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MUZEUL  
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EDITURA MUZEULUI NAȚIONAL BRUKENTHAL  
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## Editorial Policies and Instructions for Contributors

The Brukenthalia Journal proposes a subject for its new issue - **Imago Mortis: Natural Disasters, Epidemics, Massacres, Genocides, the Holocaust, the Gulag (I)**

Philosophically speaking, Antiquity seemed to “dedramatize” death, which was constructed as a denial of the being and as a punishment for human weaknesses and errors. Nevertheless, mortality in the Middle Ages generated apparently insurmountable dread and a collective obsession with the end, due to scourges – plagues, particularly the Bubonic plague during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, wars, famines, natural disasters, a low life expectancy and a profound sense of perceiving life as a mere passage. Transposed in the imagery of the Apocalypse, fear of death was a dominant state, in spite of the official agents’ best efforts to relativize death and to turn it into a natural phenomenon, inescapable as such. The official Christian discourse about death and dying was focused on the image of eschatological death, of death as the only Gateway to the Last Judgement and to Eternity. In the historical reality, fear and terror, the imagery of popular Christianity prevailed. The attitudes and sensitivities towards death and dying materialized mainly in the repulsion and horror towards physical death and the inexorable decomposition of the “sinful human flesh”. Despite the insistence of the Christian discourse and subsequently of the scientific discourse (especially the thanatological one), illness and death have been considered results of sin in the collective perceptions – antechambers of punishing human flaws through the rigors of the Inferno.

Such a representation was simultaneously the result of the junction between the pre-Christian discourse and the Vulgate of the Christian theology of sin. The only “solace” laid in the “social justice” instituted by the “equalizing” and impartial death (see the iconography of the Danse Macabre, which illustrates this social representation of death in Western Europe, as well as in the continent’s Eastern peripheries, as a product of cultural contagion). The Renaissance, followed by dissemination of the Protestant discourse on death and the decrease of mortality rates in late pre-modernity, seemed to provide more chances for the accomplishment of individual eschatology. However, death has remained, even in those contexts, the referential system according to which life has been defined.

The historian Michel Vovelle asserted that death is a complex structure of phenomena, of civilizing acts (practices, beliefs, etc.), a fluctuating socio-cultural expression, in which the ways of dying and the imaginary of death are determined by the major evolutions of the social sphere, by its dynamics, by its successive stages of growth or impasse, including crises of conscience. In such a system of relations and levels, death and dying are “lived” through the interactions that occur between the palpable reality (economic and social institutions, demography, family) on the one hand, and the representations and discourses about death, on the other. Using similar contextualizations, Vovelle describes three levels of manifestation: “death that is suffered” (which refers to collective death as a historical phenomenon studied by demographers and investigated through the questioning of quantitative sources), “death that is lived” (more complex, as it implies the analysis of the “qualitative” sources, that is, of the iconography of death, the practices and beliefs related to the funeral moment, the imaginary of post-existence) and “the discourse on death” (which, in fact, involves the “encounter” and the intertwining of the discourses that a society produces with reference to death – the official, scholarly and popular religious discourses, the secular discourse, the literary and artistic discourses, the scientific discourse).

So far, the proposed topic has benefited of a well-defined theoretical position. The widening of the historian’s area of research, of his/her documentary base, the revolution of research methodologies through the promotion of the interdisciplinary approach have made



possible the tackling of death as an object of cultural-historical investigation. First, the historians of collective mentalities carried out the quantitative evaluation of the phenomenon, then the qualitative evaluation. Furthermore, these approaches have offered a significant number of works published in a relatively short period of time. These works put forward stimulating ideas, generated by the nature of the new research topic, by the identification of historical sources and innovative methods of investigating both these recent sources and the classical quarries. Thus, in the last decades, two distinct methodological dimensions have emerged: the serial survey and the quantitative survey. The investigated sources – funeral practices, funeral homiletics, memoirs, wills, fiction writings, the funerary monument (of particular interest have been the epitaph and the specific art), the graveyard as cultural synthesis (and even institution) – have revealed particular sensitivities and manifestations of religiosity, aspects decided by the historical and cultural frameworks, as well as by the religious identity. Since the beginning of the 1970s, studies of historiography and cultural history, especially the French and Anglo-Saxon ones, have transcended the limitations of the iconographic approach of death, being concerned with the expansion of the sources of investigation and with the enrichment of methodological register through the applications of the trans-disciplinary discourse.

Throughout its institutionalized history, humanity has faced collective tragedies at times difficult to imagine. The one thing that impressed every time was the attitude towards the death of the Other, an attitude that ranged from indifference or morbid interest to compassion and altruism. Particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we are surprised by the interplay between short- and long-term memory, as well as by the mystification, trivialization through routinizing, and negationism.

This research proposal takes into account the investigation of diaries, fiction, documentary and feature film, fine arts and photography, the historiographical imagery and the oral history interviews.

We are interested in investigating images of collective death, "death that is lived", the images of death during the major natural disasters and epidemics, from Antiquity to the present day, genocides previous to the Great War (and, implicitly, the extermination of several social movements), the Armenian Genocide, the Nanjing Massacre, the massacres during World War Two (Pogroms in Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary; massacres in Lidice, Katyn, Ip and Treznea, the Siege of Leningrad, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings), as well as Mao Zedong's "Cultural Revolution", the Gulag, the Red Khmer's terror, the civil war in Rwanda. We also intend to approach the topic of modern millennial fears (see the literature popularizing paranormal predictions and phenomena, the suicidal actions around the year 2000).

We welcome approaches of those episodes of natural disasters and inter-human conflicts that have resulted in the annihilation of peoples and civilizations in the name of a so-called superiority of culture and race. We are particularly interested in those imageries which seem to partly explain fatalism and axiological disbelief in humanity and progress.

Deadline for submission of accepted articles: 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 2020.

Please send your contributions to: [granceaela@gmail.com](mailto:granceaela@gmail.com), [mihaifulger@gmail.com](mailto:mihaifulger@gmail.com), [brukenthalia.journal@gmail.com](mailto:brukenthalia.journal@gmail.com), [grajdian@hiroshima-u.ac](mailto:grajdian@hiroshima-u.ac), [ancasiminamartin@gmail.com](mailto:ancasiminamartin@gmail.com)

## GUIDE FOR AUTHORS

### General Instructions

1. **The Brukenthalia. Review of Cultural History** scientific journal receives contributions under the form of unpublished research papers, review papers written in English. The field of interest is Cultural History. The accuracy of translation is the author's responsibility.
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3. The manuscript should be submitted as a single file in \*.doc (Microsoft Word) format (or edited in Open Office) and shall contain: (1) to whom it may concern document, (2) manuscript, (3) list of illustrations and (4) tables (if required). Together with document the authors should attach \*.jpeg or \*.tiff format illustrations (legend marked inside text).
4. The manuscript should not exceed 20 pages, 4.000-15.000 words (bibliography included), written in Times New Roman (TNR), font size 11, justified, single row, 2 columns, A4 page format, 2 cm margins. The pages should not be numbered. The manuscript should contain an abstract and keywords in English and another one in Romanian (Romanian translation will be provided by editors if authors have no means under this respect).

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The submitted manuscript should be arranged as follows: (1) title, (2) author's name, (3) author's affiliation and e-mail address, (4) abstract, (5) keywords, (6) manuscript, (7) references, (8) list of illustrations, (9) tables.

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Diaconescu et al. 2011 Diaconescu Dragoș, Dumitrescu-Chioar Florian, Natea Gheorghe, Șura Mică, com. Șura Mică, jud. Sibiu. In CCA 2011 (campania 2010) (in press).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### A. STUDIES

Anamaria TUDORIE	<i>Contagious Diseases in the Stone Age?</i> .....	799
Csaba SZABÓ	<i>Religious Appropriations and the Antonine Plague</i> .....	807
Șarolta SOLCAN	<i>Witchcraft and Daily Mortality in Transylvania of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries</i> .....	821
Andrea FEHÉR	<i>Cannibalism in Early Modern Transylvania</i> .....	835
Roxana COMAN	<i>Eros and Thanatos: Instinctual and Emotional Responses to the Plague Epidemic in Ion Ghica's Letters</i> .....	851
Anca-Maria POP	<i>Pellagra: the Alarm Signal of the Romanian Rural Environment</i> .....	861
Iuliana Maria GAVRILĂ	<i>Death as Seen by the Romanian Peasant during World War One</i> .....	874
Tudor UREA	<i>Death Comes from the Depths of the Ocean</i> .....	884
Adrian SCHEIANU	<i>"Revolution Means Confusion." Sergio Leone's Take on the Mexican Revolution</i> .....	895
Antonia-Ruxandra BERA	<i>Social Hierarchy Reflected in the Positioning of Burial Places. A Case Study – Orăștioara de Sus Village, Hunedoara County</i> .....	906
Elena Andreea TRIF-BOIA	<i>The "Spanish" Flu as It Was Reflected in the Romanian Publications of Transylvania (1918-1919)</i> .....	917
Alexandru-Ionuț DRĂGULIN	<i>Katyń Massacre: Shaping the Historical Memory through the Political Narrative</i> .....	925
Valeria SOROȘTINEANU	<i>The Carlton Building, the Earthquake of 1940 and the National Legionary State</i> .....	935
Florinela GIURGEA	<i>The Image of Death in the Case of Roma Deported to Transnistria (1942-1944)</i> .....	950
Constantin CANAVAS	<i>Erosion of Memory and Musealisation of Death in Bhopal</i> .....	960
Dana PERCEC	<i>Death, Remembrance and Transience in Ali Smith's "Autumn"</i> .....	974
Cristina CHEVEREȘAN	<i>Pandemic Fiction: Investigating the Past, Prefiguring the Future in Philip Roth's "Nemesis"</i> .....	983
Ionuț Mihai HORADRON	<i>Reflections on Death. The Wake in Coșdeni Village</i> .....	997
Nicoleta MUȘAT	<i>Forms of Ageism and Fear. From Fairytales to Fieldwork</i> .....	1007
Silvia FĂGĂRĂȘAN	<i>Vision, Death and Anatomy in Contemporary Visual Culture. Case Studies: BodyWorlds, Hymn and Color Out of Space</i> .....	1016

### B. MISCELLANEA

Alexandu-Ilie MUNTEANU	<i>"Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life": Samuel von Brukenthal's British Books on Christian Civility</i> .....	1037
Laura STANCIU	<i>"A Stairway to Heaven". The Role of Homiletics in Shaping the Romanian Enlightenment in Transylvania</i> .....	1045
Diana-Mihaela PĂUNOIU	<i>The Cult of Heroes during the Authority Monarchy of King Carol II: Oltenia (1938-1940)</i> .....	1054
Alexandru Gh. SONOC,	<i>The Bust of Field Marshal Hermann Kövess Baron von Kövessháza by Hans Mauer Donated to the Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu</i> ....	1067
Adrian LUCA	<i>The End of the Common Man and the Ideological Creation of the "Homo Sovieticus"</i> .....	1083
Francesco RANDAZZO	<i>Images of Gothic Death in the Romanian Film and Literature</i> .....	1089
Mihaela GRANCEA	<i>Gender and the Struggle Against Environmental Degradation and Economic Deprivation in Africa: Niger Delta Area in Focus</i> .....	1102
Emmanuel Osewe AKUBOR, Beatrice Amili AKUBOR		

## C. REVIEWS

Valeria CHELARU	<i>"The State, Anti-Semitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: the Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union"</i> by Diana Dumitru (Review).....	1117
Ecaterina LUNG	<i>"No Gods, No Priests. History of the Inquisition, the Convents, the Jesuits"</i> („Ni Dieux, ni prêtres. Histoire de l'inquisition, les couvents, les Jésuites") by Maurice Lachâtre. Texts Chosen, Introduced and Annotated by François Gaudin (Review).....	1121
Gheorghe NEGUSTOR	<i>"Cultural Codifications, Social Inflections"</i> by Andi Mihalache (Review).....	1124
Ioana-Cornelia REPEDE	<i>"The History of Cursive Self: Testimonies, Identities, Patrimonies"</i> by Andi Mihalache (Review).....	1126
Mihai COTEA	<i>"The Stavrogin Syndrome"</i> by Alina Pavelescu (Review-Interview)..	1129
Alin BURLEC	<i>"Past in Dispute. The Communist Regime in Romania in Historical Literature from 1990-2015"</i> by Eleonora-Maria Popa (Review).....	1132
Konrad-Harris GERGELY-KISZELLA	<i>"Witchcraft in Transylvania in the 13th-18th Centuries"</i> by Șarolta Solcan (Review).....	1134

## **A. STUDIES**





## CONTAGIOUS DISEASES IN THE STONE AGE?

Anamaria TUDORIE

Assistant PhD.

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Romania

anamaria.tudorie@ulbsibiu.ro

**Abstract:** *The article presents some of the recent published data regarding the identification of contagious diseases that existed and spread during prehistory - the Paleolithic and Neolithic period - this being the result of a multidisciplinary approach and the effort of scientist that activate in different field of research: archaeology, biology and medicine. If answering to the question whether some of the diseases that still exist nowadays were present during prehistory may have found answer due to modern analysis, it is quite difficult to explain how ancient people reacted to diseases.*

**Keywords:** *prehistory, diseases, shamans, priests, Stone Age*

**Rezumat:** *Informațiile privind existența anumitor boli în perioada preistorică încep să devină tot mai numeroase, grație contribuției altor științe precum biologia, în special genetica, medicina sau antropologia la datele pe care arheologii le colectează din teren. Spre exemplu, astăzi avem dovezi clare privind prezența bacteriei care poate provoca sifilis la hominidii din Africa, încă de acum 1.500.000 ani și răspândirea sa pe continentul european, prin descoperirea unui femur de H. erectus în Italia, infectat cu aceeași bacterie. În ultimii ani pași importanți au fost făcuți și în identificarea urmelor de Yersinia pestis, bacteria care provoacă ciuma, încă din perioada neolitică. Mai mult, cercetătorii au corelat unele scăderi demografice, modificări culturale și chiar perioada de trecere de la eneolitic la epoca bronzului cu o posibilă infectare a unor comunităților umane cu această bacterie. Odată cu perioada neolitică oamenii vor deveni mult mai mobili, iar contactele dintre comunități sunt mult mai intense, ceea ce poate favoriza răspândirea bolilor contagioase.*

*Dacă pentru stabilirea existenței anumitor boli informațiile sunt tot mai precise, pe de altă parte, este mult mai dificil să răspundem la întrebări legate de atitudinea omului preistoric în fața bolii. Cele mai multe răspunsuri își caută sursele în dovezile etno-arheologice și credem că în acea perioadă procesul de vindecare implica, pe lângă auto-medicație, și o componentă magico-religioasă.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *preistorie, boală, șamani, preoți, epoca de piatră*

### On short, about identifying ancient diseases

Humans had to face contagious diseases ever since their existence as a distinct species and researchers are very interested to find out what kind of viruses (the word “virus” is derived from the Latin word for poison) or bacteria (the term is being derivate from the Greek *bakterion* and it refers to the shape of the first bacterium identified), used to threaten the health and lives of ancient people.

If answering to the question regarding whether the existence of large scale diseases, epidemics like we have nowadays, seem to have found some answers based on new evidences, after the joined efforts of specialists acting in different research fields, as archeology, biology, medicine, it seems quite difficult to explain how did the prehistoric man reacted to contagious illnesses. Of course, archaeologists, historians and anthropologists

are trying to give some answers based on the material remains, on ethnographic studies and also by considering some attitudes and beliefs that prevailed before the existence of modern medicine.

One of the difficulties in studying the prehistory is the fact that archaeologists are facing a great lack of remains, due to the materials used by the early humans, the preservation conditions, the great period of time that has passed and of course, the absence of any written information.

But, nowadays, this situation is being balanced by the contributions of other sciences which are offering new complementary data in order to clarify some unknown aspects. This is the case of geology, biology, anthropology, physics, chemistry, mathematics or informatics, for instance.

Maybe the disciplines listed above will not offer exact answers to questions like: how did the early humans communicated?; what kind of gestures did they use?; how were they organized?. But they can, for sure, explain how the climate and environment changed during that period; what kind of animals did they hunt, what age and sex did those animals had; what type of plants did they start to grow first; or what kind of anatomical characteristics the humans had and, also important, what kind of diseases did they suffer of.

The information regarding the occurrence of diseases during Ancient history can be found in different sources.

An interesting example is an Egyptian stele that represents a polio victim from the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (1403-1365 BC) (Kirienko *et al.* 2011, 108). Specialists agreed that it was the earliest indication of crippling caused by poliomyelitis (Pellet *et al.* 2014, 45).

Other information, for more recent periods, when historians have written texts, is available through the notes of different ancient writers. For instance, there is the case of Plutarch who mentioned plague and its consequences (Plutarch 23, 94-96, 131, 345, 551, 755-760), or the one of Herodotus, who described the outbreak of dysentery among the Persian soldiers of Xerxes after the battle of Salamis (Snodgrass 2017).

And, of course, there is the immense contribution of Hippocrates, considered the "father" of modern medicine. In the *Corpus Hippocraticum* he presented numerous diseases, but also notions of hygiene and, what is impressive is the fact that modern doctors still consider some of his observations and advices valid today (Pappas *et al.* 2008).

Another source of information regarding diseases, even for the ancient period, are the artistic representations. For instance, there is painted pottery from Peru, dated in 100 A.D., indicating the presence of facial ulcerations, scarring and malformations (Snodgrass 2017).

Now, for modern periods, data regarding diseases or epidemics are being detailed in statistics of authorities, in medical records or even in press.

As I was mentioning before, for the archaeologist specialized in prehistory information not abundant at all, and the contribution of other sciences is of highly

importance for understanding what happened during those times.

Nowadays, biology, especially the genetic studies, have been of great help in studying the past.

In an article published in 1995, in *Nature magazine*, a group of three scientists (Roshtchilde *et al.* 1995) that have been examined the skeletal remains of *H. erectus* from Koobi Fora Formation East Lake Turkana in Kenya (dated at  $1.6 \pm 0.1$  million years B.P.) discovered the presence of treponematoses (a form of yaws).

Yaws forms part of a group of chronic bacterial infections commonly known as the endemic treponematoses. These diseases are caused by spiral bacteria of the genus *Treponema*, which also includes endemic syphilis (bejel) and pinta (Roshtchilde *et al.* 1995, 344).

Very important is their conclusion, that treponematoses (in the form of yaws) had its origins in Africa during the Middle Pleistocene, about 1.5 million years ago. And, also of great matter, is the fact that a femur of *H. erectus* discovered in Venosa, Italy, dated at 500.000 B.P. presented traces of yaws, this being the prove that *H. erectus* carried this disease in Europe (Roshtchilde *et al.* 1995, 344).

### **Transformations that influenced the spread of contagious diseases**

During the Paleolithic period people lived in smaller groups and the contacts between these groups, as it is difficult to prove, but it is to be assumed, used to be limited. On the other hand, things were quite different with the emerge of the Neolithic period.

Aproximately 11.000 years ago a new geological period started, called Holocene. Among many environmental changes, it was also the moment when the prehistoric communities started a both technological and cultural evolution.

The first period of the Holocene is being characterized by oscillations of temperature or modifications in the atmospheric circulation (Budja 2007, 191).

In this new climatic context, humans tried to adapt to the new environmental conditions and also started to produce its own food resources.

Besides the technological innovations as new type of stone processing, or the

production of pottery, there are also some behavior transformations, as the need of sedentarism appeared, in order to cultivate plants. And, there is also a demographic growth which, according to experts, will favorize the outbreak of epidemics (Cărpuş 2010, 21). There is an estimated growth of population from 1 million inhabitants around 6,500 BC to 8 million around 2,000 BC and 14 million around 1,500 BC (Müller 2016, 30).

There are also other factors that will influence dramatically the emerge and spread of some diseases, creating what specialists have defined as a significant change in the patocenosis (for the definition of the term and more information see Cărpuş 2010, 15), because of several factors: the presence of domesticated animals and the close contact with humans, the increase of the insect population as a result of the weather warm-up and their vicinity to human settlements, and the mobility of some individuals or groups, this fact favorizing the rapid spread of some diseases (Valtueña *et al.* 2017).

### Evidences of Plague in Neolithic

Looking at the Neolithic patocenosis we should also take into consideration the fact that these communities started to stock the grains that they cultivated, which created the conditions for rodents to come closer to people. Rodents and associated fleas are known to carry the bacteria that causes plague: *Yersinia pestis*.

The term *pestis* comes from the Latin form which means *epidemy* (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pestă>). An article published in 2015 (Rasmunssen *et al.* 2015) showed that *Yersinia pestis* was present and was “widely spread across Eurasia from at least the early 3rd millennium BC”. The results of the team that signed this study suggest that the plague infections were present with 3,000 years before the first historical texts indicates. Also, they emphasized that the *Yersinia pestis* strains identified in the sampled individuals (7 of 101) did not have the ability to cause bubonic plague, only pneumonic and septicemic plague. Another conclusion of the study is that the population declines registered in this period can be connected with these early plagues.

Only two years after the publishing of the above-mentioned article, another team of scientist presented other six new European

*Yersinia pestis* genomes spanning the Late Neolithic to the Bronze Age (LNBA; 4,800 to 3,700 calibrated years before present) (Rasmunssen *et al.* 2015). They opinioned that because the period was characterized by social changes and intensive contacts between human communities, a possible scenario was that “plague was introduced multiple times to Europe from a common reservoir between 5,000 and 3,000 BP”.

The growth of population starting with the emerge of Neolithic wasn't a constant one, being marked by fluctuations, explained by some specialists through technological and social changes that occurred (Müller 2016, 14). There is the case of Cucuteni culture settlements, part of a wide cultural complex (of more than 350.000 sq km), extended geographically from the center of Transylvania up to the forested steppe of Ukraine, that evolved between 4,600 – 3,600/3,500 CAL B.C (Lazarovici *et al.* 2009, 13-17). This prehistoric culture, maybe the most known one from territory of Romania, due to the impressive decorated pottery created by Cucuteni people, was ended suddenly, after a period of great development. The causes that determined the vanishing of this amazing civilization might be the continuous increasing of the population, the exploitation during several years of the same fields, the numerous herds that also consumed the natural resources, the wood exploitation and land clearings, the increase of the intertribal conflicts, climate change and the expansion of the Steppe Population, the last one not being seen anymore by historians as the main reason for the decay of Cucuteni culture (Țurcanu 2006, 25) as Marjia Gimbutas stated (Gimbutas 1995).

Now, there is also a new path to take into consideration: some infectious disease might have contributed to the decline of Neolithic civilization (Rascovan *et al.* 2019, 295). Recent published analyses indicate that the *Yersinia pestis* spread “likely through early trade networks rather than massive human migrations”. The authors of this work also suggest the idea that plague might have contributed to the Neolithic decline and this created the right context for the steppe migrations that came to Europe (Rascovan *et al.* 2019, 301).

## Healing practices

It is quite difficult to explain the prehistoric man's attitude towards disease, and the ideas presented below are not to be considered directly connected with contagious diseases, nor limited to this short list. I have only tried to present some of the practices that are generally accepted or documented (as is the case of trepanation) to be performed by the prehistoric people in their attempt of healing.

One of them is *self-medication*. This procedure was present even before our existence as a distinct species and it can be confirmed by the behavior of chimpanzees, we can see the beginnings of the tendency of medical healing. Besides the general social cleaning of the skin and hair, the chimpanzees are examining carefully the small wounds of other individual and removes splinters if is the case (Morris 1967, 252-253). In addition, it is possible that early hominids also to have been used some medicinal plants too, because of their healing properties.

New researches and complex analysis indicated that the Neanderthals included in their diet, besides meat, plants. After performing some studies on five Neanderthal individuals from the site of El Sidrón, located in northern Spain, the conclusion on the research team was Neandethals *had a sophisticated knowledge of their natural surroundings which included the ability to select and use certain plants* and the results of the study offered the *first evidence for the use of medicinal plants by a Neanderthal individual* (Hardy et al. 2012).

So, now there is solid proof that during prehistory self-medication used to be practiced from very old periods.

Also, for Romania, Professor Marin Cârciumaru published detailed information about both cultivated and wild plants that were used by prehistoric people in order to heal or to reduce the effects of some illnesses (Cârciumaru 1996, p. 154-189).

Another practice commonly connected with paleo-medicine is geophagy. The term *geophagy* (or *geophagia*) has been applied to the practice by humans and animals of consuming soil (Henry, Cring, 2013, 180).

The discoveries from archaeological excavations indicated that it is almost sure that geophagy was practiced by prehistoric population but, as I mentioned already several times, we don't have many details about the

way it was practiced. Most likely, not all soil was considered good to eat and it was selected and based on appearance and taste. It is only assumed that it had a medicinal function, a supplementation function and a detoxification function (Henry, Cring, 2013, 191).

One of the prehistoric medicinal practices that we do have archaeological evidence is *trepanning*. The practice involved cutting a small hole in the skull. The procedure was used to treat headaches, skull fractures, epilepsy, and some forms of mental illness, and it was employed worldwide (Hajar 2012). For the Neolithic period, more than 1500 trephined skulls have been uncovered throughout the world. Most reported series show that from 5-10% of all skulls found from the Neolithic period have been trephined with single or multiple skull openings of various sizes (Faria 2015).

Trepanation is considered the oldest documented surgical procedure and it is assumed to have been performed by shamans or witch doctors (Faria 2013). Because the source of illness during ancient times was considered to be the *loss of the soul* (Eliade 1964, 9), opening the head by trephination could allow the bad spirit to leave and the good spirit to enter it.

## Shamans, priests, healers

In pre-modern societies, there was the figure of the *shaman* associated with the process of healing. It is believed that the Shaman was responsible with the spiritual-healing practice (Winkelman 2015, 331).

According to Michael Winkelman, Professor Emeritus at Arizona State University, the shamans share the following features (Winkelman 2015, 333):

- a nighttime charismatic ritual performance by the preeminent group leader in the presence of the community;
- activities of healing;
- protecting from spirits and malevolent shamans;
- alterations of consciousness through prolonged dancing, physical austerities, fasting, chanting and singing, extensive drumming, and frequently hallucinogens or entheogens;
- physical collapse and apparent unconsciousness while experiencing

*a special alteration of consciousness referred as “soul fight”;*

- selection and training of initiates through pre-monitory dreams and illness and involving vision quests;*
- the initiatory experience of death and rebirth;*
- relations with animals, including the ability to control animals and to transform into an animal;*
- the belief the shaman can harm and kill magically;*
- the reputed ability to control weather, physically fly, and to have immunity to fire.*

Thus, as we can see in this list, the shaman had to deal with healing aspects, but had also many other “tasks” and “powers”, many of them being related to magical-religious practices. In more complex societies, this practice was carried out by other practitioners as *priests, medium, or healers* (Winkelman 2012, 57-58).

The word *shaman* comes through the Russian, from Tungusic *l’aman* and it is a dominating figure of the community, the magical-religious life being centered on him. Also, the shaman has important attributes in what concerns the health of the community and he performs rituals in order to defend against “death, diseases, sterility, disaster” (Eliade 1964, 508-509).

In Eliade’s opinion, in primitive societies, illness was caused by *loss of the soul* (Eliade 1964, 9) because of spirits’ aggression or by theft by other shamans. Shamanic rituals typically involved removing the spirits and recovering patient’s soul, but the healing ceremonies also include what we would refer as medicine: cleansing of wounds, extraction of objects, and the use of herbal medicine (Winkelman 2012, 49).

The shaman had an important role in the prehistoric society and the discover in Hilazon Tachtit archaeological site from southern

Levant, Israel, of a 12,000-year-old shaman burial (Leore *et al.* 2012), confirms this supposition. Inside the pit grave, besides the elderly shaman woman were placed offerings: 50 complete tortoise shells, body-parts of a wild boar, an eagle, a cow, a leopard, and two martens and a complete human foot (see **Fig. 1**).

In Romania, for the Early Neolithic period, an object that was attributed to a shaman was discovered in Limba-Bordane (Alba County) archaeological site (Ciută, Ciută 2013). It is the case of a perforated baton – bâton de commandement – considered to be part of a shaman’s “ritual kit”. What is very interesting and intriguing in the same time about this object, is the fact that similar were discovered in Paleolithic and Mesolithic which can suggest that the Early Neolithic communities, more structured in their organization, also in what spiritual life meant, transforming the *shaman* into a *priest*, might have continued some old ritualic manifestations (Ciută, Ciută 2013, 28).

We cannot talk about the practice of medicine, not in the modern sense of the word, for prehistory, but it is sure that humans were preoccupied in treating illnesses and maybe what caused them. The way they tried to treat must have involved different trials, errors, but also some success with the methods they used. It is almost certain that during that period people believed in a combination of natural and supernatural causes for the diseases and the healing process also involved a magic-ritual component.

The emergence of some contagious diseases was very much influence by the practicing of agriculture, the demographic growth, the changing of the environment and weather conditions, the mobility and contacts between communities.

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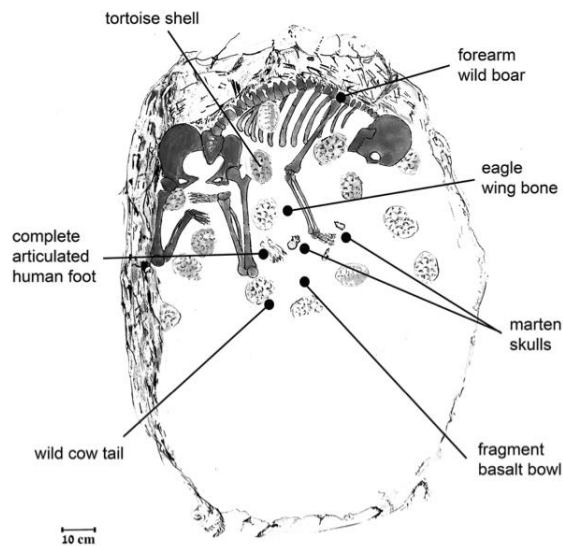
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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/LISTA ILUSTRĂȚILOR

**Fig. 1.** An artistic reconstruction of the Shaman grave, illustration by P. Groszman (*apud* Leore *et al.* 2012, Fig. 4).

**Fig. 2.** *Eskimo Medicine Man. Alaska, Exorcising Evil Spirits from a Sick Boy.* Photo by Carpenter, Frank G. (Frank George), 1855-1924, photographer, collector (Library of Congress). Forms part of the Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection. Gift; Mrs. W. Chapin Huntington; 1951.

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## RELIGIOUS APPROPRIATIONS AND THE ANTONINE PLAGUE

Csaba SZABÓ

Assistant Lecturer PhD.

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu

Department of History, Cultural Heritage and Protestant Theology

E-mail: csaba.szabo@ulbsibiu.ro

**Abstract:** *The Antonine Plague is considered one of the major epidemiological disasters of the Roman Empire. Occurring between 161 and 180 AD, the pandemic known also as “Galen’s plague” became an intensively discussed and debated topic in the last fifty years, producing numerous articles and studies on the demographic, social, economic, geopolitical and even religious impact of the event. In this article, the author deploys primary sources (literary, archaeological and epigraphic evidences) to discuss the real and metahistorical impact of the Antonine Plague through specific case studies from literary and epigraphic sources. The article also focuses on the major changes brought to religious communication in the mid-second century AD.*

**Keywords:** Antonine Plague, pandemic, Roman religion, cult of Glycon, Lucian.

**Rezumat:** *Ciuma antoniniană este considerată una dintre cele mai importante dezastre epidemiologice ce a avut loc în timpul Imperiului Roman. Produsă între anii 161 d. Hr. și 180 d.Hr., pandemia cunoscută și sub numele de ciuma lui Galen a devenit un subiect intens discutat și dezbătut în ultimii cincizeci de ani, subiect care va duce la numeroase articole și studii privind impactul demografic, social, economic, geopolitic și chiar religios al evenimentului. În acest articol autorul pune în discuție surse primare (dovezi literare, arheologice și epigrafice), impactul real și metaistoric al cumei antoniniene și, prin studii de caz specifice dovezilor literare și epigrafice, lucrarea va discuta despre schimbările majore de la mijlocul celui de-al doilea secol d.Hr. în comunicarea religioasă.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Ciuma antoniniană, pandemie, religie romană, cultul lui Glycon, Lucian.*

Pandemics that affected the Roman Empire and its society had been well documented since the fifth century BC till late antiquity. Between 472 and 22 BC, there were 17 major pandemics or plagues mentioned by literary sources, especially by Livy (Duncan-Jones, 1996, 111, footnote nr. 24 and 25; Wazer, 2016, 134-135). In each case, Livy – based on earlier, mostly unknown literary sources – presents very shortly the major symptoms and also the social and political and rarely even the religious effects of the urban pandemic. Sixteen of these were interpreted as a *prodigium*, a divine sign or punishment of the Roman society in crisis (Orlin, 2002, 88; Jiménez, 2018).<sup>1</sup> The *Ab Urbe Condita*

provides short yet valuable information on the ancient Roman crisis management of an urban, local pandemic, coordinated by the *decemviri sacris faciundis*, but Livy also notes important details on the mental map and cultural appropriations of an urban society in crisis. When a pandemic erupted, the city suspended major crowded events, military and political meetings and councils, markets and festivities. Livy mentions that pandemics affected the social elite and the poor equally and usually it had 1-2 year-long economic effects, too (Rüpke, 2018, 235).<sup>2</sup> When the pandemic was

<sup>1</sup>See also: Liv. 3.7.6–8; 4.25.3; 5.31.5; 5.27.1; Obseq. 22; Oros. 2.12.2; 3.4.1–6.

<sup>2</sup> Liv. III.32.: „The following one, in which P. Curiatius and Sextus Quinctilius were consuls, was still quieter owing to the continued silence of the [2] tribunes. This was due to two causes: first, they were waiting for the return of the commissioners who had gone to Athens, and the foreign laws which they were to bring; and secondly, two fearful disasters came together, famine and a

very severe, society interpreted it as a *prodigium*, as a divine sign of Apollo or other divinities. The Sybille Books were consulted many times to establish a religious crisis strategy and a radically new, unusual and temporary strategy of religious communication, which re-enforced the harmonious relations between humanity and the divine world.<sup>3</sup> The most interesting cases reported by Livy are those when the presence of the pandemic changed the religious communication of the society radically, especially among the lower social strata.<sup>4</sup>

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pestilence which was fatal to men and fatal to cattle. The fields lay waste, the City was depleted by an unbroken series of deaths, many illustrious houses were in [3] mourning. The Flamen Quirinalis, Servius Cornelius, died, also the augur C. Horatius Pulvillus, in whose place the augurs chose C. Veturius, all the more eagerly because he had been condemned by the [4] plebs. The consul Quinctilius and four tribunes of the plebs died. The year was a gloomy one owing to the numerous [5] losses. There was a respite from external enemies.” Livy. History of Rome. English Translation by. Rev. Canon Roberts. New York, New York. E. P. Dutton and Co. 1912.

<sup>3</sup> Liv. IV.25.3.: “An epidemic that year afforded a respite from other troubles. A temple was vowed to Apollo in behalf of the people's health. The duumviri did many things by direction of the Books for the purpose of appeasing the angry gods and averting the plague from the people. [4] Nevertheless the losses were severe, both in the City and the country, and men and cattle were stricken without distinction. They even feared that famine would succeed the epidemic, since the farmers were down with the disease. They therefore sent to Etruria and the Pomptine district, and to Cumae, and finally to Sicily itself, for, corn.” Livy. History of Rome. English Translation by. Rev. Canon Roberts. New York, New York. E. P. Dutton and Co. 1912.

<sup>4</sup> Liv. IV.30.8-10.: “A drought that year caused great suffering. Not only did the skies provide too little rain, but the earth as well was deficient in native moisture and could hardly supply the perennial streams. [9] In some cases the failure of the sources caused the dry springs and brooks to be lined with cattle perishing of thirst; others were carried off by a mange, and their diseases were by contact communicated to mankind. At first they attacked country people and slaves; then the City was infected. [10] And not only were men's bodies smitten by the plague, but a horde of superstitions, mostly foreign, took possession of their minds, as the class of men who find their profit in superstition-ridden souls introduced strange sacrificial rites into their homes,4 pretending to be seers; [11] until the public shame finally reached the leading citizens, as they beheld in every street and chapel outlandish and unfamiliar sacrifices being offered up to appease Heaven's anger. [12] The aediles were then commissioned to see to it that none but Roman gods should be worshipped, nor in any but the ancestral way.” Livy. History of Rome. English Translation by. Rev.

Superstition and alternative religious strategies were invented in a very short time and this represented a conflict and crisis for the official religious entrepreneurs and providers of religion (commonly known as priests), too: new gods appeared on the religious market, magical practices flourished and new religious movements tried to have a new, dominant voice in the society in crisis (Wendt, 2016, 2). These early Republican analogies also show some of the major impacts of a pandemic in antiquity: temporary economic crisis, suspended social and political, military events and the advent of new religious movements and alternative strategies for religious communication. While these events reported by Livy were local, urban epidemic crises, the so-called Antonine Plague or Galen's plague was the first continental, “global” pandemic which affected the entire Roman world. In what follows, I will present shortly the current state of research into the social, economic and especially religious impact of the Antonine Plague.

### **The mysterious plague: primary sources and metahistories**

There are three major types of primary sources analyzed since 1835 in Western literature regarding the “great plague” or Galen's plague, nowadays known also as the Antonine Plague (Gilliam, 1961, 225, footnote nr. 1; Duncan-Jones, 1996; Flemming, 2019)<sup>5</sup>: literary evidence (contemporary or later sources), epigraphic and papyriological materials, and archaeological, paleomicrobiological and osteological sources. While works published in the nineteenth century – starting with Hecker's paradigmatic study (Hecker, 1835) - to the mid-twentieth century focus almost exclusively on literary sources, Duncan-Jones' study in 1996 reopened the complex dossier of the problem, looking into the demographic, economic, social and religious impact of this event (Gilliam, 1961; Duncan-Jones, 1996, 116). He reproduces 14 literary passages from Galen (Galen Kuhn 19.15, Galen Kuhn, 19.17-18), Aelius Aristeides (Ael. Aris. Or. 48.38-44),

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Canon Roberts. New York, New York. E. P. Dutton and Co. 1912.

<sup>5</sup> There is no ancient name for the plague; Galen used the words “great” and “long lasting” for the pandemic of his period.

Lucian (*Alexander* 36.), Cassius Dio, Orosius (7.15.5-6), the *Historia Augusta* (Verus 8.1.1-2, M. Antoninus 13.3, 17.2, 21.6 - Gilliam, 1961, 232.), Jerome, Eutropius (8.12.2), Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.24. – see: Duncan-Jones, 1996, 118-120). He did not cite Marcus Aurelius who mentions the plague very vaguely on a single occasion (IX.2. - Gilliam, 1961, 228). The literary sources – although great in number, which confirms the real nature of the event – are inconsistent in many respects, especially on the symptoms, the real demographic impact and the chronology of the pandemic. These three factors are essential for identifying the nature of the pandemic and the long-term effects of this historical event. Literary sources represent the most important type of evidence; all the other types of primary sources presented by Duncan-Jones in 1996 cannot confirm its direct relationship with the pandemic. Epigraphic sources become increasingly numerous in the last few decades,<sup>6</sup> but they cannot be considered direct evidence of the Antonine Plague: Duncan-Jones argues that the decrease in the number of inscriptions on buildings (Duncan-Jones, 1996, 126-127) and Egyptian year-dated documents between 160 and 180 AD testify to the crisis that started after the Antonine Plague (Duncan-Jones, 1996, 125 fig.7.). The author – similarly to most of the historians who analyzed the impact of the Antonine Plague in the last two decades (Bruun, 2007; Scheidel, 2002; Scheidel, 2009) – ignored two of the most violent wars of the second century AD: the Parthian wars and the Marcomannic Wars. These two events not only contributed to the widespread of the pandemic, but also had a much more powerful impact on building projects, slowing down the urbanization processes and redistributing the economic and agricultural resources (Demandt, 2019, 183-270). Most of the Egyptian sources focus on the economic and demographic impact of the Antonine Plague, yet the papyriological sources show only that the wheat tax was smaller after 184 AD (P. Oxy. 66. 4527 - Scheidel, 2009, 16.) and the number of the tax-payers have fallen by 34% in some settlements. However, this could have also

been caused by the major military events (Duncan-Jones, 2018, 45). The closing of Roman mines in Dacia and Hispania was recently interpreted also as a consequence of the plague, however there is no direct evidence for this, especially in the case of Dacia, where the Marcomannic wars could have also generated a similar effect (Silver, 2011). Human biology and paleogenetics, and osteological studies provide only indirect and scarce information on the wellbeing and health of the soldiers or other social groups in the Roman Empire (Scheidel, 2009). The group burial in the tomb X (82.T18 level 5 and 6) in Saint Peter and Marcellinus catacombs might be an indication of Galen's plague, however there were no paleomicrobiological examinations on the defunct (Blanchard *et al.* 2007; Flemming, 2019, 240, footnote nr. 93.).

Based on all the primary sources available, R. Duncan-Jones established a chronology of the events spanning 165-194 AD, when this pandemic known by contemporary literature as the Antonine Plague reoccurred several times (Duncan-Jones, 2018, 43). The plague begun in the East, in the cities of Nisibis and Seleukeia during the Parthian war of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius in 165 AD (Demandt 2019, 160-162). Duncan-Jones suggested that the pandemic arrived in the Near East from China where a similar plague was identified in literary sources (Duncan-Jones, 2018, 44). The plague spread extremely fast, which suggests the highly infectious nature of the virus or bacteria (probably a long period of latency, too). In 165 AD the plague is already in Rome and Smyrna and in 168-169 in Aquileia and in Egypt, too (Thmouis I.104.10-18. Duncan-Jones, 1996, 119). Alexander Demandt suggested recently that the numismatic and epigraphic evidence of the German limes suggests that between 167 and 169 AD the pandemic reached already the northern edges of the empire (Demandt 2019, 161). There are several accounts of the (or a) pandemic in the 170s and a more intense reoccurrence in the age of Commodus between 189 and 194 AD (Herodian I.12.1. Gilliam 1961, 231; Silver 2011, 136, footnote nr. 1). Paleomicrobiological research into the plague did not identify the pathogen: although previous great pandemics can be identified today via microbiological investigation also (bacteria as *Mycrobacterium tuberculosis*,

<sup>6</sup> Compare the epigraphic sources mentioned by Gilliam, 1961 and Gourevitch, 2013. In the Heidelberg Epigraphic Databank there are 141 votive inscriptions from the period of 160-180 AD.

*leprae*, *Yersinia pestis*, *Bartonella*, etc. from the past 20,000 years can be identified through microbial DNA and from 1 million years ago via bacterial DNA: Drancourt, Raoult, 2008, 55), in this case we can speculate on the nature of the pathogen by consulting the literary reports on the symptoms, especially those mentioned by Galen.<sup>7</sup> It was almost certainly a viral pathogen, which makes it hard to identify paleogenetically (the oldest viral DNA – the Hepatitis B – was identified recently from Bronze Age: Krause-Kyora *et al.* 2018). Most authorities on the subject agree that based exclusively on Galen's reports, the pathogen was a certain type of smallpox (Cunha, Cunha 2008, 12 table 1.2; Duncan-Jones, 2018, 44). However, R. Flemming recently questioned this old metahistorical consensus (Flemming, 2019). Recent scholarship has two major currents: R. Duncan-Jones and many others claim that the Antonine Plague was a major historical game-changer and had a catastrophic impact on demography (15-45% of population died), economy and even climate (Duncan-Jones, 2018, 44). Others such as W. Scheidel recently became more balanced and cautious in how they interpret the event, arguing that “in the absence of solid evidence, Roman historians would be well advised to exercise restraint in instrumentalizing this poorly known event as a ‘deus ex machina’ mechanism to account for presumed demographic or economic transformations” (Scheidel, 2009, 23). In this new context of

<sup>7</sup> “In particular, I discovered the cure of them, in that place, at the time of the great plague (would that it will at some point cease), when it first came upon us. At that time, a young man broke out in ulcers all over his whole body on the ninth day, just as did almost all the others who were saved. On that day there was also a slight cough. On the following day, immediately after he bathed, he coughed more violently and brought up with the cough what they call a scab...[...]. Those easily restored to health from the plague seem to me to have been previously dried and purged in respect to the whole body, for vomiting occurred in some of them and the stomach was disturbed in all. And, in the same way, in those already purged who were going to be saved, dark pustules (exanthemata) appear clearly over the whole body, in most ulcerous, in all dry. And it was obvious to the observer that, what was left of the blood which had been putrefied during these fevers, had, like a kind of ash, been forced through the skin by nature, just like many other superfluities [...]. On the outside the body was not hot to the touch, nor was there pallor; the skin was rather red, livid, and broke out into small blisters and ulcers (helkoi).” (Flemming, 2019, 227-229)

historical relativization and metahistorical analysis of the event, a reinterpretation of the religious impact of the Antonine Plague is also in order.

### Religious appropriations and the metahistories of the plague

The Roman Empire in the second century AD is a religious melting pot with a great number of small group religions often named in literature “oriental cults”, “orientalised religions” or “elective cults” (Beaujeu, 1955; Edwards, 2012; Versluys, 2013; Gordon, 2014). The spread of the Hellenistic mystery cults coincided with a great variety of local religious appropriations of Celtic, Illyrian, Thracian, Syrian, Anatolian and other divinities. Using the urban and economic networks and infrastructure of the Roman Empire, the newly emerging gods and their specialists, founders and religious providers created a very dynamic religious market (North, 1992; North, 2017) with local, glocal and universal gods (Woolf, 2016; Van Alten, 2017). This infrastructural background and the increased religious mobilities created an ideal ground for short and long-term religious appropriations.. The strategies used by the religious entrepreneurs, founders and providers were extremely varied (Gordon, 2017a; Rüpke, 2018, 300-319): most of them used an exoticized visuality or textuality to create and maintain their small religion, which had several critical phases especially in the early days of a new cult (Beck, 1996; Rebillard, Rüpke, 2015; Lichtermann *et al.* 2017). These exotic features of the new cults are well documented in the cult of Mithras (Persianism) or Isis (Egyptianism: Gordon, 2017b; Gasparini, Gordon, 2018). Most new cults were formed and spread gradually, as part of a *longue durée* process of religious transformations. There are no or very few pieces of evidence that these new cults became more preeminent during the second century AD due to the Antonine Plague.<sup>8</sup> Another strategy to create and maintain a new religious movement in antiquity focused in eliciting fear, instability and crisis within the

<sup>8</sup> Duncan-Jones, 2018, 43, footnote 15 suggests that the Mithraic group of Virunum was affected by the Antonine Plague, however his only argument is the death of five members in one year.

population. Crisis-religions are new religious movements intentionally deploying the critical economic, medical and psychological instability of a society to construct their religious network (Kenneth *et al.* 1998). The Antonine Plague occurred at the same time with two major military and political crises: the Parthian War and the Marcomannic Wars. These three events affected severely not only the social framework of the Roman Empire through forced mobilities, economic turmoil and instability but also by creating a mental map, where the human body and health or wellbeing became extremely vulnerable. The death of co-emperor Lucius Verus and the military failures in the early days of the wars led to the emergence of several superstitious and extraordinary strategies in religious communication: the sacrifice of the Lions in 167 AD (Demandt, 2019, 190-193), the activity of Arnuphis, the Egyptian magician during the rain miracle around 172-174 AD (Israelowich, 2008, 88-89; Kovács, 2009, 12), the imperial rite of *lectisternia* in Rome (Ambasciano, 2016), the rise of magical practices (use of amulets, exorcisms) or the occasional persecution of Christians (Tomlin, 2014, 201; Harris, 2016, 56-57; Keresztes, 1968). These were occasional, rare and non-repetitive facets of religious communication, as signs of religious crisis management. The best known case is, however, a new phenomenon, namely the rise and spread of popular religious entrepreneurs and providers (Wendt, 2016; Rüpke, 2018, 310-319).

### **Rising cults from fear and crisis: the case of Alexander of Abonoutheichos**

The above-mentioned temporary or unique religious strategies were occasional, official or individual events in times of crisis. Similarly to Arnuphis, another famous religious entrepreneur and provider appeared on the religious market of the second century AD during the time of the Antonine Plague. His name was Alexander of Abonoutheichos, the well-known “false prophet” of Asclepius eternalized in the satiric work of Lucian (Chanotis, 2002, 67, footnote nr. 1 and 2). His activity is well documented by Lucian, although the historicity of his account is obviously questionable in many respects. Alexander’s activity as one of the most well documented false prophets or religious

entrepreneurs of the Roman Empire produced an immense literature, and here I will focus especially on the formation of small religious groups and crisis-religion as strategies for coping with a medical crisis in antiquity.

Ann Taves, in her important book on revelatory events as strategies for small group formation and spiritual path-making, argued that revelatory events of religious founders involve two knowledge claims: one is about the knowledge communicated, disclosed, the other one is that the knowledge is coming from a divine source (Taves, 2016, 2). In the first phase of the development of every small religious group, a revelatory event – visual, oral or textual – is essential for building the core group of the new religious movement and establishing and clarifying the major narrative of the new cult. The second step focuses on stability and continuity: to maintain the first group and to prepare the material and infrastructural background for its diffusion. The third step in the formation of a small religious group is the geographic and demographic expansion and diffusion and finally, the next step – which is rarely reached by new religious movements – globalization and appropriations. In the polytheistic religious market of the Roman Empire, such an endeavor was really hard to achieve: mythical tradition, local or ethnic narratives and also the legal aspects played a crucial role in the success of every new religious initiative, especially before the early third century AD (Szabó, 2020, 217-219).<sup>9</sup> Without an ancient (often from the Bronze Age or Neolithic) tradition, a successfully maintained central sanctuary or an exoticised narrative, new religious movements in antiquity did not last too long. Alexander of Abonoutheichos knew this very well. He was one of the many religious entrepreneurs in the Roman world, representing a strong and probably highly popular alternative for religious communication and strategies for crisis management of lay people (Windt, 2016). Lucian mentions that these “false prophets” often claimed medical knowledge and were the

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<sup>9</sup> Sacra peregrine or “foreign cults” (which would also be referred to by historiographers as “Oriental cults”) were legally limited especially in terms of public sacrifices and the topography (usually *extra-muros*) of the sacralised spaces.

major sources of popular medicine in the Hellenistic and Roman world.<sup>10</sup> Lucian describes the “revelatory event” of Alexander and his friend as they recognized fear and hope as the two major copying mechanisms of successful religious communication (Chaniotis, 2002, 68).<sup>11</sup> In his enumeration of several successful oracles, Lucian mentions Claros, too, who became highly popular in the Antonine period, especially during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, however there is no clear evidence that the oracular inscriptions (*secundum interpretationem Clari Apollinis*) associated with Apollo Claros and his main sanctuary corresponded in any way with the Antonine Plague (Jones, 2005; Duncan-Jones, 2018, 58). Cocconas and Alexander mention the major features of a successful new

religious movement: it is dependent on the existence of a superstitious and poor social environment, the founders need to know well the topography of the first sanctuary and it should be in an easily available commercial center, too.<sup>12</sup> A pseudo-materiality (material exoticism) of the new cult is witnessed in this case, too, as one of the successful strategies implemented by founders: Alexander and his friend made some bronze tablets with a Greek inscription (divination) stating that Apollo and Asclepius will move to Abonouteichos.<sup>13</sup> The bronze tablets materialized and legitimized the aims of the founders and transformed their communication into a divine message, similarly to John Smith in Ann Taves’ study (Taves, 2016, 40). It also represented an instance of exotic materialism of a new cult, which proved successful for the cult of Mithras (Persianisms) and Isis (Egyptianisms: Gasparini, Gordon, 2018). Tablets, plates as divine epiphanies and legitimization of religious knowledge is present in numerous case studies in antiquity and – by reviving traditions – also in contemporary case studies (Fine, 2019, 12 and 231). Alexander is also portrayed as a prophet with a specific and very strong visual appearance, who played an important role in the first phase of the cult formation, namely in attracting the local community.<sup>14</sup> Sacralising the new cultic place of Asclepius, Alexander implied deploying exotic elements once again: the materialization and embodiment of the god (a living snake in the lake) and the unknown, probably through Phoenician or Hebrew spells evokes the nature of the *defixiones* and their *charaktêres*, used as

<sup>10</sup> Lucian, Alexander, 5-6: “Among others, he had an admirer who was a quack, one of those who advertise enchantments, miraculous incantations, charms for your love-affairs, ‘sendings’ for your enemies, disclosures of buried treasure, and successions to estates. As this man saw that he was an apt lad, more than ready to assist him in his affairs, and that the boy was quite as much enamored with his roguery as he with the boy’s beauty, he gave him a thorough education and constantly made use of him as helper, servant, and acolyte. He himself was professedly a public physician, but, as Homer says of the wife of Thon, the Egyptian, he knew ‘Many a drug that was good in a compound, and many a bad one,’ all of which Alexander inherited and took over. This teacher and admirer of his was a man of Tyana by birth, one of those who had been followers of the notorious Apollonius, and who knew his whole bag of tricks. You see what sort of school the man that I am describing comes from!” Translated and notes by A.M. Harmon, 1936, Published in Loeb Classical Library, 9 volumes, Greek texts and English translation: Harvard University Press. This extract is transcribed by Roger Pearse, 2001. Online.

<sup>11</sup> Lucian, Alexander, 8: “As you might have expected of two consummate rascals, greatly daring, fully prepared for mischief, who had put their heads together, they readily discerned that human life is swayed by two great tyrants, hope and fear, and that a man who could use both of these to advantage would speedily enrich himself. For they perceived that both to one who fears and to one who hopes, foreknowledge is very essential and very keenly coveted, and that long ago not only Delphi, but Delos and Clarus and Branchidae, had become rich and famous because, thanks to the tyrants just mentioned, hope and fear, men continually visited their sanctuaries and sought to learn the future in advance, and to that end sacrificed hecatombs and dedicated ingots of gold. By turning all this round and round in conference with one another and keeping it astir, they concocted the project of founding a prophetic shrine and oracle, hoping that if they should succeed in it, they would at once be rich and prosperous ...”

<sup>12</sup> Lucian, Alexander, 9: “Cocconas thought Chalcedon a suitable and convenient place, close to Thrace and Bithynia, and not far, too, from Asia10 and Galatia and all the peoples of the interior. Alexander, on the other hand, preferred his own home, saying— and it was true— that to commence such a venture they needed “fat-heads” and simpletons to be their victims, and such, he said, were the Paphlagonians who lived up above Abonoteichus, who were for the most part superstitious and rich.”

<sup>13</sup> Lucian, Alexander, 10: “they buried bronze tablets which said that very soon Asclepius, with his father Apollo, would move to Pontus and take up his residence at Abonoteichus. The opportune discovery of these tablets caused this story to spread quickly to all Bithynia and Pontus, and to Abonoteichus sooner than anywhere else.”

<sup>14</sup> New materialities of instrumenta sacra, as his attributes: Lucian, Alexander 11-12.

strategy in written ritualized manipulation (Gordon, 2014, 254). The creation of the new god *neos Asklepios Glykon* ('the Gentle One' – **Figure 1-2.**) is a well documented case study of religious appropriation: Alexander combined numerous divinities and visual features of the Hellenistic and Roman religious narratives (Sabasios, Egyptianisms, oracular hearing gods and healing aspects: Chaniotis, 2002, 73, Petridou, 2017; Steger, Ursin, 2020, 250-252). Glykon had oracular and healing powers, too, which was not essentially new on the religious market of the Roman Empire in the second century AD. Each individual element of the cult – the unusual iconography of the god, the oracular aspects and mysticism of the divine messages and the healing aspects – are already present on the market and did not represent a novelty for the people. However the short-term success of these small religious groups always depends on the foundation myth and narrative: the embodied, physical presence of the "god", the snake from Pella and the above-mentioned exotic elements made the cult of Glykon very popular in the period spanning 160-180 AD. The cult is attested in the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world, but also in Tomis and Apulum, too (**Fig. 3**). In these cities, the cult of Glykon was transported via small groups or individuals from Asia Minor, possibly in close relationship with Alexander himself (Szabó, 2018, 76-77).<sup>15</sup> Lucian mentions what the archaeological evidence shows, namely that the iconography of the new god was standardized: the well-known statue of Glykon from Tomis was probably also reproduced in Apulum, where parts of the snake were preserved on the statue base (**Fig. 4**)<sup>16</sup>. The maintenance crisis of the cult is reflected in the use of new visual appropriations used to maintain the popularity of the cult: Alexander transformed the original, oracular statue of Glykon into a Hellenistic speaking statue (Platt, 2003).<sup>17</sup> This new yet not unusual aspect of divine statues served as the embodied presence of the divine and increased the success of the oracle. Lucian criticized numerous times this aspect of divination, making jokes about the empty body of statues (Platt, 2011, 81). The success of the

new cult can also be measured by analyzing its political impact: Alexander convinced Severianus to attack Armenia, which was one of the reasons leading to the Roman-Parthian wars in 161-166 AD. The war and the pandemic were also connected by the later Roman historiography and collective memory: after the late antique historiography (*Historia Augusta*, *Verus* VIII.2) the plague outbreak started in Babylon after a soldier opened a golden casket in the temple of Apollo.<sup>18</sup> It is unclear if Lucian was aware of this legend or if it was created much later, but by combining the military disaster and the beginning of the plague with Alexander and Glykon, Lucian creates a legitimization of his meta-history of the negative effects of religious entrepreneurs and charlatanism. Lucian also mentioned that Alexander used his cult during the pandemic (plague) and connected his movement with the already popular and prestigious cult of Apollo Phoibos.<sup>19</sup> In combining popular medicine with oracular mysticism in a period of crisis, Alexander entered not only the religious market, but also the important field of urban medical care. Lucian claims that by combining his religious ambitions with the current

<sup>18</sup> HA, *Verus* VIII.2-3.: "It is believed that this pestilence originated in Babylonia, where a pestilential vapour arose in a temple of Apollo from a golden casket which a soldier had accidentally cut open, and that it spread thence over Parthia and the whole world. Lucius Verus, however, is not to blame for this so much as Cassius, who stormed Seleucia in violation of an agreement, after it had received our soldiers as friends."

<sup>19</sup> Lucian, *Alexander*, 36: "No sooner did Alexander get Italy in hand than he began to devise projects that were ever greater and greater, and sent oracle-mongers everywhere in the Roman Empire, warning the cities to be on their guard against plagues and conflagrations and earth-quakes; he promised that he would himself afford them infallible aid so that none of these calamities should befall them. There was one oracle, also an autophone, which he despatched to all the nations during the pestilence; it was but a single verse: "Phoebus, the god unshorn, keepeth off plague's nebulous onset." This verse was to be seen everywhere written over doorways as a charm against the plague; but in most cases it had the contrary result. By some chance it was particularly the houses on which the verse was inscribed that were depopulated! Do not suppose me to mean that they were stricken on account of the verse—by some chance or other it turned out that way, and perhaps, too, people neglected precautions because of their confidence in the line and lived too carelessly, giving the oracle no assistance against the disease because they were going to have the syllables to defend them and 'unshorn Phoebus' to drive away the plague with his arrows!"

<sup>15</sup> Lucian, *Alexander*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Lucian, *Alexander*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Lucian, *Alexander* 26.

medical crisis of the major Roman urban environments, Alexander contributed indirectly to the belittling and general ignorance of the medical crisis, which resulted in the death of numerous families and households. The negative effects of the new cult of Alexander – as a product of a society in military and medical crisis – is presented by Lucian through examples of moral crisis, too: the false prophet is accused by Lucian of pedophilia,<sup>20</sup> presented here through a moralizing example and a sign of the negative aspects of such new religious movements and their false prophets.<sup>21</sup> Despite its great success during the life of Alexander, the cult of Glycon did not resist on the religious market of the Roman Empire after the death of its founder. This was not unusual: numerous religious movements and even “great gods” had the same fate, especially if these cults were dependent on a political and medical crisis which seems to have been resolved after 193 AD.

## Conclusions

This paper set out to present the current state of research into the so-called Antonine Plague and its impact on the religious market of the Roman Empire in the latter half of the second century AD. Although this pandemic is considered by R. Duncan-Jones and his followers as one of the major cataclysms of the Roman Empire, recent studies argue that the available literary, economical and archaeological sources are not enough to understand its implications, the real economic and social impact, and the medical nature of this pandemic. By contextualizing this event against a global background, in

conjunction with the two major wars (Parthian Wars, Marcommanic Wars) in the eastern and the northern parts of the Empire and the constant diversification of the religious market, I believe that the Antonine Plague needs to be interpreted as an important piece of a larger historical puzzle, where climatic changes, religious appropriations, large scale and *longue durée* mobilities were interacting at a macro and micro level within the Roman Empire, shaping its society and political history, too. The case study of false prophet Alexander provides a detailed account of crisis management and shows how religious market changed during the pandemic and wartime. Lucian presents not only the major mechanisms involved in constructing small religious groups, but also the negative effects of magical practices, popular medicine and mass manipulation during a critical period in the social and medical history of the Roman Empire.

<sup>20</sup> The notion is modern and was never used in ancient literature. On the complex problem of ancient pederasty and contemporary views on pedophilia, see Butrica, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Lucian, Alexander, 41: “Although he cautioned all to abstain from intercourse with boys on the ground that it was impious, for his own part this pattern of propriety made a clever arrangement. He commanded the cities in Pontus and Paphlagonia to send choir-boys for three years’ service, to sing hymns to the god in his household; they were required to examine, select, and send the noblest, youngest, and most handsome. These he kept under ward and treated like bought slaves, sleeping with them and affronting them in every way. He made it a rule, too, not to greet anyone over eighteen years with his lips, or to embrace and kiss him; he kissed only the young, extending his hand to the others to be kissed by them. They were called ‘those within the kiss.’”



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#### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

- Fig. 1.** The statue of Glycon from Tomis, today Constanța (Photo: Author, National Museum of Archaeology, Constanța).
- Fig. 2.** Details of the statue of Glycon from Tomis (Photo: author, National Museum of Archaeology Constanța)
- Fig. 3.** Statue base dedicated to Glycon from Apulum (Photo: Ortolf Harl, Ubi Erat Lupa Online Database nr. 11284-1).
- Fig. 4.** Details of the statue base of Glycon from Apulum (Photo: Ortolf Harl, Ubi Erat Lupa Online Database nr. 11284-5).



**Fig. 1.** The statue of Glycon from Tomis, today Constanța (Photo: Author, National Museum of Archaeology, Constanța).



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**Fig. 3.** Statue base dedicated to Glycon from Apulum (Photo: Ortolf Harl, Ubi Erat Lupa Online Database nr. 11284-1).



**Fig. 4.** Details of the statue base of Glycon from Apulum (Photo: Ortolf Harl, Ubi Erat Lupa Online Database nr. 11284-5).

## WITCHCRAFT AND DAILY MORTALITY IN TRANSYLVANIA OF THE 16<sup>TH</sup>-18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

Șarolta SOLCAN

Professor PhD.

Faculty of History

University of Bucharest

E-mail: saroltasolcan@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The article explores the phenomenon of witchcraft and traditional healing linked to the daily mortality in the difficult period of the 16th-18th centuries Transylvania. The memoirs, diaries of the elites, as well as fragments of the Transylvanian witchcraft trials offer a complex image of the Transylvanian society and their daily hardships in facing the diseases, sicknesses and imminent death regardless of their social status and financial possibilities. The fine line between the capability of doctors for the elites and of healers for commoners highlights the equality of all the people in front of common types of diseases, health conditions or wounds. The profile of the Transylvanian witches and their accusers is revealed, along with the common accusations in the witchcraft trials. Moreover, the article investigates the link between the Transylvanian witches and natural disasters, as well as the witches in Transylvanian imaginary of that period.*

**Keywords:** *Transylvania of the 16th-18th centuries, witchcraft trials, daily mortality, elites and commoners, memoirs and diaries*

**Rezumat:** *Studiul de față urmărește fenomenul vrăjitoriei și vindecarea populară strâns corelate cu mortalitatea de zi cu zi din perioada secolelor 16-18, în Transilvania. Memoriile, jurnalele elitelor, dar și fragmente din procesele de vrăjitorie transilvănene ne oferă o imagine complexă asupra societății și greutăților zilnice în înfruntarea bolilor, molimelor și morții iminente, indiferent de statutul social și posibilitățile financiare ale celor implicați. Diferențierea fină între capacitatea doctorilor la îndemâna elitei și vracii disponibili oamenilor simpli reliefează egalitatea în fața unor boli comune, a condițiilor de sănătate și rănilor. Profilul vrăjitoarelor/vrăjitorilor transilvăneni și a acuzatorilor este o altă preocupare a studiului, alături de tipurile comune de acuzații aduse în procese. Un alt aspect explorat este legătura dintre vracii/vrăjitoarele din Transilvania și dezastrele naturale, fără a neglija locul vrăjitoriei în imaginarul transilvănean al perioadei.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Transilvania secolelor 16-18, procese de vrăjitorie, mortalitatea zilnică, elitele și oamenii de rând, jurnale și memorii*

### Brief introduction

The witches' trials in Transylvania are linked with a high mortality rate since their beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Documents mention numerous epidemics. Plague is one of them in 1552-1554, 1574-1575, 1586-1588 (Cernovodeanu, Binder 1993, 46, 51, 53, 57), in the first years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, then merely in every decade: 1622, 1633-1637, 1644-1648, 1651-1653, 1661-1664,

1675-1678, 1691-1692, 1698, 1709-1711, 1716-1718, 1737-1739, 1756-1757.

The epidemic of the years 1601-1604, 1660-1664 and 1716-1718 were especially virulent. They covered the entire Transylvanian area and the southern and eastern territories of the Carpathians.

Plague was feared because of its particular manifestations, the rapid spread after the unknown then incubation period. The glass blower Georg Franz Kreybich described the debut of the plague in 1709 in Sibiu: "in one

single night five houses were infected and 15 people died promptly.” (Holban et al. 1983, VIII, 129)

The disease decimated families. Valentin Segesvári, the chronicler from Cluj, noted that in August-September 1661, his two sons of 3 and 14 years old and two daughters of 9 and 16 years old died. As many others, he felt helpless facing his dear ones’ death and considered plague a divine punishment for human sins. (Pataki 1990, 192)

Plague and wars took many lives and affected communities for decades. (Nicoară 2006, 77-106) They became a landmark in collective memory. There were tens of thousands of people that never encountered these events, but they were still afraid of deadly diseases. Unlike plague, these diseases were part of the everyday life. You could not run away from them as from the plague.

#### **Daily diseases in Transylvania of the 16th-18th centuries**

We may find evidence of numerous diseases in documents: in 1586 Girolamo Fanfonio pointed out that apart from plague, “there are many ill people, suffering from other diseases” in Cluj. He mentioned two priests: “one was paralysed”, the other “was spitting blood... his days are numbered.” Holban et al. 1971, III, 130-131) Massimo Milanesi, the orderly of the Jezuit College of Cluj wrote in 1585 that people who suffered of fever, edema, children’s sickness, stomachache, dizziness, paralysis, palpitation, inflammations, heart diseases, gout, calculi, colic, headaches, blurred vision, wounds, old and new abscess, hemorrhages. (Holban et al. 1971, III, 128)

In the same period of time Antonio Possevino was impressed by chronic diseases “that eat up from inside as a file, which is why some heal them with a different care, with refreshing cure... These pains are followed by paralysis of legs of arms.” (Holban et al. 1970, II, 128) Others wrote about skin diseases like mange, leprosy, gout, leg pain. (Holban et al. 1997, IX, 552, 553; Holban et al. 2001, X/1, 405)

David Frölich who graduated from medicine university in Frankfurt showed that around 1629-1639 in the Sibiu area there were

many people who suffered from arthritis (Holban et al. 1973, V, 50), while in Bistrița area “in the plebeian cases there are many deaf, mute, with a thyroid condition and many mad people...” (Holban et al. 1973, V, 51) The Prince János Kemény remembered that in 1637 he suffered of “spleen disease” (Holban et al. 1973, V, 133), while the Transylvanian chronicler Georg Kraus mentioned chickenpox, dysentery, typhoid fever (Kraus 1965, 144-145, 431), all of these being infectious diseases.

Referring to the epidemic of chickenpox in Cluj in 1628, Valentin Segesvári wrote: “there were many children and elders with chickenpox, and both children and lads died of it.” (Segesvári..., 157) Although this illness might have been a normal one in Transylvania, it was rarely mentioned. A memorable moment was when it affected the prince’s family in 1651-1652. Sigismund Rákóczi, Prince’s brother, and his wife died during that epidemic of chickenpox (Kraus, 1965, 144, 431). Even the Prince, George Rákóczi fell ill, as well as the Princess and their son, but they survived after “lying ill, fearing for their lives, and after the marks left by the illness on his face, the Prince was ugly, with a bad wound near his eye.” (Kraus, 1965, 145) Chickenpox came back time and again, leaving bereaved families. According to the writings of teacher Teodor Baran in 1715, in Brașov and Țara Bârsei (Burzenland) “many children died of chickenpox all the summer”, while in 1717, before the outbreak of the plague, there was a “sickness of broken heart, the flux (dysentery) and people of all age passed away.” (Mușlea 1943, 275; Nicoară 2006, 84)

There are no many pieces of information about the dysentery outbreaks. Documents mention the pestilence of Sibiu that lasted since August till October 1675 (Sigerus 1997, 30), and Miklós/Nicolae Bethlen described the tragedy caused by dysentery. At the end of July 1673, in one Friday and Saturday, 12 hours distance, Bethlen’s daughters of 2 and 3 years died “at an age when they were pretty, talkative and frisky.” (Bethlen 2004, 127) When the elder daughter was ill, a renowned doctor was called – Ioan Tolnai of Cluj (*Kolozsvári Tolnai János*) who studied in Frankfurt (*Peregrinatio Hungarica* 2006, 319) and said that the youngest daughter had roundworms and needed her belly be



anointed with an ointment. After this treatment the girl had 53 stools and “with all his struggles, the doctor could not stop the diarrhea so that 5 days after being anointed, 12 hours after her sister, the girl died.” Bethlen’s text highlights father’s pain and doctor’s despair, feeling his incapacity of saving lives: “The ointment was nothing else but a pumpkin boiled in oil, bitter cucumber; the doctor was sad and ashamed, but it happened.” (Bethlen 2004, 127-128) All people of the household were infected apart from the author, his son of 6 weeks and his nurse. 28 servants and his wife fell ill. And old servant died as well (Bethlen, 2004, 128).

Miklós Bethlen’s memoirs are a valuable source for knowing the illnesses a child was facing back in those days. He mentioned the diseases he suffered of: hay fever, typhos, “fever during the cold season”, erysipelas, and “if I ate more watermelon, pears and summer peaches, they gave me dysentery” (Bethlen 2004, 64). Actually, that was frequent enteritis (Bethlen 2004, 70). Around the age of 10 years, during the epidemics of 1653, he had smallpox and after healing “all my body parts were covered by scabies as if sprinkled by something and it stung badly.” It was thought that the latter was smallpox consequences. After getting rid of mange, he got ill of rubella, bouts of fever, sore throat, a big abscess on his neck and chin that must be cut, toothache, colds, and epistaxis (Bethlen 2004, 69-70). In time he confronted with other health problems so that in 1677, when he was 35 years old, when he was imprisoned and accused of participating in a plot against the Prince, he displayed signs of apoplexy, eye pain, and colic. In 1691 he fell ill for two weeks “because of sadness and cold...” (Bethlen, 2004, 71). That was the year when he was chosen chancellor of Transylvania.

His childhood had also some accidents that could have proved fatal. He had infections - once because of a blister and then because of a “wound the size of a coin” (diameter of 3 cm) that were not treated in due time and “if he was not brought to Sighişoara to a good barber, my silly finger either broke or paralysed”, while the second time “little was left to have my entire hand cut off the wrist” (Bethlen 2004, 72).

All these illnesses, infections of one of the most important nobles in the entire

principality, becoming later a great deputy, were treated by well-known doctors and barbers of the country.

In his turn, Mihály Cserei wrote about the typhos epidemic of the eastern part of Transylvania (Cserei 1983, 435) and described his deceased son’s sufferings of measles in Braşov: fever, severe thirst, delirium, incapacity of eating during 13 days. During this period of time, the chronicler was laying in bed because of typhos (Cserei 1983, 435), but despite doctor’s assurances that his son was about to recover, his son died.

An official of Făgăraş, Rétyi Péter, noted down in his diary that he attended a funeral of his friends’ small children, one of which died of measles in 1668 (Rétyi 1983, 49, 54, 60).

Chroniclers also shared information about the state of health of their family members. Thus, Bethlen lost his father, chancellor János Bethlen when he was 64, in 1678: “to everyone’s amazement, he was healed of a terrible dropsy that had tormented him for 3 years and a half, dying of a dry illness (tuberculosis) and dreadful hiccup” (Bethlen 2004, 51). His maternal grand-father died of dropsy at 70 years old, judge of Cluj, Miklós Váradi (Bethlen 2004, 52).

János Cserei’s death, former captain of Făgăraş fortress and father of Mihály Cserei, occurred in 1712, at 72 years old, after he “suffered with kidney calculus, and then fell ill with typhos and died five weeks” (Cserei 1983, 52).

Rétyi Péter mentioned that in 1674 someone died after several days of suffering from troubles with the nervous system (*Rétyi Péter naplója* 1983, 94). He lost friends and acquaintances after being ill for several days (*Rétyi Péter naplója* 1983, 65, 75, 83, 91, 94), others died suddenly after a feast. That is the case of vice-captain of Făgăraş fortress, Péter Veres (*Rétyi Péter naplója* 1983, 85).

We find the same atmosphere depicted in western Europe by Pierre Chaunu. Diseases contributed to two yearly mortality peaks: in winter when adults and elders would die, and in summer when children died mostly because of enterocolitis and diminishing breastfeeding

because of agricultural labour (Chaunu 1989, I, 237).

Chroniclers described the way they assisted helplessly to their mothers', newborns' and wives' illness and death. Referring to Miklós Bethlen, we must mention that his mother passed away in March 1661 of "bitter illness and death, as being pregnant, the child she bore died and then she died because of that" (Bethlen 2004, 92). In May 1668 his teenage sister who was about to marry died of chickenpox (Bethlen 2004, 121). Then he witnessed the sufferings of his two wives. The first one died at 33 years old in December 1685 after a long illness of kidney calculus from 1679. After she gave birth to her fifth and last child – a baby boy who died shortly afterwards – her physical state worsened, suffering from colic, menstrual issues, kidney calculus and then epileptic seizures. She died after lying in bed for 14 weeks. His second wife suffered from severe complications after giving birth (Bethlen 2004, 166, 180-181).

Following the range of illnesses mentioned in the sources of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, we may ascertain that apart from the plague, there was a great number of illnesses that affected all age categories: typhus, chickenpox, dysentery. Some descriptions of children's diseases – including loss of arms and legs or weakness – suggest Lyme disease or polio.

Sources of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries note a myriad of maladies, but their description was vague and many symptoms may indicate ulcer, rheumatism, kidney stones, colic, arthritis and others (Holban et al., 1970, II, 541, note 63).

#### *Doctors for the Transylvanian elite*

One category of affections had usually dramatic emotional impact – those of women and children. Except for witchcraft trials, we have poor knowledge of these in Romanian Principalities. Only memoirs noted women's and children's death, while the authors were deeply marked by the loss of their dear ones.

These illnesses were part of the everyday life and witches sought remedies to heal them. Disease and death could appear in someone's life anytime. The fact that people of those times witnessed children, wives, friends,

parents suffering and dying spread fear and contributed to searching for remedies everywhere by everyone.

Elites benefited from doctors' services after learning at famous universities, famous barbers from great cities. Miklós Bethlen called for one of the most prestigious doctors of Transylvania when his daughters fell ill of dysentery, but children died in pain under the helpless eyes of the doctor. When he was ill, "doctor Köleséri Samuel<sup>1</sup> prescribed sauerkraut with honey..." (Bethlen 2004, 64) and as a consequence "all illnesses were healed by pickled cabbage. When I suffered from severe hay fever, typhus, fever, erysipelas, I was eating sauerkraut with linseed oil, no vinegar... I was drinking a lot of sparkling water or spring water, sometimes with honey, sometimes coffee, no wine, and especially in the evenings I was covering up, napping and I got better" (Bethlen 2004, 64). Referring to doctors' prescriptions, Bethlen stated that they were narrowed down to "emetic, purgative, sweating medicine", then bloodletting and suction cups (Bethlen 2004, 71-72).

Simple people tried to cure skin diseases with the help of sulphurous waters (Holban et al. 1997, IX, 546). Those with leg wounds and gout were going to Borsec and springs of Cehul Silvaniei, as Jan Fridwaldszki noted (Holban et al. 2001, X/1, 405).

#### *Healers for the Transylvanian commoners*

Witchcraft trials in Transylvania were against healers or witch doctors. Spells were part of these accusations, but they were not punished with death sentences. There were few witchcraft trials where the aim was to remove someone particularly inconvenient to authorities; to this end, people were accused of occult activities. Witchcraft trials in Transylvania were lay, as judges and magistrates were part of city councils and counties. However, the trials borrowed some features from the western witchcraft trials, such as the special relationship of the accused with

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<sup>1</sup> Köleséri Samuel (1663-1732) studied medicine at the University of Leiden; he was the doctor of chancellor Miklós Teleki, then of Transylvanian governor and then of the military command of the imperial troops.

the devil and Sabbath, but after 1728, under the Austrian rule in Transylvania, the lay character was maintained.

These Transylvanian trials show that commoners appealed to local witch doctors' help for healing. Francesco Grisellini confirmed that specifying that those who dealt with the sick people were old women of the family, while the treatment consisted of weeds or "amulets, marks, formulas, which are a mix of saint and worldly expressions meant to shudder" (Holban et al., 2001, X/1, 396) Grisellini stated that at some point he met in the village Denta, on Bârzava, "in a gipsy cabin a lad full of manger to whom his mother brought the boiled meat of a small snake in a bowl made of clay so that he would eat that" (Holban et al., 2001, X/1, 383).

Perhaps in many cases the ill expected to heal in time, as Bethlen mentioned (Bethlen 2004, 72). That attitude was noticed by travellers through Romanian Principalities. Thus, Grisellini wrote: "they endure as much as they can all these illnesses without caring for themselves and behave very superficially" (Holban et al., 2001, X/1, 386). That attitude toward disease was not specific only to local commoners, as it was also characteristic to some travellers (Holban et al., 1997, IX, 224).

The trials against the witch doctors concerned the witchcraft related to everyday illnesses. Plague was brought into discussion on such trials rarely in the first half of the 18th century. Although in the 17th century plague was frequent and sometimes affected large areas, no witchcraft trial referred to plague treatments. Accusers, witnesses and defendants were preoccupied by the usual illnesses. That is why the cause and activity of so-called witches was continuous, and there were trials on an yearly basis throughout Transylvania, Crișana, Maramureș and Banat regions.

Accusers and witnesses of these witchcraft trials were talking about the fear of losing the loved ones. They could not accept death or the consequences that made them marginal figures in society. In Philippe Ariès' perspective, these depositions present people facing the other's death (Bogdan 2016, 13; Ariès 1996); that death does not take into account those who physically disappeared, but those who

were marginalised because of an infirmity and were not part of the community.

That fear generated numerous contradictory reactions. The relatives of the ill appealed to witch doctors, who were endowed with unlimited powers. When the remedies prescribed and performed by the healers proved inefficient, the relatives changed their perception, associating them with malefic characters. Such events triggered despair, hatred and desire of revenge, which was given by legislation of the second half of the 18th century. Thus, the daily Transylvanian life of the 16th-18th centuries was spiced up by the witches' presence.

#### *The profile of the Transylvanian witches and their accusers*

Before approaching the issue of witchcraft we should analyse who were the accused and accusers in these trials, the stages of the trial, torture and capital punishment.

Most of the accused of witchcraft were women who were also midwives. Women who performed spells on animals and households, spells for bringing back people or objects were also under trial. These were adults, elder people, with families or poor widows that "survived on mending clothes and massage" (Komáromy 1910, no. 16, 34). The healing process supposed a series of knowledge and experience, while the healer must have inspired trust. These women were mostly daughters of healers who were, in their turn, accused of witchcraft.

The activity of such a healer supposed many years (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 174, 407). Some of them were known as witches for twenty years or more. For example, Bedner János' wife, Agota, from Sighisoara, was said to be a witch for twenty-one years in 1671 (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 85, 122). Another example is Farkas Borbála from Târgu Mureș, whose trial took place in 1752 and was an old midwife and healer. One of the witnesses highlighted the fact that she gave birth to seven children with Borbála's help, while another woman of 40 years stated that she gave birth to several children and her daughter was also helped by the defendant while in child labour. The three women from the Ineu domain were trialed in

1755-1756 and were of 50-60 years age (Bessenyei 2000, no. 123, 234-251).

There were also several young women accused of witchcraft. For example, a girl names Adinica from the county Solnocul Interior, judged in 1712. The documents state that she was condemned on the basis of test of the water – if she drowned to be forgiven, if not, to be burned (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 212, 257). Ilia Béán was 22 years old, the last one to be judged for witchcraft in Transylvania in 1803 (Bessenyei 2000, no. 146, 339-359).

Widows were frequently involved in such trials. Some were accused being innocent. That is the case of a widow from oppidum Matészalka (nowadays Hungary) in 1701. She was murdered by several villagers, instigated by a neighbour, Nagy Ferenc, who considered her responsible for his son's death (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 5, 50-63). Ten years later, in 1711, a similar experience had a woman from the small gentry in Plăiești, Arieș area. She was accused of witchcraft by a man who caught her, beat her, threw her into water, trampled her and set her on fire, but he was stopped in time by villagers (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 160, 382).

Among those under trial for witchcraft were men, with the same accusations. One of them was a witch doctor - Kőmives Simon rom Colțești, county Turda-Arieș – accused of witchcraft after one of the healed persons was crippled (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 89, 278). Other men were accused of the death of animals in some households. Thus, in 1716, Pásztor János from Decea, county Turda-Arieș was judged for killing cattle with “devilish craft” (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 138, 329).

Vagrancy was forbidden in Transylvania, as everywhere in Europe. Tramps were usually imprisoned, but in the 18th century, Lengyel István in 1716 and Bethlen János in 1736, from Arieș area, were accused of practicing witchcraft in villages (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 177, 418).

Those accused of witchcraft came from various socio-economic backgrounds. There were wealthy and very poor people among them – nobles, merchants, townsmen and serfs, as well as tramps. Accusations and punishments were the same for all of them, as the law forbade witchcraft trials in case of nobles (Bessenyei

2000, III, no. 83, 104, 271, 296-298). People were accused of witchcraft regardless of their ethnic background.

Almost all of the accused were witch doctors that were also involved in birthing, healing people of their community. These were people to whom villagers resorted in times of despair, in the hope of healing and recovery. In 1584, at the trial of the widow Katalin from Cluj, one of the witnessed stated that she was under the suspicion of sickening the witness' son; the judge of Micoșlaca (Alba county) asked the witness not to do that because the widow “had been a very good mother” (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 18, 50).

The accusers may be defined in this way: people who suffered of consequences after the so-called healing process or have deceased relatives after asking for witch doctor's help. Among the accused were those with dead cattle that were vital in ensuring bread on the table. Accusers were from different socio-economic background, of any ethnicity. They were wretched people in a world with many diseases, considering the witch doctor the only person capable of producing miracles. That explains the variety of feelings inspired by witch doctors – from hope to despair, hatred and demonization. That is also responsible for the image of healers in that period.

It is remarkable that witch doctors' neighbours were not among the accusers and in many cases they defended the healers and supported their innocence.

In accusers' mind, healers who were accused of witchcraft combined contradictory features. On the one hand, people hoped for miraculous help and they did not accept to be refused. Witch's malice or desire of revenge was considered the cause of the treatment's failure. The impossibility of beloved ones' healing was out of question in people's mind. From the moment of tragedy, the healer became a malefic character that induced disease and killed on purpose. These feelings were amplified by the lack of explanations about ills and sickness. Moreover, nightmares with aggressive witches were considered real facts by the magistrates in witchcraft trials.

### Accusations and witchcraft trials

The healer was endowed with supernatural powers which he/she controlled. In 1700, the widow of Nagy Péter, member of small gentry from Stejeriș, Arieș area, was burnt after being accused of differentiated witchcraft – some people were healed, while others were destroyed (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 159, 196-197). That was community's mentality, which followed a pattern of behaviour regarding witches: first, witches were abused verbally if they refused to perform the healing, then they were abused physically and if the result of witches' intervention was death, they were trialed for witchcraft.

The trial between two women from Dej in 1727 is telling of the relationship between the so-called witch and community. Ács Borbála, Kecskémeti János' wife accused Márkus Borbála, Szász István's wife, that she was a witch and then her mouth was askew. After a series of threats, Ács Borbála got better and accused Márkus Borbála of healing the induced illness, of bringing back her astray husband and that Borbála threatened that she could make women barren. Moreover, Márkus Borbála talked to other witches and was seen by her husband and by others performing spells (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 341, 394-395).

We may note that the starting point of this argument was an illness. The accuser argued with the defendant and considered that the accused made her sick because of accusing her of witchcraft. That was a dangerous thing, as unless rejecting publicly such an accusation, she could be accused by the authorities any time. Despite the fact that Barbara Ács got better soon after the incident, the healer was in a difficult situation, as people considered that she healed the accuser out of fear for her own life. Such a situation was quite common and it supported the community's assumption that the healer was a witch.

The fact that Márkus Borbála, a healer, was labeled as a witch reflects the way of villagers' thinking: she could induce illness or heal. Even the fact that her husband came back to her was considered the result of witchcraft. The reason for his leaving or coming back is unknown, and probably their family life was not a smooth one, given the fact that he accused

Borbála of witchcraft. Such accusations could lead easily to an execution.

The accusation that Márkus Borbála could make women barren lead our analysis to a different direction. Some healers might have tried to improve their influence within community, especially if they had competitors. They wanted to be feared and listened to by the others and threatened with sensitive issues like health, life or desire of having children. Some of them would listen under the window of their neighbours in the dark just to impress them afterwards with their knowledge (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 8, 16, 17; 19, 31, 39). Thus, they contributed to creating and spreading the myth about their supernatural powers to attract the customers. Mystery and herbs, along with that reputation turned against them in so many cases.

The same issues and attitudes are stated in a document from the 16th century. The first to be accused of witchcraft were Prisca Kőmíves and Clara Boci, under trial in 1565, both of them midwives and known healers from Cluj. Clara Boci was literate and used a "herbs book" (Kiss 2005).

The first witnesses of the accusation were generally ill persons or relatives of the deceased. For example, the trial against Fekete Kata in 1573 (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 8, 16-20) was initiated by a man who suffered from a terrible pain in his leg, followed by a woman whose child died after seeing the defendant taking coals from the neighbours, and then accusation regarding concubines, robbery, threats. Someone claimed that the accused "bound" his son's hand so that he could not bit his wife. The first witness was healed after threatening the accused that he would "put fire on her back" unless she healed his leg; that supported his conviction that she was a witch.

Once fear of death spread in the community, its members felt threatened and reacted by accusing the woman. One of the witnesses declared that he hadn't noticed anything bad regarding Kata's behaviour, but when her child got ill, she began fearing Kato, especially after hearing rumours about her (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 8, 18).

In 1584, in Cluj, Szabo Kata's trial took place (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 16, 27-35). That case was triggered by a woman's tongue full of

blisters who stated that she and her husband argued with the accused and Kata threatened her. Then another witness declared that his servant fell ill after a fight with Kata, while another supported the fact that another ill woman died after not paying the accused for healing her and her husband. Kata was also considered responsible for a woman's death after unsuccessful healing process and for a man's death who refused to give her wood. A pregnant woman refused to call Kata and then fell ill. After the husband appealed to Kata's services and paid her, the pregnant woman recovered. These accusations were concerned with health issues and life and death matters, which constituted reasons for the trial. Other testimonies of threats and gestures of magic importance during the healing process were mentioned.

Another category of witchcraft accusations were oriented against midwives by desperate families that witnessed helplessly the suffering and death of women and their babies. The abovementioned cases were also cases of midwives, but their tragedy started because of their incapacity to heal the sick.

Another midwife, Sós Jánosné, from Cluj, was under trial in 1584 (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 17, 36-44). Witnesses state aspects of suffering, discontent concerning midwife's refuse to assist birthing and her threats. The fact that after birth both mother and baby were sick was considered midwife's revenge because of less money received as payment. Moreover, if after a difficult birth the woman could not bear any children, people considered that the result of spells. Two witnesses suspected the midwife of death of two children, one newborn.

In the same year in Cluj took place Katalin's trial (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 18, 44-55). Two women's sufferings were the source of that trial, one of them died after swelling, while the other had a crippled foot. Both women asked for Katalin's help. Other women with ill children joined the accusations, then a man testified that he lost one eye after stealing the Katalin's goose. One mother accused the midwife to intervene after her three year old child died in seizures and his body covered by boils. Another accuser stated that her mother died because of Katalin, but a servant declared

that in fact a wasp got into the deceased's mouth. Other witnesses added that the accused threatened that she was seen entering and gathering herbs in the cemetery at night.

While in Katalin's case the issue of infirmity was brought up, another trial from the same year, against Szeles Miklosné's wife from Cluj, apart from ill and deceased people, there were cases of ill and dead cattle or cows with no milk.

In January 1735, in Reghin-Sat, there were two cases of witchcraft: Oltyán Opra's wife, Moldován Juána, and their daughter, Oltyán Macsinyika (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 95, 196). Both women were healers. The case that brought them into attention was the illness of a serf's son from Apalina. Both the parents and his master were convinced that the two women were to be blamed. The master "ordered them to reverse what they had done with that crippled", fact which was impossible.

In the same year, Mircse Vasile's wife from Vălenii de Mureș, Turda county, was accused of witchcraft, as she caused illness of children and animals (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 98, 199).

At the trial of a Romanian midwife, Elena Moașa Româncă ("Olá Ilona Bába" in documents) (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 34, 198-213) prosecuted in 1739 in Zalău and in 1742 in Șimleul Silvaniei other dramas were uncovered. One lad was desperately trying to save his sister; as the girl got worse, he beat the midwife up. A husband suspected that Elena "might have done something" to his wife after a difficult birth and no other babies were born afterwards.

Among those who were terrified of the perspective of illness and death of their beloved ones, there were not only commoners who appealed to witches, but also princes. Bethlen Gábor tried to get his ill wife better - Susana Károlyi – in 1621, with the help of a witch, but his wife died in 1622. Desperate because of the disease's evolution, he wrote with bitterness: "I do not hope that doctors and barbers would do something against such spells" (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 36, 90). Decades later, Apafi Mihály I searched for scape goat among women with occult preoccupations for the death of his 13 children and his wife's illness (Herner 1988, 18, 19, 35-41, 161, 163).

The same aspects – disease and death – determined similar reactions of the relatives of those who were sick or of the deceased ones throughout the principality and in all the witchcraft trials. The relatives could not apprehend the tragedy in their lives and searched for explanations and scape goats. They would not accept witch doctors' limitations. Often their searches were oriented by rumours about healers that lived in the area, by other healers' indications, who proved incapable to handle the disease and blamed the first healer that was contacted or "the first one who entered the ill's house" (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 8, 17).

All the illnesses attempted to be cured by healers were everyday type of illnesses. That was the cause of witchcraft trials in Transylvania of the 16th-18th centuries.

#### *Transylvanian witches and natural disasters*

Witches' activity and links to epidemic or natural disasters were done only from the third decade of the 18th century. Thus, in 1725, in Turda-Arieş county there were several persons accused of spells against the community – a serf, Aliman Balger from Sânger (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 100, 291) and a Roma young woman, Anuța Stan (in documents "Sztan Anutza") from Colțești (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 101, 292). The first one was accused of spells during the "last" plague epidemics, while the second was held responsible for bringing illness upon people, cattle and destroying "herbs of the fields" according to devil's teachings. Accusations were made based on a series of natural disasters – floods of the 1711-1713, 1715-1716, the droughts of 1714, 1717-1719 – that contributed to hunger, expensive food and one of the biggest plague epidemics. In 1724 another drought happened (Cernovodeanu, Binder 1993, 136-145).

Another case was trialed in 1729. Semedra Pap, Meszes Gergely's wife (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 31, 177) from Hereclean, Sălaj county, was accused for the dead from the village during the plague wave of 1718. One of the witnesses, a man of 40 years stated that 11 years ago, during a great plague outburst, the noble Kis Dániel ordered four men and four women to go from house to house and search for someone with the signs of a witch. If they were

to discover someone with marks on the body, they should accuse him/her of bringing the pestilence in the village. These people found the accused sleeping profoundly after working from dawn till dusk, as witnesses testified. 11 years later she was accused that "under the cover of plague, she killed many people with the help of witchcraft" (Bessenyei 2000, III, 181).

These trials only accused of provoking and spreading the plague; no reference was made to witch doctors being involved in healing people or fighting the plague.

Victims of the plague were especially feared, as it was considered that they draw others to death, children especially. In some regions of Transylvania, especially in Romanian communities, it was believed that the plague was cause by vampires and ghosts (Nicoară 2006, 94). In 1723, in Tonciu, Bistrița county, a woman pretended that her mother-in-law who died of plague was coming back from time to time and "took with her" children from the village. An investigation was held, the tomb was opened to calm down the villagers (Kiss 1998, no. XIV, 161-164).

Crooks were remembered during the plague more than healers, as crooks profited from the people's fear and took money offering salvation. For such scams during the plague of 1739 and in 1743 some were punished – a woman from Șăulia, Turda-Arieş county in 1743 (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 129, 323) and a crippled man from the village Budiul de Câmpie, same county (today this is Papiu Ilarian, Mureş county), in 1744. The man was sentenced to having his tongue cut "in such a way that he would not die and could not speak for the rest of his life" (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 134, 326-327).

#### *Witches in Transylvanian imaginary*

In the 16th-18th centuries the image of witches was shaped based on nightmares, delirium of ill people or based on testimonies of those who looked after the ill. In many cases the character identified as the witch from the dream looked like the healer who treated them or refused his help. Thus, an ill woman who had just given birth had a dream with Sós János' wife who was pulling her hair (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 17, 36), while a man whose 3 year old

child died stated that when he held the child in his arms, he saw a shadow that entered through the window; he was convinced that it was the midwife (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 18, 48). A very ill woman was also convinced that when she was lying in bed, the same healer brought her poisoned food – she died crying that she was poisoned by the midwife. Although people from the same room did not see anyone, in both cases, the accusers were believed. A 14 year old girl who had a leg pain said that she saw the Romanian midwife known as Olá Ilona Bába eating up her leg as a dog or as a midwife (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 34, 206).

We must add that in people's imagination, witches were capable of flying (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 427, 587; *Ibidem*, III, no. 15, 106), swimming, getting in and out of a house through the chimney, through the keyhole or the fence hole (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 16, 107; Schram 1982, III, 197-198), to walk on water (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 130, 276), to determine men to fall in love with them (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 145, 334-338). In 1766, a 12 year old girl claimed that she saw Békési Erzsebet, Marosi Pál's wife, well-known witch doctor in Bihor county, sitting on the roof in a nest of sparrows (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 456, 697). In Târgu Mureş it was believed that witches hide themselves under rubbish and therefore it was not good to leave it in the house (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 423, 548). Some witnesses considered that met witches transformed in cat, wolf, dog, bird, insect, wind, always being aggressive and harming men and their goods.

The most terrifying scenes described by the witnesses of the accusation were those that told their nightmares. These were accepted in trials as proof. The nightmares linked witches' violence – identified as the accused person – and illness and death.

A man stated that he saw two witches at night who laid their hands on his wife and their newborn at one of the trials in 1584, in Cluj. When he woke up, they disappeared. One of the witches from his dream resembled the accused. The baby died a week after that dream and the bereaved father was convinced that was witches' doing (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 20, 63). At the same trial, a witness remembered that when she

was sleeping after giving birth, three women came and the accused was among them, they took the child and crippled it. The baby died shortly afterwards (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 20, 64).

Herczeg Gáspár's wife claimed that Sós János' wife appeared in a dream when her aunt's baby was ill. The witch wore a smelly and unkempt fur. She pulled the accuser's hair and when she was recognised, the witch leaned on a desk and merely broke it. Next night the nightmare continued and the witch wanted to pull the cover from her victim (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 17, 36).

The same claims are found decades later. In 1715, a witness to a trial of Nagy Mihályné's wife from Bihor county said that after giving birth, the witch tormented her night after night (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 232, 263). In 1723, in the same county, witnesses were talking about the night horrors while dreaming inflicted by the midwife Kata Fejer, Szegedi Istvánné's wife (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 321, 308-309, 311-312). A woman who suffered from a heart disease fainted in the church during a baptism and after that claimed that she saw the accused cutting her arms and legs with the hacksaw and hurting her bellybutton because she had initiated the trial. Another 35 year old woman stated that 19 years ago when she was pregnant, the accused with her mother and another woman came and shook her till she had a miscarriage and then they tortured her.

Aggressiveness was also present in cases when the witch had zoomorphic appearance.

The mother-in-law of a man claimed that two black dogs and killed her son-in-law. When she shouted at them, they answered: "keep quiet and stay there..." (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 30, 77).

A woman from Cluj stated that after she gave birth she saw the midwife coming to her at night in the shape of many cats, and after one of them sighed, they all began to scream. They took and harmed her and her child. She witnessed everything and could not say anything out of fear. In the next days the child was very ill (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 21, 68-69). A woman with a sick child from Bihor county declared that in 1724, the midwife, Zefer



István's wife, visited her as a pig and beat the child (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 328, 333).

Although in all the cases the accusers were not alone when having their nightmares, no one could testify that they saw the aggressor. There were no marks or wounds inflicted by the witches, but based on accusers' testimonies, people were burned alive. I found an explanation for such an approach in a trial from 1682 when Sárdi Katalin, Kőrösi János' wife, was condemned in Târgu Mureş based on a girl's testimony that the midwife ripped her hip off, cut her hair off in her dream, facts that were not real. The magistrates's rationale shows that not all the accusations may be proven, as the devilish methods are secret (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 67, 160-161). There were cases when the witch from the dream did not touch the victim, but she/he woke up in pain (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 323, 318).

Regardless of the shape the witch doctor took in the dream, he/she inflicted pain, suffering and/or death.

#### *The situation of Transylvanian people accused of witchcraft*

Analysing the relationship between fear of death and witchcraft in Transylvania requires lingering over the fight for survival of those who were accused of witchcraft.

The dungeon, the harsh tortures for recognizing the sins and revealing accomplices, the test of water and then the stake frightened those accused of witchcraft. Some women were afraid to get involved in birthing, although having knowledge of herbs and cure. That is the case of Forika István's widow from Stejeriş, Turda-Arieş county (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 178, 420). It was a reasonable fear when we think of the high mortality rate of women and children of the 1st half of the 18th century.

Documents uncover some reactions of the accused facing the magistrates who decided their fate. The desire to save their lives was evident. As it may be seen from a woman's declaration from Ineu domain, under trial in 1756-1757, she was cautioned by others accused of witchcraft and imprisoned to "not confess anything no matter how they torture me; as the wounds would heal, while burning on the stake

would be the end of me" (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 427, 597).

In 1639, Kállai Gyurkáné's wife from Târgu Mureş said: "I do not know anything else; if I knew, I would do something to be better for me as well" (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 24, 121). In 1723, during Katalin Fejer's trial, from Bihor county, she exclaimed desperately:

*"I would give my skirt to know who wanders with my face, as devil born of devil would not wander using my face"* (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 321, 309).

Witchcraft trials did not always end with the execution of the accused. If there were no evidence of witchcraft, they were granted life, but they were sanctioned because of witchcraft suspicion. That happened after being tortured.

Fear of death determined the accused of witchcraft to run away. Sometimes it was known where they had been, other times, it was written in the report that they "made spells in the village and in other places". That was the case of Fodor Sára, Demeter János's wife from Dileu Nou, Turda-Arieş county, in 1740 (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 128, 322).

Following those who ran away from the stake we note that they walked to a different territorial unit, from east to Cluj, Bihor and Maramureş. They stopped in other villages where, driven by poverty, started to heal again. For example, old Csutak Zsuzsa, who came from Trei Scaune to Andrid, to Satu Mare county (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 13, 98-99) or widow Kádár Kata of whom they said in 1732 that she was in Reghin, then in Bistriţa and then in Cluj (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 375, 471). Debri Anna and her daughter were caught in Crasna, in 1735, but they had lived in Meseşenii de Sus, Zalău and Jibou (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 33, 190). The story of a woman from Bihor county who was judged in 1756 is impressive. Békési Erzsebet, Marosi Pál's wife, mother of a girl, was caught in Bihor county who ran away from her village fearing the stake. She left Keresztes (nowadays Hungary, Hajdu-Bihar county), leaving her child, ran to Roşiori, but she was banished, then she lived in Niuved, Sântion, Sz. Imreh (nowadays Hungary, Hajdu-Bihar county) and Tamási (nowadays Hungary, Hajdu-Bihar

county), villages from Bihor county, but she healed in other places as well. She was well-known in the area, as people said “there is no greater witch in Bihor county” (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 438, 630-637).

Those who could not run away, experienced terrifying moments. Several women tried to commit suicide, fearing the execution. Dancs Mihály’s widow from Satu Mare county was about to be drowned by the villagers in 1702 and swallowed pins (Bessenyei 2000, II, no. 5, 50-63). The old midwife Farkas Borbala from Târgu Mureş said in 1752 that she “preferred to poison with arsenic, to set herself on fire, to hang herself or to throw into Mureş river than to be singed as a pig” (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 423, 547). She tried to hang herself when they came to arrest her (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 423, 553).

Women who had been already judged and tortured experienced crises and fear of new torture. For example, a noble woman from Crasna, judged in 1720-1721, fell when found out that she was suspected of witchcraft again, then she came to her senses for a moment only to have seizures again. Witnesses said:

*“It’s been three years since this illness of hers has shown, if someone who knows her does not grab her, she will go astray”* (Bessenyei 2000, III, no. 19, 123, 125).

These are just several cases that drew attention to villagers and were noted down in documents.

The healers with children had a harsher perspective on life after being accused of witchcraft. They had to deal with fear of death while taking care of their children. Békési Erzsebet, judged in 1756, left her daughter with

a family while running away from village to village. Another mother who was about to be judged, Nagy Erzsok, was heard while trying to encourage her children: “if they throw me into the water, you’ll live without me” (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 328, 331).

Fear of death marked the entire family of those who dealt with healing. The members of the family helped each other in healing people (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 378, 476; Klaniczay et al. 1989, I), they announces each other when someone became a suspect or when someone was missing (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 367, 448).

### **Brief conclusive notes**

Despite being lay trials against healers, witchcraft trials in Transylvania reveal a daily desperate struggle for life. Fear of death, infirmity as a social death were present everywhere. Fear was felt by the ill and their relatives, but also by the healers who could be accused anytime and sent to stake. That fear of death shook the balance of community and people did not trust each other and feared each other. They considered that their neighbour who helped to alleviate their sorrows could become a malefic witch willing to kill them. In their turn, witch doctors knew that a man’s death or infirmity could bring their death anytime. In 1724, when a woman brought milk to an old healer, the healer said: “do not bring me milk, because if anything happens, you’ll say immediately that I am a devil” (Kiss, Pál-Antal 2002, no. 328, 343). Fear of death generated fear of the other.

Impressive testimonies have remained from Transylvanian witchcraft trials when illness and death were lurking constantly.

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## CANNIBALISM IN EARLY MODERN TRANSYLVANIA

Andrea FEHÉR

Senior Lecturer, PhD.

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj Napoca

E-mail: feher\_andrea@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *In the present article, we would like to address the controversial topic of cannibalism. Despite the fact that Transylvanian sources rarely mention “the horror of cannibalism”, the annals, chronicles, legal documents, and diaries from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries occasionally report on different circumstances when people ate people. We analyse primarily the edited Hungarian and German sources, approaching the subject of cannibalism from several viewpoints. First, we examine the image of the savage man-eating Hungarians, namely the cultural construct of cannibalism. Then we present the phenomenon of Transylvanian anthropophagy brought about by famine and sieges, and finally, we briefly discuss medicinal cannibalism.*

**Keywords:** *Transylvania, cultural cannibalism, anthropophagy, survival cannibalism, famine, medicinal cannibalism, corpse pharmacology*

**Rezumat:** *În prezentul articol, am dorit să abordăm subiectul controversat al canibalismului. În ciuda faptului că sursele transilvănene menționează rar „orarea canibalismului”, analele, cronicile, documentele legale și jurnalele din secolele al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea menționează ocazional diferite circumstanțe în care oamenii au mâncat oameni. Analizăm în principal surse redactate în maghiară și germană, care abordează subiectul canibalismului din mai multe puncte de vedere. În primul rând, examinăm imaginea sălbaticilor maghiari mâncători de om, și anume construcția culturală a canibalismului. Apoi prezentăm fenomenul antropofagiei transilvănene provocat de foamete și asedii și, în cele din urmă, discutăm pe scurt canibalismul medicinal.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Transylvania, canibalism cultural, antropofagie, canibalism de supraviețuire, foamete, canibalism medicinal, farmacologia cadavru.*

### Introductory considerations

The Collins English Dictionary defines cannibalism as “the act of eating human flesh or the flesh of one’s own kind”, and then offers a second interpretation, according to which cannibalism means “savage and inhuman cruelty”<sup>1</sup>. Dictionaries generally suggest that cannibalism could refer to the “practice of eating other people” or could define nations “who were to be characterized by their adhesion to such a practice.” (Hulme, 1987, 15) Therefore, we are familiar with two understandings of the word, one concerning the actual consumption of human flesh, and another one referring to cultural constructions. This would probably explain why historian Peter Hulme suggests it to researchers to make a distinction between cannibalism, “a fantasy that the Other is going to eat us”, and anthropophagy, “the actual consumption of human flesh” (Obeyesekere, 2005, 14). Despite Hulme’s suggestion, the vast majority of scholarly papers ignore this distinction and use

the term “cannibalism” as a general description for both understandings of the word. In our paper, we will utilize both terms; and although we embrace Hulme’s observations regarding the cultural construct of the term, we will sometimes substitute the word “anthropophagy” with “survival cannibalism”, which in our opinion is a more powerful coinage.

In our paper, we wish to address three types of cannibalism: cultural cannibalism, starvation cannibalism or anthropophagy, and medicinal cannibalism. Our data is related to the Hungarian, Romanian, and occasionally Saxon inhabitants of Transylvania. In the first part of our paper, we would like to underline briefly the existence of cultural cannibalism related to the Hungarian nation in general. This part of our inquiry is based on western narratives: medieval chronicles, early modern essays and letters, and modern scientific literature. Then we will present the different types of survival cannibalism existing in Transylvania. Our local sources (chronicles, diaries, documents, and official decrees) attest that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, due to the military

<sup>1</sup><https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/cannibalism>

conflict between Zsigmond/Sigismund Báthory and Giorgio Basta, and then as a result of natural calamities, people occasionally were forced to consume human meat. Survival cannibalism is then again recounted in the second decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when famine and epidemics strike again. Data suggest that in both centuries, we encounter two types of anthropophagy: mortuary and murder cannibalism, namely the consumption of dead bodies and the act of killing in order to consume human flesh. Finally, in the last subsection of our article, we will make some considerations regarding the existence of medicinal cannibalism, or mortuary anthropophagy, the consumption of the bones, dried organs and sometimes flesh or blood of the dead in order to recover from some illnesses or just to gain some strength (Obeyesekere, 2005, 16). We will also briefly discuss corpse pharmacology as well, i.e. the consumption of bodily matters, such as urine, blood, or faeces.

In approaching the topic, we would like to underline from the beginning the importance of narrative analyses, especially for the first two types of cannibalism. In the case of cultural cannibalism, it is very important to determine the nature of the source, the contexts of its making, and the actual political message western authors wanted to transmit about Hungarians. Survivor cannibalism, as we shall see, is strongly related to starvation, and famine. Discourses about these human and natural catastrophes are in many cases well-elaborated local narratives, literary constructions meant to stress the consequences of poor agricultural crop, climatic calamities, or epidemics. Consequently, some of the narratives may look identical through the centuries, having been bequeathed from generation to generation, thus there is no wonder that many regarded cannibalism as a literary topos rather than a fact (Jordan, 1996, 149).

### Cultural cannibalism

Many anthropologists, archaeologists and historians deny the existence of actual human flesh consumption, and rather prefer to explore the cultural properties of the word, suggesting that the term is used mostly for pejorative purposes, and is “part of a narrative that demonizes outsiders.” (McGowan, 1994, 416; Gráda, 2015, 15) In his ground-breaking

book *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (1979) William Arens suggests that cannibalism is in fact nothing else than a myth constructed about others that cultures have used to justify hatred and aggression. Since Arens, most researches deny the reality of cannibalism as a practice, and prefer to define it as a cultural and symbolic construction (Kilgour, 2001, vii). Cannibalism was an appropriate activity to attribute to those who were living far away from the “civilized” world, but it could refer to marginalized people as well, who lived outside the accepted social conventions (McGowan, 1994, 426).

But cannibalism or anthropophagy was not just an exotic phenomenon related to geographical discoveries and especially to the discovery of the New World. Concerns and accusations about the eating of human flesh and drinking the blood of the deceased were widespread in Europe too. Moreover, cannibals were first of all a European phenomenon, and only with the voyages of discovery did the “exotic” cannibal emerge (Obeyesekere, 2005, 9). From the first historical writings, we are familiar with tribes that live in Europe and practice unheard-of and uncivilized rituals, such as those described by Herodotus or Strabo. However, we have to underline that neither Herodotus, who is not necessarily condemning the Scythians for the ritual consumption of human flesh, considering this rather a matter of custom and law<sup>2</sup>, nor Strabo believed all he had heard about the endo-cannibalism practiced by some incestuous Irish tribes<sup>3</sup>. But they do contribute to the creation of the “par excellence barbarians” (Sager, 2002, 28), introducing the notion of the savage cannibal, which could be later successfully applied to all people who could not meet the expectations of western civilization.

European cannibalism did not stop with Strabo or Herodotus, or at the margins of the European map. We can still encounter continental cases of anthropophagy in the heart of Europe long after the appearance of

<sup>2</sup> *The Histories of Herodotus*. Transl. by George Rawlinson. Roman Road Media (2013): <https://files.romanroadsstatic.com/materials/herodotus.pdf> (Last accessed on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*. Published in Vol. II of the Loeb Classical Library edition (1923): [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/4E\\*.html#ref156](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/4E*.html#ref156) (Last accessed on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020).

Columbus's Caribbean man-eater. Western Europe was marked for centuries by religious savagery (coinage used by Montaigne), culminating in the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres, when Catholics consumed the hearts and livers of murdered Protestants, and sold their fat in stores (Zemon Davis, 2012, 20; Obeyesekere, 2005, 17). But curiously, this particular incident did not transform the French into an anthropophagous people. Nor did the systematic consumption of medicine made from parts of the human body. For more than two centuries, Europeans had consumed human flesh and drank blood, pulverised human bones, and yet none of the western civilized nations were defined as being anthropophagous. It seems that the actual consumption of human meat was not enough to define people as cannibals.

### **The hungry Hungarians. Cannibalistic terrorism and vampirism**

On her journey to Constantinople, leaving behind Vienna, in 1717, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote to her sister:

*I have writ' a letter to my Lady – [...] She is angry that I won't lie like other travellers. I verily believe she expects I should tell her of the anthropophagy, and men whose heads grow below their shoulders.* (Montagu, 2007, 18)

The quote suggests that once crossed the Viennese border to the east, the traveller enters into the uncivilized part of the continent, populated with war dancers and savages, fictional fantasy monsters, who, as suggested by the letter, were expected parts of the landscape. The assumption of Montagu's friend was not totally unfounded, since Hungary and Transylvania were always perceived as a land of fairies.

In the following, we will present a few examples of how ancient literary constructions outlived in medieval chronicles, and we will briefly reflect on some mediated anthropophagy and vampirism cases from Transylvania, which contributed to the cannibalistic image of Hungarians.

The Hungarian tribes appear in medieval chronicles as brutal and of extreme savagery, a people who ate raw meat, drank blood, and almost always consumed the heart of their enemies to gain strength. According to

Remigus "the Hungarians received their name from the famine they suffered", and therefore this hunger became part of their identity. Thus, the Germans associate the term *Hungarian* with *die Hungrigen*, "the hungry ones" (Sager, 2002, 27). They were presumably descendants of the Scythian tribes, and "in the mythology of anthropophagy", as shown before, "Scythians are legendary choices" (Appelbaum, 2019, 159). At the time they appeared in European history, they were unknown, unheard of, therefore outside of the divine order of the world, and due to their savagery caused great panic in the civilized Christian part of the continent, which later generated among these people a fearful obsession with them (Sager, 2002, 27). The situation changed, however, in a few centuries, due to the Ottoman invasion, and the once fearful vanguard parties became the pillars of Christianity (Tóth, 2003, 14–17; Revel, 1998, 80). But their "eastern charm" did not disappear, since stories about their cannibalistic acts periodically invaded the literary market. In the following, we would like to consider such a case, which electrified once again the western imagination. We are referring to the most mediatized "devilishly constructed theatrical performance", that of "cannibalistic terrorism", the "celebrated and elaborated awful example" of György Dózsa/Gheorghe Doja's execution from 1514 (Birnbaum, 1993, 104; Sugg, 2016, 196; Freedman, 2017, 267). In the west, there had been no punishment similar to Dózsa's, so there is no surprise that the story was retold in several forms and many of the accounts were accompanied by illustrations in order to achieve more effect (Birnbaum, 1993, 96). The execution of the Szekler leader of the peasant uprising proceeded as follows: Dózsa was seated naked on a red-hot iron throne, and then enthroned with a burning crown. His comrades were forced to bite from his roasted flesh and then, after he was decapitated, they had to drink his blood. Those who refused to obey were killed, and those who ate spared. Many accounts mention that during the execution, music was played and different songs were sung, there is, however, no consensus regarding the genre of the songs. Some even suggest that there was some dancing too, an element which of course would give a macabre complexion to the events (Birnbaum, 1993, 95).

The cruelty of this execution caused a great stir in Europe, as proven by the numerous publications, among which many portrayed Dózsa as the supreme martyr (Birnbaum, 1993). However, we wish to mention only one near-contemporary account, namely Montaigne's version of the execution, which is included in his essay on cruelty. According to the French author, the closest friends of Dózsa were forced to:

*drink his blood, and caused twenty of his most favoured captains to feed upon him, tearing his flesh in pieces with their teeth, and swallowing the morsels. The remainder of his body and his bowels, so soon as he was dead, were boiled, and others of his followers compelled to eat them.*<sup>4</sup>

According to contemporary local chronicles, Dózsa's remains were decapitated and quartered, and the pieces were sent on display to Buda, Pest, Belgrade, and Oradea (Freedman, 2017, 267). Therefore, Montaigne added a gruesome end to an already staggering story to underline the cruel nature of the execution, and one cannot help to think about the illustrations of Theodore de Bry, which depict Native Americans dissecting human corpses and preparing to boil them. We have to stress, however, that this particular narrative from Montaigne's essay is not mentioned in the chapter dealing with cannibalism, suggesting that the author himself believed this to be a single act of cruelty. In Montaigne's conception, cannibalism was already an exotic phenomenon, attached to the New World, and if there were any European acts of cannibalism, those were medicinal ones, as we shall discuss in the last subsection.

Dózsa's execution was sadistic, however, not singular in Hungarian history, since similar executions took place half a century earlier when Pál Kinizsi/Paul Chinezul (general of the famous Black Army of Matthias Corvinus) executed traitors by putting them to the stake and then forcing soldiers to eat the flesh of the betrayers, asking them "how does traitor flesh taste?" (Barta, Fekete,

1973, 215) Curiously, this case did not have the same publicity, and we believe that this could be explained by the still very positive image of the defendants of the eastern border of Europe, who sacrificed themselves to save the Christian world from the Muslims.

The stories about man-eating Hungarians did not end in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British and Scottish press related about the notorious process intended against a group of 132 Gipsies who were incriminated for systematic consumption of human flesh (Gammon, 2019, 151). In a 19<sup>th</sup>-century book signed by baron de Walckenaer, *Lettres sur les contes de fees* (1828), the image of the man-eating Hungarians was enriched with a new interpretation, which then was taken over by the geographer and historian Louis Dussieux in 1839 (Tóth, 2003, 6). According to these authors, there must be an etymological explanation for the similarities between the two words: "Ogre" and "Hongre, Hongrois" (French for Hungarian), since both terms are associated with savagery and anthropophagy (Tóth, 2003, 7). The Hungarian Historical Society tried to gather evidence to prove that the man-eating myth is not nation-specific, and especially not Hungarian, but rather a common description of the enemy, and applied mostly to nations living on the margins. Their arguments, however, were not taken into account (MOE IV, 1940, 195).

The image of the savage man-eaters was then completed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with blood-drinking. There is an actual vampire craze in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the Habsburg Monarchy, due to some disturbing news about odd rituals regarding some "blood-sucker living dead". The vampire craze did not leave the Viennese Court untouched, and since these stories compromised the image of the Monarchy (Miskolczy, 2015, 77), Maria Theresa, advised by her confident physician Gerard Van Swieten, started an investigation<sup>5</sup>, which culminated in the exhaustive work of Georg Tallar<sup>6</sup> (Magyar, 1999, 1253). The conclusion

<sup>4</sup> *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*. Transl. by Charles Cotton, ed. by William Carew Hazlitt (1877). Chapter 27. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm> (Last accessed on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Van Swieten also wrote an exhaustive paper on the topic: Gerard van Swieten: *Vampyrismus*. In Andreas Ulrich Mayer: *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenter, nebst einem Anhang vom Vampyrismus*. Augsburg (1768).

<sup>6</sup> Georg Tallar: *Visum repertum anatomico-chirurgicum oder gründlicher Bericht von den sogenannten Blutsäugern, Vampier, oder in der*



of these investigations is quite simple: German and Hungarian (Catholic and Protestant) inhabitants were “immune” in every aspect to vampires because the phenomenon of the blood-sucking dead was strongly related to the superstitious Greek Orthodox inhabitants of the Monarchy, namely Slavs, and Romanians (Miskolczy, 2015, 74-75; Magyar, 1999, 1254). As we can see, within a multicultural Monarchy there was also a sort of hierarchy, and nations such as the Slavs or Romanians were considered inner savages. The scientific inquest of Tallar confirmed the already existing negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, the vampire-phenomenon was not just a simple case of superstition but had several healthcare-related consequences, since many communities explained epidemics with vampirism (Magyar, 1999, 1247). Tallar had easily found the connection between the Orthodox dietary habits and diseases, and concluded that the victims of vampires were in fact starving believers. According to the “simple-minded folk”, the disease came from the blood-suckers, and to Tallar’s surprise, in this misconception, the folk was guided by their religious leaders. Therefore, once again the savagery and obscure nature of the Orthodox population was proved. It seems that the German and Hungarian physicians (Sámuel Köleséri also wrote about the vampire-cases (Magyar, 2003, 67), forgot about some earlier vampires, when a Hungarian Prince Mihály Apaffi ordered the exhumation of a general named Cabrera, in the Saxon town of Sibiu, in order to stop the unnatural death among the population. After the head of Cabrera was cut off, the epidemic stopped (Magyar, 2003, 67). Not to mention that in 1742 the Hungarian authorities from Dej (Cluj County) ordered the exhumation of suspected vampires and then ordered their burning in order to calm the locals (MOE IV, 86–87). Even if these locals were Romanians, the “sane-minded” Hungarian authorities shared their fears, otherwise we could not explain the events.

The two works, those of van Swieten and Tallar, had the purpose to save the reputation of the Monarchy and to bring into

light the urgent need for reforms and education especially among the ignorant peasantry, and to bring religious barbarity into discussion once more. Their views were then echoed in travel-writings since the majority of the sources seem to support the “official” point of view regarding the ignorance of the Transylvanian Orthodox peasantry (Grancea, 2013, 229–230; 235–236).

Despite the internal success of the aforementioned publications, Europeans were resistant to the arguments of Tallar or van Swieten, and until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, associated vampirism with Hungarians, and more specifically Transylvanians (Dömötör, 1975, 677), and did not linger too much on the nationality of the vampire-believers. The ones to blame for this misconception are a Benedictine monk, and an Irish author. In 1746, sometime during Tallar’s investigation, Augustin Calmet wrote a book on Hungarian vampires<sup>7</sup> which became a best-seller despite the fact that it described a trial from Belgrade, and that in the first edition of the work no Hungarians appear in it (Dömötör, 1975, 677; Magyar, 1999, 1253). Inspired by Calmet, Voltaire also wrote in an ironic note, about Hungarian and Polish vampires. Moreover, as a consequence of Calmet’s convincing argumentation, English dictionaries define the term “vampire” as originating from Hungarian or eventually Turkish (Dömötör, 1975, 676). Therefore, the diligence of the German physicians to associate vampirism with Romanians and Slavs was futile. Bram Stoker, on the other hand, managed to combine in his gothic novel *Dracula* the image of the Wallachian Voivod, Vlad the Impaler with vampires, placing the first part of his fiction in Transylvania. The consequences of his literary endeavour are well-known.

We can briefly conclude that Hungarians enter medieval literature through German chronicles, where they are portrayed as barbarians with *hunger*, without the object of their hunger being described. Then in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarians became associated not only with human flesh consumption but also with vampirism. In the German case, the savagery described could be interpreted as a

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*wallachischen Sprache Moroi, in der Wallachei, Siebenbürgen und Banat, welche eine eigends dahin abgeordnete Untersuchungskommission der löbl. K. K. Administration in Jahre 1756 erstattet hat.* Wien und Leipzig (1784).

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<sup>7</sup> Dom. Calmet: *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de Silésie.* (1746).

representation of the barbarian pagan tribes, therefore as part of the Christian-Pagan paradigm. The French and English etymological associations (ogre, vampire) reflect in fact the attitudes of western civilization toward Eastern Europe. Their purpose was to offer evidence about the inferiority of the people living on the margins of Europe. But this margin has its own margins as shown by the efforts of the Viennese Court to counter accusations of vampirism. Therefore, we consider that many cannibalism-related stories are first of all a good evidence “for the relation between accuser and accused.” (McGovan, 1994, 415) The impressions of open-minded travellers, such as Lady Mary Montague, suggest that some of the elite realized that the majority of the news from the eastern part of Europe are nothing more than the act of imagination:

*It is a particular pleasure to me here to read the voyages [...], which are generally so far removed from truth and so full of absurdities I am very well diverted with them.* (Montagu, 2007, 80)

### **Survival and murder cannibalism: “hunger has no conscience”**

For most of the researchers, as mentioned before, cannibalism is bound up with discourses of colonial oppression, or of opposition between civilization and savagery, but this does not exclude the existence of actual anthropophagy. Data suggests that in some desperate cases people had to overcome their horror in order to survive (Sumner, 2007, 336). The main question, however, is how widespread human meat consumption was during famines (Gráda, 2009, 63). No one denies the existence of starvation cannibalism, not even Arens, who considered starvation cannibalism “always regrettable” and “not customary”, since there is no culture where this was considered normal (Arens, 1979, 9; McGovan, 1994, 414–415). In his interpretation, anthropophagy is not a constant universal pattern, but it is rather determined by some socio-historical circumstances. Nevertheless, these circumstances were not that numerous as historical sources suggest. Anthropophagy did occur, especially during sieges, epidemics, and other natural calamities, but not as often as indicated.

In approaching this topic we will rely on the methodology proposed by economic historian Cormac Ó Gráda, examining the two forms of survival cannibalism: starvation cannibalism (when people consume the corpses of the dead) and murder cannibalism (when people murder someone and then consume the meat of their victim) (Gráda, 2015, 14). After explaining why and how starvation cannibalism occurred, we will also address the question of who was eaten, reflecting on the nature of cannibalism, namely if it was the case of endo-, exo- or auto-cannibalism (Arens, 1979, 17–18).

We will begin our survey by presenting how people get from starvation to anthropophagy. Anthropologist Robert Dirk identified three behavioural phases in starvation. During the first one, group members are generous, trying to help one another and there is a general mobilization in order to solve the problem. Depending on the aggravated circumstances, the community slowly begins to conserve its energies and supplies, smaller groups of interest (mostly gathered around families) are created, and relations outside this inner circle are ceased, acts of previously mentioned altruism are now becoming rare, people start to behave aggressively and violence starts to increase. In the last phase, we are facing the complete collapse of the social order; family ties loosen as well, people maintain no physical activity, and this is the stage when Dirk believes people become capable of cannibalism (Schutt, 2018, 144).

In the first phase of a famine, among the most popular steps taken by the poor was to seek relief and shelter in towns, since these conglomerates were better prepared against hunger (Langan-Egan, 1999, 124). In the beginning, town authorities and especially charitable institutions took care of them, but after the number of the needy started to grow, some restrictive measures were taken. Strangers were not accepted anymore, and the communities tried to support first of all their own poor.

*The needy, miserable poor were forced to beg for food from door to door. ... Orphaned and neglected children, whose parents and relatives were consumed partly by the cruelty of the soldiers and partly by famine or the ensuing epidemic,*

*filled the squares and streets everywhere with their pathetic wailing day and night. The unfortunates perished en masse from the cruel winter cold, many died in the open air or from hunger in their miserable huts. Many who had not yet been able to get rid of life, with limbs frozen from the terrible cold, trembling half-dead between life and death, trembled on the roads and squares. Transylvania has never seen such a terrible blow, nor has it heard of one. We witnessed the consumption of dogs and cats. One was happy to be well-fed with the corpses of a dead horse or any kind of cattle. ... The terrible expenses of the last four years were naturally followed by a cruel epidemic.* (Szamosközy, 1977, 328)

The Histories of Szamosközy describe disastrous scenes with strangers dying on the streets, rotting corpses eaten by vagrant animals, and occasionally by humans. Moreover, our sources suggest that some took profit from the dead, and sold human flesh on the market, which according to the secondary literature occurred quite often during a famine. We have one case from 1603 regarding the commercialization of human flesh during the aforementioned great famine of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which is mentioned in several chronicles. In Aiud (Alba County) local authorities reported the presence of human meat on markets (EOE V, 1879, 56; MOE II, 1929, 304). According to Somogyi:

*a poor peasant from the town of Aiud secretly killed his wife, and served her to their children, and sold the rest of the meat on the market. When the rumour finally reached the authorities, he was first tortured, and then, after he confessed his sin, killed in a shameful way.* (Somogyi, 2013, 129–130).

Data regarding the commercialization of human flesh is often encountered in anthropological studies, where it is usually described as a common practice, rather than a misfortune (Sumner, 2007, 300). Supporters of the idea of cultural cannibalism usually deny the existence of these practices described by anthropologists, and they definitely oppose to those sources which describe the commercialization of human flesh. They consider these accounts simple rhetorical constructions. Even if we are also inclined to consider these narratives with a certain amount

of scepticism, since chroniclers tended to deliberately exacerbate the news, the fact that the case from Aiud is included in a legal compendium and recorded in several chronicles supports the hypothesis of a real event. The way this incident is recorded, and the consequences of the trial suggest that the commercialization of human flesh in Aiud was a singular occurrence in Transylvanian history.

As previously shown, many of the poor sought help in towns, but most of the people tried to survive famine and pandemics in their own homes. Starving people searched for solutions first in nature, as shown by this fragment from 1718, Ciuc County:

*From 1683 onwards, there was such unheard-of hunger in our country that some of the stronger people forced by hunger preyed on the grain and food of their owners; linden, beech, and oak, especially the nuts of these latter were mixed with roots, reed, and straw, and were mashed and baked in the form of a cake or bread, and people forced themselves to eat this.* (Benkő, 1853, 83)

They lived on wild herbs, nuts, and berries, just as people do anywhere else during a famine. Then they started to consume animals, almost everything from farm animals to pets (Langan-Egan, 1999, 126, 131). According to Simon Czeuck, in 1603 children from Cluj “ate cats and dogs [...] slaughtered and strangled these, in order to keep themselves alive” (Czauck, 1860, 122), a novelty which is included in other contemporary chronicles as well (Somogyi, 2013, 129; Kraus, 1839, 191–192). The consumption of house animals, such as cats and dogs, even mice, is completed then by the consumption of indispensable farm animals:

*In 1717, there was a terrible famine in the county, which not only led the stronger to take what they could from the weaker, but also made people feed not only on frost root, buds but also on horse and human flesh.* (Háromszék, 1899, 29)

Horse and ass meat consumption already indicates despair, and usually this is where human corpses are mentioned in the enumeration:

*The bodies of the dead horses and dogs were eaten, and even the dried meat of the children who died of starvation in the village of Ojdula (Covasna County) was eaten by some, so there was so much hunger that in some villages just as many people died of starvation as many of the plague.* (Benkő, 1853, 84)

At first, there were only cases of starvation cannibalism, where people usually consumed corpses. From a 1609 charter we found out that in Jeledinți (Hunedoara County)

*due to the unprecedented lack of grain and famine that befell Transylvania due to the five-year (!) wars [...], and as a result of which people ate the flesh of the dead ...*(EKJ, 2016, 221: 73)

Starvation cannibalism was then followed by murder cannibalism. Sources suggest that during a famine, just as throughout epidemics, the elderly and the very young were most at risk (Walter, 1989, 121). We usually read about young children eaten by their mothers, a topos found in every culture which at some point in its history dealt with famine. Most of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvanian descriptions mention it:

*At the same time, in the village of Reiz, near Sibiu (Sibiu County), a mother devoured her child who had died of starvation or by his mother's hand. I have no intention, nor could I do it, to search every corner of the country, to explore every hidden place, to reveal the secrets of every person's conscience.* (Szamosközy, 1977, 329)

A similar situation is described in a charter:

*After four years in which Transylvania was hit by a shortage of grain and war, [...] mothers killed their children in Mălăiești (Hunedoara County) and elsewhere, driven by hunger.* (EKJ, 2016, 108: 44)

Works regarding famine often discuss child abandonment and infanticide (Gráda, 2009, 61), the first more frequently than the other, although in some cases there is even an anthropological explanation, according to which mothers eat their babies “in order to get back the strength which they had lost in

bearing them.” (Sumner, 2007, 331) This reasoning is, however, too exotic to be applied. We rather consider, as we shall elucidate at the end of the chapter, that in these cases we are dealing with a rhetorical construction, a well-elaborated narrative, originated from Biblical texts, and used commonly to describe the desperation caused by famine. What is interesting, however, is the inversion of the “child-eating mother” relation. Although our next quotation describes an instance of starving cannibalism, the passage is an interesting example of this rhetorical inversion. In the diary of László Vass it stands as follows:

*This last year, 1719, was so difficult until the harvest season came, because of the terribly lean year before it, that Transylvania had not faced such hunger for a century, so that many starved to death, not being able to get any grain at all, which is why it was rumoured that in Szeklerland, due to famine, children were forced to fry and eat their dead relatives. Terrible news!* (Vass, 1896, 502–503)

From this, it appears that the author was familiar with the famine from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, possibly with its description as well, and he chose to present contemporary events in the same manner. However, his imagination completed this picture, mentioning even the way the corpses were consumed. But Vass could not accept the image of adults eating their children; therefore he altered the well-known Biblical topos of the child-eating mothers. We have to underline that Vass was probably inspired by German chroniclers as well, since a similar inversion is to be found in Simon Czauck's narrative on the famine from 1603, when “*children eat their dead parents*” (Czauck, 1860, 122) and in Georg Kraus's chronicle as well, where “*children ate their parents and parents ate their children.*” What is however extremely important is that Kraus made a connection between the famine from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the one mentioned in the Bible: “*there was a hunger similar to that from Jerusalem*”, deliberately using a biblical reference in order to construct his narrative (Kraus, 1839, 191–192). And this easily supports our thesis regarding the existence of literary topoi in famine descriptions. But under these circumstances, it is very difficult to select the actual accounts of anthropophagy from the

foreign literary construction meant to stress the consequences of the great famine. We will, however, attempt to disclose these texts in order to analyse the validity of the presented information.

In the following we will analyse one of the most detailed descriptions on Transylvanian survival cannibalism, recorded in the *Histories* of Szamosközy:

*Around the time when Moses' armies roamed the country, a terrible thing happened that the world may have never heard of. In the village of Rășinari (Sibiu County) on the border of Sibiu, which the Saxons call Staedterdorf, five miles from the city, a Wallachian woman, at short intervals, (took) six children in a row, including a girl related to her, stole them in a disgraceful way, then killed them, and chased away her hunger— nothing could be more terrible – with their meat. As soon as the crime was discovered, it was reported to the magistrates of Sibiu, who arrested her, took her to the city and imprisoned her. It didn't take much time for the woman to confess her deed, and to tell every detail of her sinful assassinations. All this was reported to the council, where the case was investigated and a verdict was handed down. This dreadful sin could be explained only in one way: she was driven by hunger. She herself recognized her sin, confessed her guilt, yet she did not consider herself guilty, but referred to her despair and thought that she deserved mercy. However, the awfulness of her deed stamped out all pity from the judges. Eyewitnesses to the trial said that because of the consumption of human flesh, the careless, frightening-looking woman's whole body had an unbearable odour which could be smelled from afar. So the judges sentenced her to death and gave her to the executioner, who cut her into four, and impaled the pieces of her body on the four corners of Sibiu, outside the city walls. This was halfway through the end of May. (Szamosközy, 1977, 329)*

Unlike the previously analysed quotations, Szamosközy seems to relate here an actual trial, about an actual murderess. A short account of the tragic event is also given by Kraus, who did not know the details but mentioned a female near Sibiu who ate her children (Kraus, 1926, 79-80). Szamosközy's description is in a certain aspect very similar to

the case mentioned by Somogyi. We consider that these cases, the anthropophagy from Aiud and the one committed by the woman from Rășinari, are probably among the few “real” ones. There are too many references to actual facts, in the Rășinari case, for example, we know about the number of murdered children, among which a relative of the accused, about the attitude of the judges, the thoughts of the murderess, and the reference to those who attended the trial, and felt the unbearable smell. It is interesting, however, that the woman did not deny her acts of violence, and that she was convinced that her deeds could be forgiven given the circumstances. The attitude of the authorities, probably shocked not only by the act of anthropophagy but by the six murders, is a firm one. This could explain the execution method as well, since female capital punishment was usually resumed to decapitation, drowning and burning, or live burial in the case of infanticide (Fehér, 2015, 731–736). But in the Rășinari case, the execution is similar to that applied to male traitors and murderers (Dülmen, 1990, 114–119). There are therefore no extenuative circumstances. Unfortunately, Somogyi did not state the execution method used in the case from Aiud, only that “he was executed in a shameful way”, thus we cannot compare the two outcomes.

We already assumed our position regarding the validity of the sources, but in the following, we would like to strengthen our argumentation through some considerations regarding the rhetorical solutions used in the quotations from this subsection. Many researchers believe that references to cannibalism during famine are nothing more than a cliché, because „to make a famine real, one had to include cannibalism in the story.” (Jordan, 1996, 149) Sometimes this was used as a powerful metaphor for horror and disaster (Gráda, 2009, 64). Transylvanian authors, especially the Protestant ones, look for rhetorical guidance to the Bible, as shown previously in the case of Kraus, who mentions that the famine occurred during the siege of Jerusalem. The authors also look for evidence, and try to explain the historical events in the frame of the great Divine plan, just as Szamosközy did after he finished the presentation of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century famine and murder cannibalism:

*It would not be easy to say how many disasters the whole country has been hit by during this three years of war, famine and epidemic, these three scavengers, which the Tatar rage hailed on this world for the destruction of the human race.* (Szamosközy, 1977, 330)

The common rhetorical model is undeniable since the majority of descriptions bare similarities. In the narrative construction regarding famine, there are some recurring motifs such as the consumption of pets (dogs, cats), and parental murder (Jordan, 1996, 149). Among parents, especially mothers are those who feed upon their sons (Jordan, 1996, 148). Hungarians always relate about mothers who ate their children and vice versa, Germans write about parents in general. There are no references to fathers who ate their children, and this might confirm the theory of an existing rhetorical scheme. On the other hand, the reason these descriptions are very alike could be explained by the fact that usually the same things happened during a famine. Some people migrated to towns, people ate everything they found in nature, from herbs to bark, and when all these supplies ended, they started to consume their animals. In desperate cases, when nature could not provide, some might have been forced to consume corpses, or to kill in order to eat. Most of the presented cases describe endo-cannibalism, the consumed corpses having belonged to the community, in most of the cases they were close relatives, children, and parents. Only the Rășinari case suggests exo-cannibalism since the woman killed stranger children as well. We even have a case of auto-cannibalism, recorded also in the chronicles of Georg Kraus: “A woman from Gherla (Cluj County) driven by hunger has her own flesh from her arm nibbled.” (Kraus, 1926, 79–80). What is most curious, however, is that all the cannibalism-related quotations mentioned in this subsection are concerning Hungarians (more precisely Szeklers) and Romanian inhabitants of Transylvania. Saxons are never involved directly in starvation- or famine-related stories, despite the fact that Saxon chroniclers contribute to the discourse of cannibalism, since many of our 17<sup>th</sup>-century data came from them. The majority of 17<sup>th</sup>-century cases describe cannibalism among Romanians, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century mentions are addressing the

epidemics from Covasna and Ciuc Counties, namely Szekler communities who were living at the margins of the principality. We do not want to deny the existence of anthropophagy among Szeklers or Romanians, which could be explained in several ways, from the geographical determinism on one hand, and poverty on another. Saxon communities were probably more protected against famine, since wealth offers protection against starvation, even if not against disease. In our opinion, despite the existence of the proven cases, the majority of anthropophagy cases could be easily explained in the context of cultural cannibalism as well. The violence of the Szeklers, defendants of the Carpathian borders, who were always considered among the most fearful inhabitants of the principality, and the ignorance of the Romanian peasantry made these groups proper to associate them with cannibalism. We believe that the majority of the recorded cases suggest rather a literary topos than real anthropophagy. This does not mean, of course, that we deny the existence of survival cannibalism, we wish only to draw attention to the existence of negative stereotypes and cultural savagery in these narratives.

### **Medicinal cannibalism and corpse pharmacology**

One research topic that has recently become fashionable within the field of cannibalism studies is medicinal cannibalism, namely the medical circulation and consumption of the human body and bodily matters. Some refer to it as mortuary anthropophagy, some as corpse pharmacology. We would like to contribute to this topic only briefly, mostly in order to draw attention to this challenging way of interpretation. Unlike the forms of cannibalism discussed in the previous subsections, medicinal cannibalism, and corpse medicine is not a question of hunger but of health (Sugg, 2016, 178, 248).

Corpse pharmacology is an integrated part of medicinal cannibalism, with the difference that these medicines are taken from the living body (Noble, 2011, 2; Sugg, 2016, 164). Corpse pharmacology basically means the consumption of all kinds of bodily matters, from urine and blood to faeces or fat. Among these bodily matters, urine therapy seemed to be preferred by our ancestors, and as suggested by the medical literature, this had to be

performed as an external or internal cure. Works such as *Pharmacopoeia nove in qua repostia sunt strepora et urinae* (Dávid Ruland and István Bethlen, 1644) mediated the consumption of these fluids throughout the century, just as the most well-known Transylvanian medical treatise, the *Pax Corporis*<sup>8</sup>. Urine, as well as blood, was highly valued and was considered a precious balsam of life, a universal panacea available for everybody (Noble, 2011, 3; Sugg, 2016, 265). We have to keep in mind that urine and excrement-based treatments were quite popular during the early modern ages, since people were more tolerant of filth and smells, and therefore they were not averse to the opportunities afforded by nature. Urine was used externally (in form of compresses, and mostly in the treatment of wounds) (Pápai-Páriz, 1747, 16, 397), and internally as a drinking-cure, which could mean short- and long-term treatments. For example, if a woman was facing difficulties during childbirth, doctors believed that her pain could be eased with her husband's urine (MOE IV, 1940, 291). This was probably used only occasionally and only once during labour. But the victims of witchcraft utilize urine as a long-term medicine, drinking herbal plants boiled in their own urine in order to cure themselves (MOE II, 1929, 266). Urine was considered to act as a shield against the plague as well, therefore some 17<sup>th</sup>-century physicians recommended its regular use during epidemics (MOE IV, 1940, 363). In the aforementioned treatments, human urine was used. But pharmaceutical treatises include a great number of remedies based on animal excrements. Manure was mostly used as an internal cure. Excrements were usually dissolved in wine and milk, and even if our ancestors had a higher stink threshold than us, some might have been disgusted, as mentioned in Pápai-Páriz's book when he describes an ass-faeces treatment against bleeding: "it is not pretty, but is certainly effective." (Pápai-Páriz, 1747, 273)

Medicinal cannibalism, or the consumption of pulverized human bones or organs to cure some maladies, could be

interpreted as a form of ritual cannibalism (Schutt, 2018, 209). Mummy was considered to be among the most powerful bone-powders, and pulverized mummy was a constantly present pharmaceutical product (Noble, 2011, 19–20). Avicenna described mummy as a bituminous material, which in Arabic is called "mumia". The Arabic understanding of the term did not refer primarily to mummified human bodies; however, the discovery of the mistranslation could not stop the European success story of the embalmed bodies (Schutt, 2018, 216; Noble, 2011, 19–20). Mummy powder is also to be found in the princely pharmacy from Alba Iulia, and not just any kind of mummy, but an "overseas" one (Kovács, 2018, 122). We do not know if it was an authentic Egyptian mummy or only one made from people who drowned in the North African desert since these were among the most popular mummies (Schutt, 2018, 215). *Pax Corporis* mentions mummy-powder as well, recommending its use in the treatment of severe diarrhoea and dysentery (Pápai-Páriz, 1747, 285), but it is obvious that only a few could cure themselves with this rare and presumably expensive medicine. Those who could not afford a mummy could easily replace it with skulls, preferably from hanged people, since sudden suffocation concentrated the spirits; and the spirit of the dead was believed to remain in the skull for at least seven years, therefore skull-powder was considered extremely strong (Sugg, 2016, 281; Noble, 2011, 20).

Data regarding medicinal cannibalism can be found in court records as well. For centuries, the most desired "ingredients" came from executions. It is well known that during middle ages and even in early modern times people believed that the executioner and the condemned person possessed magical healing powers. Several data suggest that crowds were present at executions not only driven by curiosity but out of despair, since the body parts and especially the blood (usually soaked with a kerchief, or drunk hot at the scaffold) of the executed murderers held magical healing powers (Noble, 2011, 31; Sugg, 2016, 164; Dülmen, 1990, 142). The hang-rope also had magical properties. In a trial from Cluj in 1670, a woman, who believed that she was imprecated by a witch, bought hang-rope twice in order to cure her injured waist (KBP, 2014, 304–305). In some early modern

<sup>8</sup> Ferencz, Pápai Páriz, *Pax Corporis*. Azaz az emberi test nyavalyáinak okairól, fészkeiről, s azoknak orvoslásának módgyáról való tracta. Kolozsvár (1747)

Transylvanian witch trials, court records suggest that accused women performed strange cannibalistic acts in order to gain power. In 1680, a female was accused of child-murder and then witchcraft, because the authorities found the body of a mutilated child, whose heart and liver were cut out (KBP, 2014, 289–290). In the interpretation of the judges, such an act of cruelty could be committed only by the instrument of the devil, and only for some unnatural reasons. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century trials, two of the executed witches possessed cannibalism-related objects, one had jars made of bones and the other possessed a human embryo fossil (Fehér, 2019, 135).

We cannot finish this subsection without referring back to the previously mentioned vampire craze of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a classical form of medicinal cannibalism. In his investigation, Georg Tallar noted that people were convinced that the only salvation from a terrible death, when attacked by a vampire, is to dig out the body and to cut the head of the vampire, and then to coat oneself with the bodily liquids (in contemporary conception the blood of the vampire), and then to hope for recovery. The German surgeon concluded that this treatment was the number one reason people died (Mézes, 2014, 133-134). But no matter how insistent the authorities were, peasants continued to dig up corpses.

The list regarding the medical recycling of the body is far from exhaustive, but it is not the purpose of this article to enumerate all the data we have on this topic. We only wanted to draw attention to this challenging field of research. Although many works deal with the magic and healing power of the blood of an executed man, and even more books describe the wicked witch who dissected children, we could rarely read the interpretation of these acts as a form of medicinal cannibalism. But recent studies show that “classical” subjects could fit well into this modern interpretation.

### Closing remarks

Cannibalism is “a verbal hand grenade” (Sugg, 2016, 195), associated with all forms of savagery and immorality from infanticide to incest and blood-drinking. In the first part of our paper, we addressed the issue of cultural cannibalism, trying to underline how Transylvania, due to its geographical location, was always considered to be

inhabited by wondrous creatures, and associated with almost all the aforementioned uncivilized acts. The hungry Hungarians belonged to the savage barbarians which populated the imagination of medieval historians since Herodotus. Their hunger for violence was noticed just like their particular eating habits. Their savagery did not disappear, not even when they became the defenders of the eastern borders of the western Christian civilization, since their cruelty persisted in their sadistic executions. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hungarians and Transylvanians were still associated with vampires and ogres, suggesting once again our place on the European mental map.

The second major topic discussed in our article regarded survival cannibalism. The lack of information prevents us from drawing clear conclusions regarding if anthropophagy occurred or not in early modern Transylvania. But even if evidence is scarce, we should not doubt the existence of extreme starvation which could lead to extreme survival methods. The military campaigns of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the plague of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, taken together in both cases with the consequences of harvest failure, could lead to anthropophagy, but the information available is sporadic and often subjective, and we have the impression that, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century sources, authors used starvation cannibalism as a powerful metaphor to underline the horror and disaster caused by famine.

Medicinal cannibalism or corpse pharmacology was the flourishing type of European cannibalism which, according to Montaigne, was much more related to anthropophagy than many would admit: “physicians fear not, in all kinds of composition to make use of the human body”<sup>9</sup>. Reading about the consumption of bodily matters, one must keep in mind that medicine in early modern times was equally addressing the body and the soul. No matter how strange the aforementioned early modern treatments sound, we have to remember that all these actions created mental stability, which helped our ancestors to face everyday challenges in a world which still knew little about the functioning of the human body.

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<sup>9</sup> *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*. Transl. by Charles Cotton, Ed. by William Carew Hazlitt (1877). Chapter 30. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm> (Last accessed on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020).



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# EROS AND THANATOS: INSTINCTUAL AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE PLAGUE EPIDEMIC IN ION GHICA'S LETTERS

Roxana COMAN

Independent Researcher PhD

E-mail: roxana.coman@rocketmail.com

**Abstract:** As we are going through the experience of a pandemic, both public opinion and research have returned to past examples to analyze, discuss and predict how the Covid-19 pandemic is going to progress and affect us in the present and the foreseeable future.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to use an account of Caragea's plague (1813-1814), written by Ion Ghica (1817-1897) several decades later, before the aforementioned author was even born, to measure the impact on collective memory of this specific event. This account is both interesting and colorful since it plays on two distinctive drives of human nature: Eros and Thanatos by emphasizing the number of weddings officiated after the epidemic ended, with a detailed description of the rituals associated with both events: disease and wedding/death and life. The recollection of Caragea's plague in Ion Ghica's letters uses a variety of details and, anecdotes and recounts a series of medical and funeral practices in an attempt to achieve authenticity.

**Keywords:** epidemic, memory, Cultural History, bubonic plague, Wallachia, Phanariot regime

**Rezumat:** Trecând momentan prin experiența unei pandemii, atât opinia publică, cât și cercetarea apelează la exemple din trecut pentru a analiza, discuta și cerceta cum pandemia de Covid-19 o să se dezvolte și o să ne afecteze în prezent și în viitorul apropiat.

Prin urmare, scopul acestui studiu este de a folosi o descriere a ciumei lui Caragea (1813-1814) scrisă de Ion Ghica (1817-1897), la câteva decenii după, o epidemie ce a avut loc chiar cu cca 2 ani înainte de nașterea autorului, pentru a măsura impactul asupra memoriei colective a acestui eveniment. Descrierea este interesantă și colorată deoarece mizează pe două direcții ale naturii umane: eros și thanatos, subliniind numărul de nunți oficiate după finalul epidemiei, cu o atenție sporită acordată ritualurilor din ambele instanțe: boala și nunta/ moartea și viața. Memoria ciumei lui Caragea în scrisorile lui Ion Ghica utilizează un număr de detalii ale evenimentelor și anecdote, evidențiind practici medicale și funerare ca un garant al autenticității.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** epidemie, memorie, istorie culturală, ciumă bubonică, Valahia, regim fanariot.

Epidemics are turning points from a social, medical, economic, political, cultural perspective, and traumatic events that create various coping mechanisms. Moreover, epidemics have a significant place in collective memory, with some of them ending up being evoked in various contexts, such as the bubonic plague pandemic in the fourteenth century or the one from the beginning of the nineteenth century in Wallachia, Caragea's plague. The subjectivity of media such as art and first-person literature can shed an important light on the perception of disease and pandemics, with a strong emphasis on outlining attitudes toward death. How much of our response in such critical situations do we owe to learned behavior and how much to primary instincts and human nature?

As I was reading Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice* (2013), a fictionalized saga of sixteenth-century Istanbul, some

questions arose. I wondered if Shafak's mentioning of the plague epidemic during Sultan Suleyman's reign was an element intended for authenticity, or one that draws upon certain sensibilities and attitudes toward death and the Other (and a use of the scapegoat motif by blaming the disease on non-Muslims), or the memory of that specific epidemic was still strong in contemporary minds. The reign of Suleyman the Magnificent and the works created by Mimar Sinan are still considered the epitome of the Ottoman Empire's greatness, with the subsequent centuries being generally perceived as a period of decline.

Before I delve into the contents of Ghica's text, it should be noted that the bubonic plague epidemic is a part of the chapter *Din vremea lui Caragea* (From Caragea's time), making the epidemic part of the political context of the time. Even in our times, "ciuma lui Caragea" is a rather frequent

trope used to refer to various disastrous instances. Moreover, the reign of Ioan Caragea (1812-1818), the Phanariot ruler, had negative connotations in 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative, given the unstable international context, an increase in harsh fiscal policies, famine, and internal instability. Although plague epidemics were quite frequent in the Romanian countries, during the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the one occurred between 1813 and 1814 has made a mark in Romanian mentality and has since maintained a prominent place in national history, especially due to its high mortality rate. In addition, its colloquial name has always been linked to the reign and name of Ioan Caragea, the Phanariot ruler acting as the scapegoat for collective tensions.

Albeit used as a historical source, first-person literature is still literature. Ion Ghica's letters to his friend and fellow nationalist partisan, Vasile Alecsandri (1821?-1890), were conceived in the form of a dialogue through written correspondence, requested by Alecsandri with the intent of publishing them. This study will use the 2014 Humanitas Press edition of Ion Ghica's letters and the 1956 edition.

Ion Ghica was a man of his time, one might say, the descendant of a noble family, Paris-educated, one of the founders of *Frăția* nationalist movement. (Chastain, 1997) Active participant in the 1848 Revolution, and a close collaborator of Nicolae Bălcescu, he was named official representative to the Ottoman Court, thereby developing a special rapport with the Ottoman authorities, (Ghica, 1889). His involvement with the 1848 Revolution and his standing with the members of the high Ottoman administration, such as Ahmed Vefik Pasha (Iordache, 1995), and his subsequent nomination as governor of Samos by the Porte (1854-1858) might seem paradoxical, but is a symptomatic for the specificities of Romanian nationalism.

Ghica was also a prolific author, having published *Convorbiri economice* (1865-1876), *Aminiri din pribegia după 1848*, and *Scrisori ale lui Ion Ghica către V. Alecsandri* (1884, 1887), among other political and economic writings. The letters were first published in the *Convorbiri literare* review between 1880 and 1887, being collected in a single volume, with two editions published in 1884 and 1887 (Ghica, 2014a).

The plague was a frequent presence in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Wallachian and Moldavian correspondence. In a short yet comprehensive study, Sorin Grigoruță publishes a series of letters dating from 1813, 1818, 1819, and 1829 that touch upon the plague epidemics in Moldavia (Grigoruță, 2019a). As Grigoruță also outlines, epidemics have been the subject of several books and articles so far, but the majority of them are concerned with medical practices, administrative issues, and the political context, economic impact, leaving personal experiences and the emotional impact to a side note. Therefore, the intent of my study is to trace the human factor of the 1813-1814 epidemic, by using a subjective source written a considerable amount of time after the event in question.

Subjectivity is an important issue for Ion Ghica, as he shares in his letter to Alecsandri about the effort of writing each and every letter, attempting to remember with accuracy, and interviewing some of the people involved in the described events:

“but do you know how many times I discard my pen until I find what I am supposed to say about a certain event of which I heard or witnessed; about a man I knew, or of whom it was spoken about, or I have met during my life going in one direction or another; how many times I tear entire pages because I don't find in my memory or in my notes the science to shed light on the facts I wish to tell the story of? I am not forgiven for writing unless I only tell the truth; and to know the truth and to tell it is no easy thing, especially when it also mixes some politics.” (Ghica, 2014, 81)

There are quite several instances in the history of first-person written accounts when authors bring into discussion the issue of truth and accuracy in their memoirs. The intentionality behind this gesture can vary from author to author, but sometimes it is due to the awareness that the published texts will face public feedback. As Ion Ghica's letters were meant to be published in a rather known periodical, *Convorbiri literare*, which had a significant audience among the Romanian elite, the issue of authenticity played a more significant role.

Dated November 1879, Bucharest, the chapter “Din vremea lui Caragea” begins as a historical record of the context that preceded Ioan Caragea's nomination as ruler of

Wallachia, focusing on the Russo-Turkish wars of 1784 and 1806, and with a complex international network of ever-changing interests in the Balkan region.

According to the motto, humans are conscious of their own mortality and limitations, but that means they have the possibility and responsibility of reacting consciously and responsibly. This, in turn, indicates that existential psychotherapy might offer the key to understanding why Ion Ghica chose to represent the two instances of human life: death and love.

“When we grow older and begin to realize that our omnipotence is really not so omnipotent, that our strongest wishes are not powerful enough to make the impossible possible, the fear that we have contributed to the death of a loved one diminishes.” (Kubler-Ross, 1969, 17) Psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s interdisciplinary work on death, life, and transition speaks about the survivor’s guilt as one of the main reasons behind the various customs and rituals people use to diminish the anger of gods or their loved ones: “If someone grieves, beats his chest, tears his hair, or refuses to eat, it is an attempt at self-punishment to avoid or reduce the anticipated punishment for the blame that takes on the death of a loved one” (Kubler-Ross, 1969, 18). Although her work is based on terminally ill patients and her observations are made within the framework of modern medicine, the Kubler-Ross model of the “Five Stages of Grief” is still in use. It takes five stages to deal with the trauma provoked by death, especially by a death that was unforeseen or due to an epidemic. Kubler-Ross states that we generally go from denial and isolation, through anger, and then to bargaining, which is followed by depression and ultimately acceptance.

Ion Ghica’s account of the plague is the memory of a trauma, a document of how these two drives, Eros and Thanatos, were witnessed and presented to posterity, sixty years after the actual event. As I mentioned before, plague is a familiar cause of death during the eighteenth century, one that has left behind inscriptions on crosses that thank God for surviving the epidemic, names of villages, places of memory, and notes on various manuscripts. Therefore, plague memorabilia are quite significant, and quite numerous,

reminding of its destructive force with a high death toll.

In a complicated context, but with the habitual and quite a sumptuous princely retinue that marked the ritualistic passage from Istanbul to Bucharest, Caragea’s reign started with a fire. The palace burned and it became known as the “Burned Court”, a name used even nowadays. In June 1813 the inauspicious signs continued with the plague epidemic, which was brought from Istanbul, according to Ghica.

“There have been many plague epidemics in the country, but Romania’s records do not mention a sickness more terrible than Caragea’s plague! Never a disease has made more victims!” (Ghica, 2014, 59) In Ghica’s view, the beginning of Caragea’s reign was marked by disaster, thereby emphasizing the precariousness and the pejorative image of the Phanariot regime.

His depiction of the then unstable political and international context is followed by a gruesome representation of the 1813-1814 plague epidemics. In Ghica’s view, the contagion was so dangerous that even the slightest contact with a sick household would mean a sure condemnation to death. With up to 300 deaths per day, and a total tally of more than 90,000 victims, it generated an anxiety that surpassed in strength even family and love connections (Ghica, 1956).

A study published by Cristina Bogdan outlines some of the behaviours observed during epidemics, with fleeing one’s home as the main one. (Bogdan, 2010a) Observed also in the letters published by Sorin Grigoruță, the anxiety in the face of death is overpowering. Under the imminent threat of the Thanatos, preservation instincts assume control, and lead to learned reactions. In the Romanian countries the flight response to a dangerous situation can be observed throughout history when faced with a foreign army invasion or an epidemic. Since people fleeing their homes and cities were potential sources of contamination, society stepped in to regulate instinctual actions from the outside. Phanariot rulers began to write laws that would often combine sanitary recommendations with religious and administrative ones (Ponturi de nizamuri).

Ghica recounts the story of a plague during which mothers would abandon their children, and husbands abandoned their

wives, disregarding the sentimental bonds that once connected them. The death anxiety and preservation instincts were exacerbated by the trauma of witnessing so many deaths. The situation was worsened by the numerous thieves and outlaws that took advantage and began plundering the homes of the contaminated and the dead.

Cristina Bogdan mentions that Grigore Ghica imposed the first authoritative sanitary measures, isolating the contaminated neighborhoods and burning the houses and belongings of the dead (Bogdan, 2010b). The various coping mechanisms and anti-plague measures analyzed in Cristina Bogdan's study range from sanitary to religious practices, and also include some non-Christian beliefs, such as sewing a plague's shirt or using certain herbs for fumigating houses: "Above the city a yellow and sour smell rose, the smoke of manure burning in the boyar's courts." (Ghica, 2014, 60)

In Ion Ghica's representation of the plague epidemic, the undertakers are the villains. This particular representation can also be observed in eighteenth-century sources. Associated with the idea of death, everyone would flee from their path since they were credited with using inhumane practices when handling the bodies of the sick and deceased. played a significant role in the death anxiety, but even more so in contributing to an apocalyptic image of the plague. Often, the sick were taken by the undertakers while still alive, and killed with blows to the head once they reached the field in Dudești-Ciolea.

*"Today I gathered 15 dead but was only able to bury 14 since one of them ran away and couldn't catch him." (Ghica, 2014, 60)*

Local authorities intervened in the undertaker's activity of killing the plague victims that were still alive by having a form of sanitary officers accompany them in their rounds of gathering corpses. These officers had a habit of calling to the barricaded members of a household and asking if they had any plague victims. At the end of the day, they had to draft a report, and in this paper, one of them mentioned, in this dark humour tone, that the practice of ending the suffering of the victims in a brutal manner continued.

The use of dark humour to emphasize the killing of plague victims does engender some questions as to its purpose. Does Ghica intended to use humour to tone down the image of the victims left for dead in the field without any form of help, on the wet ground?

While at the beginning of the text there are mentions of anxiety and panic, and abandoned family members, there are also records of newlyweds where the wife contracted the disease on the wedding day, and the husband fought with the undertakers to keep her until the very end. The husband is mentioned to have managed to wound one of the undertakers. The cries of the dying left on the field among corpses, the tears of their loved ones, and the howling of the dogs left without their masters are intended to depict the variety of responses to the anxiety of death. (Ghica, 1956b) In Ghica's view, the atrocities committed by people against their peers were the real issue during the plague epidemic of 1813-1814. How people reacted and dealt with the epidemic is the main subject of his account.

The issue of death has been discussed and analyzed from numerous points of view, and addressed by many disciplines. To my mind, behind the customs, products, and the history of death lies the human psyche. Beneath the cultural conventions and the historical perspective there is always the human factor. As I was reading Ghica's account of the number of deaths caused by the epidemic, I saw the potential interdisciplinary approaches existentialist psychotherapy and the works of Irvin D. Yalom offer.

In a review of *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death* (Yalom, 2009a), Dr. Paul Wong speaks about the terror of death and the passion for life, arguing "that in spite of the predominance of death in human existence, it is helpful to recognize that there is deep within us a reservoir of passion for life, a longing for meaning and happiness, no matter how dreadful the circumstances." (Wong, 2009)

Similar to Kubler-Ross, Yalom's approach to dealing with death is also a process that goes through various stages, from recognizing death anxiety, through having an awakening experience, to overcoming the trauma and the memory of it. Since Yalom's approach to psychotherapy is a rather personal one, through various examples and stories, his



understanding of death is based on his own experience with it. (Yalom, 2009b)

How can we connect psychotherapy with dealing with death and the memory of death? From Victorian practice of photographing the dead, through wearing parts of their body (jewelry made from the hair of dead people), to coping mechanisms in the face of losing a loved one, there are numerous connecting points. Moreover, in Ghica's text, death is not so personal and close, it is the memory of a distant traumatic event. Born in 1817, three years after the dead had been buried and mourned, one might speculate that his childhood could have been lived in the shadow of this particular traumatic event. However, the tone of the narrative, with some dark humour here and there, can lead the reader to believe a form of detachment has intervened. We have to keep in mind that roughly 60 years have passed between the plague epidemic and the published letters.

According to Ghica, in 1814, the plague entered a descending curb, and the people started to return to their homes. The estranged friends and family hugged as they saw each other, they cried after their loved ones lost in Dudești-Cioplea field in unmarked graves, and "started with their life ahead, forgetting the suffering and, thirsty for pleasures" (Ghica, 2014, 61).

*Staring at the Sun's* chapter six can be an answer to how dealing with the anxiety of death and the memory of it can find common ground. The memory of death is of a dual nature. On the one hand, there is the memory of the person and his/her life, and on the other, the memory of the traumatic event. His mentioning of forgetting the plague and its consequences could be viewed as a coping mechanism, as part of the bargaining and acceptance stages. Acknowledging the transience of existence, especially since epidemics were not exceptional occurrences; facing mortality in the nineteenth century could be considered by a 21<sup>st</sup> century gaze as superficial.

*"Always after an epidemic or a war, humanity seeks to recover its previous state; apparently, life becomes easier, the fortunes and dowries increase through inheritances and the death of brothers and sisters."* (Ghica, 2014, 61)

The financial implications of an epidemic ending meant, at the beginning of the nineteenth century in a country mostly relying on agriculture, cheaper prices for cereals. Ghica mentions a usual saying during this period, "bread will be cheaper," since cereals used for making basic types of food could not be exported, the focus would shift towards internal consumption.

In the letters published by Sorin Grigoruță, menial everyday chores such as buying fresh fish and other types of food take precedence during the plague epidemic in Galați, which is something mentioned at the end of a letter to Catinca. The sender even reassures lady Catinca that everything will be well even though the number of cases has grown and the disease reached the neighbors. (Grigoruță, 2019b) From the tone of the letter, I can assume that the owners of the household have decided to quarantine in the countryside, while the city manor was left to be tended by the servants, in a flight response to the then current situation. In addition, the relaxed attitude and reassuring tone could be seen as a learned behaviour owing to the frequency of plague epidemics, or maybe to a stage of denial in the grieving process. Since the issue of emotions and their expression is an idiosyncratic one in early modernity, one cannot be ascertained which is which.

Applying the concepts of Eros and Thanatos to psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud created in his 1920 book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* a dual system of primary instincts. He referred to Eros as the life instinct, which includes sexual instincts, the drive to live, and basic instinctual impulses, such as thirst and hunger, elements necessary for a prolonged existence and sustaining both individuals and communities.

The counterpart instinct is Thanatos, the death instinct, which includes negative feelings like hate, anger, and aggression. Freud theorized that Eros and Thanatos could not exist without each other, that both the life instinct and death instinct correspond and clash with each other in a lifelong struggle. "There is as it were an oscillating rhythm in the life of organisms: the one group of instincts presses forward to reach the final goal of life as quickly as possible the other flies back at a certain point on the way only to traverse the same stretch once more from a

given spot and thus to prolong the duration of the journey.” (Freud & Jones, 1922, 32)

After a detailed description which focuses on the attitudes and response in the face of significant death threat, Ion Ghica concludes that weddings would have to officiate in great numbers as a compensation for the numerous deaths. Therefore, the second part of Ion Ghica’s text is dedicated to the wedding rituals that followed the end of the pandemic. The Eros drive seems to intervene and counteract the Thanatos one, by a large number of weddings performed with intricate rituals. In early nineteenth-century Wallachia, these rituals would include a series of matchmakers, priests, deacons, and singers who would officially precede and announce the engagement. The announcement led, in turn, to festivities that could last up to a few days.

Could we perceive the tendency described in both Ghica and the letters published by Sorin Grigoruță as a drive to return to a previous state, to an instinct of self-preservation? Alternatively, could we view weddings and the dark humour employed by Ghica in his account as coping mechanisms caused by a significant traumatic event? “According to this, an instinct would be a tendency innate in living organic matter impelling it towards the reinstatement of an earlier condition, one which it had to abandon under the influence of external disturbing forces—a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the manifestation of inertia in organic life.” (Freud & Jones, 1922, 29)

Are these responses to the trauma of a plague epidemic that counts death in the tens of thousands a cultural one (Jung, 1969) or is it a personal and purely biological one as postulated by Sigmund Freud? An answer to this question follows the logic of seeking similar patterns in other cultures. A small Jewish community in Poland took further the idea of weddings as a mechanism for the return to a previous state of being, inventing the tradition of plague weddings (Shvartze Khasene), a ritual meant to appease the angry gods who have sent the disease upon them.

However, one thing is certain: the letters sent in 1813, 1818, 1819 or 1829 by various members of the local aristocracy deal with a broad range of topics, from postponing meetings, through attempting to maintain usual functions (paying taxes and various

local duties), to taking protective measures in the case of gypsy slaves infected with plague and providing succinct accounts of the evolution of the epidemic. (Grigoruță, 2019c). For the authors of these letters, the plague is seen as a sign of God’s wrath, a wretched disease that wreaked havoc, with the tally of deaths reaching a level where there were not enough graves for all the bodies. A few of these letters, dated 1829 and 1830, are concerned with life after the pandemic and focus on the wages that weren’t paid for jobs during the epidemic, or finding replacements for the dead (finding another French teacher), or a plea to return to a specific previous activity or job.

Having these letters in mind, an attempt to discern some patterns in the general response in the face of such a deadly epidemic, would much rather argue for the study of the personal unconscious. However, I believe that, in treating the plague epidemic as a constant threat faced by the Romanian countries in the period spanning 1400-1850, the responses recounted in the letters can be seen as a cultural or learned behaviour.

Therefore, rather than using Freud’s biological approach towards the dynamic of Eros and Thanatos, I believe that Jung’s concept of collective unconscious might offer more insight into analyzing how people responded when confronted with the realities of an epidemic. Since the collective unconscious is part of the personal one, as a layer that is inherited and pre-existing, it explains why some responses tend to focus on the mundane and perceive the epidemic as merely an interruption of daily life.

Stemming from Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, Monique Scheer states that “the body is not a static, timeless, universal foundation that produces ahistorical emotional arousal” (Scheer, 2012a). Scheer considers emotions to be socially and culturally conditioned, with the ability to be adapted and be trained, thereby allowing them to be assimilated assimilating them with cultural and social practices. In this sense, her study identifies four types of emotional practices: mobilizing, naming, communicating, and regulating emotion. (Scheer, 2012b) In addition, just as Carl Jung states that if we accept that human activity is under the influence of instinctual drives, we are ready to agree to the `assertion that our imagination,

perception and thinking are likewise influenced by inborn and universally present formal elements” (Jung, 1969, 44).

This dualistic dynamic of primary instincts coined by Freud, which traveled beyond the field of psychoanalysis, with echoes in philosophy and literature, has also known its challenges. In a study, Maria Kli (Kli, 2018a) goes beyond the dualistic interpretation, discussing these drives from a personal and civilizational point of view. Kli considers that Freud’s conceptualization of the subconscious, the Id, goes beyond the biological and that it can be discussed as the product of a historical and progressive articulation spanning generations.

Maria Kli’s conclusion is that, from the non-dualist perspective on Eros and Thanatos, the two drives are co-dependent. In Kli’s own words, eliminating the Death instinct could only be achieved by expanding the Eros (Kli, 2018b). Along the lines of the Jungian model of collective unconscious, Kli also emphasizes that the transition between these two drives is not only regulated by the individual Ego but also by the context that creates “collective patterns of psychic contexts.” (Kli, 2018, p.87)

Returning to Freud’s preservation instincts, it is important to note the variety of measures to counteract death used in the Romanian countries.

*“We must also be struck with the fact that the life-instincts have much more to do with our inner perception, since they make their appearance as disturbers of the peace, and continually bring along with them states of tension the resolution of which is experienced as pleasure”*  
(Freud & Jones, 1922, 51).

Following this logic, I could interpret the lavishness of the wedding ritual described by Ion Ghica as a regulating ritual for the two drives. As a response to the bleakness, the suffering, and the privations experienced during the epidemic, the wedding ritual implied decorating all the houses in the bride’s and groom’s districts with fir trees. The women bearing gifts (*călțunăreasa*) from the groom’s family would parade in horse-drawn carriages:

*“the first woman bearing gifts would enter the bride’s room carrying a silver*

*incense burner with golden flowers from which smoke of agar wood would come out; she would also carry a sprinkler to throw rose scented water, the symbol of cleanliness, and wished the bride to always be clean and perfumed.”* (Ghica, 2014, 62)

The cleanliness and perfume could be seen as an alternative response to the filth and foul smells of disease and decaying bodies experienced during the epidemic. However, their presence was noted in other circumstances as well. The opposition could only function in Ghica’s account.

In addition, the ritual involving the women from the groom’s family continued with the rest of the procession of gifts, by endowing the bride with flowers, tinsel (a symbol of wealth since it was quite expensive), shawls, jewelry, money, pastries, expensive textiles, and so on. The fiddlers would sing various songs to emphasize this rite of passage from maiden to married woman; the girls surrounding the bride would open the gifts and start braiding the tinsel and the flowers into the specific marriage crowns. The maids of honour would flirt with the groomsmen, foreshadowing future weddings. All these wedding preparations also featured specific children’s games as a reminder of the bride’s former status, and ended with a song still sung in Romania: *Ia-ți mireasa ziua bună* (*Bride, goodbye*) and an all-night party with the bride’s relatives. (Ghica, 2014c)

The ceremony of the actual wedding began at dawn and it consisted of various religious and layman customs. Reading Ghica’s description of the wedding, one cannot help but notice that the religious feels like a secondary aspect. An accent is placed on the behaviour of the participants, on the solemnity of the moment, and, most importantly, the meal. The food and diversity of pastries and drinks is significant if we think of the letter mentioning food consumption and the eating habits during the epidemic. I strongly believe that the lavishness of the ritual and the variety of foods and drinks consumed during the wedding preparations and rituals have more to do with the social factor. The Eros principle aside, there is the need for social connection and exhibitionism. As is widely known, a wedding is also an important occasion for social and economic status affirmation:

*"this party, for those below (n. tr. poor), would last for three days, and for the boyars, seven days and seven nights, in accordance with the law of rulers and emperors."* (Ghica, 2014, 63)

Ion Ghica observes this negotiation and interchanging between the two drives, Thanatos and Eros and concludes that the mourning turned into happiness.

*"One wedding finished and ten other would start, so much so that Bucharest would always be celebrating."* (Ghica, 2014, 63)

As I mentioned before, the account of the 1813-1814 plague epidemic was integrated into a letter with the reign of Ioan Caragea as the main subject. Having this in mind, one may question what the actual impact of the epidemic in this context is. One argument may be that the epidemic was yet another negative aspect of Caragea's reign, as this letter paints a bleak portrait of this Phanariot ruler.

Attempting to answer the question of whether the habit of organizing numerous weddings after traumatic events with a high death toll is an instinctual or a cultural response prompted me to search for previous instances.

Wallachia experienced in the short interval between 1793 -1796 a famine, a harsh winter, a drought, and two plague epidemics. Eighteenth-century documents attest that the 1793 plague epidemic was merely an extension of the 1792 one. Documents issued by local and central authorities imposed various measures to stop the spread of the plague. The stipulated quarantine was a 22 days interval, and involved fumigating and disinfecting contaminated people before and after their return from the hospital. The sick were rounded up by local police and taken to the hospital. Since religion was a factor that created a sense of comfort and was a coping mechanism meant to appease the wrath of God, the head of Saint Visarion became the center of a religious procession that covered the affected Wallachian districts. The religious procession was mandated by Alexandru Moruzi, the Phanariot ruler, with the formal agreement of the Metropolitan of Wallachia. (Urechia, 1893)

The documents covering the plague of 1792-1793 and the one between 1795 and 1796 revolved around similar coping strategies and measures taken by authorities. Some exceptions were made nonetheless, such as the local fair *Târgul Moșilor*, an event that not only provided the population with the necessary foods, but also allowed for some social interaction.

The Thanatos anxiety is evident from the responses especially from people and places that had the means to protect themselves from the disease: "In Bucharest, the boyars and the monasteries were barricaded in their homes and between their walls, employing guards, with some even using death threats to remove unwanted and suspicious visitors." (Urechia, 1893, 432) The fear provoked at the sight of so much death and suffering prompted even monasteries to act out their preservation instincts and shut their doors, too.

"Death by a relentless disease" (*`morte de năprasnica bolă`*) numbered around seven to fifteen cases a day towards the end of the epidemic. The death anxiety was effecting some changes in the prophylactic rules issued by central authorities, whereby people, houses, and assets were to be disinfected still, and forbidding parades, funerals, and social functions, even after a significant drop in the number of cases per day (1796). (Urechia, 1893b) According to a written account of Dionisie Ecclesiarhul, the victims of the plague epidemics were in the tens of thousands. Bucharest amassed around 10,000 deaths (men, women, old and young), three thousand in Craiova, and many unreported or undocumented in other cities and villages. (Papiu, 1863)

However, the Eros drive often balanced the Thanatos after the end of an epidemic episode. In July 1793, Alexandru Moruzi's sister, Ecaterina, was married in an event that lasted for five days, with numerous members of the clergy and local aristocracy. (Urechia, 1893d)

*"To describe the festivities of these days is less a job for an historian, and more a job for a writer. How fortunate of us that back then we hadn't yet invented the so-called chronicles of the High-life, because*

*there would have been no end of the list for the dresses.*" (Urechia, 1893, 461)

The account of this particular wedding comprises detailed descriptions of the expensive clothes, the jewels, the variety of foods and drinks served, and so on. The feast for the wedding of Ecaterina Moruzi was not just a celebration of the life instinct, of a drive to return to a previous state, but also a display of status of wealth. Ecaterina was the Phanariot ruler's sister and she lived and married in a century that had a dominant hedonistic approach to lifestyle and for this reason, the writer's tone on the ceremony comes as no surprise.

On January 28, 1795, another wedding followed, which was officiated in the Princely Court between the son of the Head of Justice (Vornic), Slătineanu, and the daughter of Head of Finance (Vistiernic) Filipescu. The documents published by V.A. Urechia describe the ample retinue of the groom and the preparations before the wedding. A great emphasis is placed on the number and rank of the participants, with a special focus on the rituals before the religious ceremony. These rituals were an interesting combination of status and pre-Christian beliefs.

In a previous study (Coman, 2017), I have emphasized Monique Sheer's theory that we are often guided by "embodied memories of past coping strategies, habits following the logic of everyday practice" (Scheer, 2012c). Therefore, the conclusion that the representation of Thanatos and Eros in Ghica's account of the 1813-1814 plague epidemic recalls both the instinctual and the cultural responses could be plausible.

Another important aspect discussed in this study is that the source used for the article is an account intended to serve as both personal memoir and a historical record. This may, however, lead to some questions regarding the methods employed for the use of this particular account as a historical source.

Writing a personal memoir does not necessarily signify that it is an objective record of one's life. In fact, we can choose how we wish to document life and especially, how to remember and write it.

Starting a journal falls into the naming type of emotional practice: "The formulation

of thought is different when one is moving a pen across paper or typing on a keyboard as opposed to when one is speaking. Writing for oneself, as in a diary, while sitting alone has interiorizing effects, whereas speaking out loud while in view of a dialogue partner has an exteriorizing one." (Scheer, 2012d) Thus, Ion Ghica's text attempts to fulfil both roles: the one of writing alone, remembering certain past events; and the one of engaging in a dialogue, where the interlocutor functions more like a spectator, whereby the author exteriorizes their essayistic and personal perspective on the past.

Therefore, in order to follow the trail of experiencing the two drives of death and life, using eighteenth-century sources has facilitated a better understanding of how these emotional and instinctual responses affected the people coping with the trauma of plague epidemics.

To conclude, the issue of the relation between the two drives as seen in the reactions reproduced in Ion Ghica's text, and the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century documents is one that follows certain patterns. On the one hand, these texts use a narrative that would lead the reader to believe that a Jungian approach more appropriate for their interpretation. On the other, one could not help but wonder if there is also a cultural factor involved. Additional research into the matter might be more relevant in discerning certain patterns.

In the deaths caused by an epidemic, the relation with the death drive is not the one from Ugo Foscolo's poem "Dei Sepolcri", celebrating death as the memory of great men and great deeds that lead the posterity by example. The Thanatos of an epidemic is traumatic and personal, and the responses reproduced in the sources cited in this study have a common thread, although they vary from one individual to another. The Eros seems to be a more constant presence, and a consequence of the Thanatos, in a co-dependent rapport.

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## PELLAGRA: THE ALARM SIGNAL OF THE ROMANIAN RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Anca-Maria POP

PhD Student

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

The Faculty of History and Philosophy, The Doctoral School „Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură”

ancamariapop2019@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Epidemics have been a constant threat for humanity over time, and people's experience of pain has been dependent upon personal perceptions. Romanian peasants, a special social category, have been afflicted by a considerable share of diseases, to a greater extent compared to other socio-professional categories and with more limited healing possibilities. Nevertheless, over time, they have managed to survive many of such diseases. One of the most characteristic epidemics affecting the social category of Romanian peasants is pellagra. This disease caused the death of many Romanians in rural areas and was defeated only after serious improvements had been brought to the daily rural life of the 1900s. The following period marked the revival of the Romanian village, out of which it's stronger, brighter, positive vital essence emerged.*

**Keywords:** *pellagra, Romanian peasants, daily life, beliefs, rural environment*

**Rezumat:** *Epidemiile au reprezentat o amenințare constantă de-a lungul timpului, iar experiența durerii a fost în conexiune cu percepțiile personale ale oamenilor. Țăranii români, o categorie socială distinctă, au fost afectați de numeroase boli în măsură mai mare decât alte categorii socio-profesionale și cu posibilități diferite de a fi vindecați. Cu toate acestea, au reușit să supraviețuiască după confruntarea cu multe astfel de boli. Pelagra este una dintre bolile specifice care au apăsător cel mai mult această pătură socială, fiind cauza multor decese din zonele rurale. Aceasta a fost învinsă doar după implementarea unor îmbunătățiri simțitoare în viața satului din anii 1900. Următoarea perioadă a marcat renașterea satului românesc din care a apărut esența sa puternică, vitală și înfloritoare.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *pellagra, țăranii români, viața de zi cu zi, credințe, mediul rural*

Who has not felt the repulsive thrill of fear when hearing of diseases such as pellagra, tuberculosis, cholera, plague or COVID-19? Disease is the alarm signal given by nature during times when people, in their incessant daily quests, are oblivious of some essential aspects, such as: personal protection, the danger associated to occupational burnout, or the acknowledgement of personal limits. Disease is sometimes perceived as a touchstone, or as a form of punishment which God sends to His beloved creatures in order for them to discover a better version of themselves, and to perform the sometimes painful attitudinal update required by change. Infectious diseases have always been, in the history of humankind, the dreadful opponent of vitality. The manner in which they were fought and perceived was different from one

historical period to another and was influenced by several factors: the evolution of medicine, the state of peace or war, the socio-educational environment, religion. But what all epidemics had in common was people's hope that the disease was only a temporary situation and, in particular, every healthy person's expectation that their health would be maintained.

History suggests the existence of a certain cyclicity, as it is argued by some triggered by God (or nature, gods, fate), according to which tragedies such as the current pandemic (Coronavirus, COVID-19 or Sars-CoV-2) return to history. A similar occurrence happened a century ago, when the Spanish flu caused the death of between 30 and 50 million people globally. In Romania, at about the same historical period, another terrible disease

decimated especially the rural world: pellagra, also referred to as corn disease. Of course, the progress made in medicine (especially the discovery of penicillin) put an end to many infectious diseases, but, unfortunately, viruses resist scientific developments and new epidemics constantly appear.

### **Pellagra – general overview**

Pellagra - a social disease - originates from Spain, is triggered by the consumption of moldy corn, and causes a vitamin and mineral deficiency, especially that of the B-complex (especially niacin). Pellagra causes skin diseases, the destruction of internal organs, and leads to the physical, mental and also material decompensation of the patient over a period which can last for up to 10-12 years. The symptoms requiring professional treatment are red spots, the peeling of the skin starting with the second year upon onset, fever, weakness, and ultimately the deterioration of the nervous system:

“Once the ailment loose, pellagra ends in death by starvation, that is when the body no longer finds substances to sustain life, unless a different ailment brings a quicker death upon the sick and unless the patients put an end to their lives themselves, with all the moral and mental depression which is usually inflicted upon them.” (Beu, 1899, 258)

Pellagra is a poverty-related disease which affected mostly peasants because of their precarious economic situation, with their preponderantly corn-based diet – corn being the cheapest cereal which agricultural communities could afford. The disaster set in because of weakened immunity and also because of the lack of information. The peasants worked the land when they received it from the lessors (maybe sometimes a little late for agricultural activities) and the allotment entrusted to them was the least fertile. Corn could be moistened from the start due to unripening or frost, and afterwards it was brought to the peasant's house to dry. Storage conditions were not adequate, in dry and ventilated barns, but sometimes corn cobs covered in husks were placed directly on simple shelves, in baskets, or in the living area, directly exposed to moisture (Felix, 1901, 183-184). The

measures taken by authorities included the recommendation to diversify cereal consumption, the dissemination of information regarding oven-dried corn and the distribution of barley, oats, and wheat seeds.

The similarity between pellagra and COVID-19 is, first, related to localization: pellagra wreaked havoc on the peoples of Europe: the Spanish, the French, the Italians. The first Romanians affected by the disease were inhabitants of the Wallachian Kingdom, in the Romanian Plain, then those of Moldavia, and ultimately those of Transylvania. It was common for people residing in mountainous areas, who traveled to more agriculturally fertile plain regions to participate in paid labor, to have a polenta-based diet of arguable quality (Felix, 1901, 183-184). This disease specific of peasant life brought patients in terrible physical and mental conditions: red and scaly appearance of the skin, weakness, hunchbacked posture, apparent dementia, tormenting digestive problems, even paralysis. The literature of the time refers to pellagra using a series of suggestive names: “skinning”, “burning”, “evil eye disease”, “evil ringworm” “rotten corn disease”. The lifestyle of the high-risk population was characterized by extremely poor hygiene, very modes living conditions and reduced treatment possibilities. In some cases, the symptoms became severe, incorporating critical physiological and mental problems, and they led to numerous cases of suicide attempts (mostly by drowning). There was a much lower incidence of pellagra in cities, as urban inhabitants did not have a predominantly corn-based diet, and not of such poor quality as in rural areas.

The epidemic wreaked havoc around the 1900s, with a record of 150,000 cases in Romania in 1906 (recorded by Dr. Thoma Ionescu), persisting until after World War II. The first case in the long history of pellagra was recorded in 1762, in Spain, at the royal court, when doctor Don Gaspar Casal diagnosed several peasants in Asturias with this condition, which was initially referred to as “mal de la rosa”. The term “pellagra” originates from Italy in 1771, coined by Dr. Francesco Frapolli. In Romania, at the end of the 19th century, doctors



such as Iacob Felix, A. Bernard or Ilie Beu are concerned with fighting the disease, insistently promoting the improvement of living conditions in villages.

In the interwar period, peasants still suffered significantly from plagues. Especially in the region of Bărăgan, where corn cultures were prevalent, people could not benefit from industrialized agriculture, nor did the sanitary system make a significant contribution either. In rural areas, it was common that a single doctor had to provide medical services for 14 villages. This shortcoming, combined with the lack of fast means of communication between patients and healthcare professionals, contributed to the fact that the doctor often arrived when the patient was dying or had already died.

Many Romanians died from pellagra during the Second World War, because of poor conditions in USSR war camps. Documents on Romanian prisoners of war, captured by the Soviet Union army during World War II, show that the deaths were primarily blamed on pellagra caused by the unhealthy environment and poor nutrition, which led to increased mortality. The living conditions in camps lacked heated lavatories, a heated living area, or individual spaces. For example, 900 of the prisoners of the Aktiubinsk camp suffered from pellagra in the first, second or third stage (Văratcă, 2013, 54).

Isolated cases of pellagra were found in Romania even after the year 2000, when 16 treatable cases of pellagra were reported.

### **The Romanian peasants' perception of diseases**

Epidemics usually affect all social categories and groups, but most commonly affected and the most vulnerable are the underdeveloped and poorly educated environments. This was the case of pellagra, whose first recorded occurrence in Romania dates back to the nineteenth century, after a period during which its existence had been denied. The disease was caused by eating unripe or moldy corn. In addition to the fact that corn was regularly consumed in Romanian villages (wheat bread being more difficult to provide), the healing process was further burdened by the

living conditions of the time. The regular social life of the Romanian rural inhabitant has always been intense, characterized by close human contact, strong communion with nature, closeness to animals, the reduction of personal space. Some common aspects of authentic rural life, such as crowding, community work gathering all members of the village, folk dances unfortunately favored the spread of germs in the close-knit community. "Even in times when villagers were known to be suffering from an infectious disease, they had visitors who did not keep safe distance from the patient's bed, who came in groups, or even holding small children in their arms. The pattern of houses composed of an anti-chamber and a main chamber for all family members represented a specific architectural typology, which denotes modesty, good family relations, cooperation for household chores, daily family communication. However, this living arrangement also implies a disregard of health-related dangers and ignorance. This type of cluster living is not entirely caused by poverty: "the peasant is not aware of the dangers emerging from overcrowding several souls in small and poorly ventilated areas, nor of the danger of becoming sick by sharing the room with a patient suffering from a contagious disease" (Manolescu 1895, 39).

Apart from the support from community members, the behavioral pattern of sick peasants is characterized by dignity. The rural individual is used to suffering in silence, without complaining to families or relatives. Even after the onset and obvious symptoms of the disease, the simple peasant keeps silent and endures the physical and emotional distress caused by the illness with the noble intention to protect everyone from his pain. This approach is explained by the popular belief that evil becomes stronger when discussed upon, while losing stamina when disregarded.

The specific perception of diseases in the rural environment is also characterized by restraint, embarrassment, shame, along with the distinct pathological distress. As the rural individual was forced to carry out sustained physical work with almost continuous effort, serious illnesses were a limitation of the ability to provide for one's family by admitting

weakness. The patient's acknowledgment of disease only occurred during the already advanced phases. The Romanian peasant often denied disease symptoms for fear of their confirmation and neglected them because of exhausting daily chores. Once the disease is obvious, the village world becomes an environment where incessant rumors are spread and exaggerations of the symptoms are common. Even to this day, there is an old saying originating in the rural part of Lăpuș region, according to which "old women will kill you before the doctors do". Rural rumors and gossip, traditionally a feminine occupation in popular belief, are considered to predict a patient's death before the medical act of decease. Death is acknowledged as a decision of fate, which the relatives of the deceased accept, while the resignation of the family is reflected in the phrase "the light is over".

The religious belief that perceives humans as lacking any human decisive authority is a distinctive factor of rural life describing the outlook on disease and even on death. They are perceived as given by God, for reasons which are not always obvious for humans. The deeply religious Christian Romanian people thus created this shield of faith, which increased and strengthened their positivism and hopes during all sanitary crises. The religious component was people's first resort, before the medical factors, even in periods of severe sanitary crises, plagues, and other epidemics. The causality of the events was first in connection with God, and only then with preventative measures, hygiene, nutrition, medical care. The closeness to divinity, or rather the symbiosis between humanity and deity, has unfortunately led people to extreme situations. Romanian peasants, adults and children alike, observed all religious fasting periods recommended by the Christian Orthodox Church, as practicing Christians

A diet deprived of dairy products, meat and eggs for 200 days per year, mostly consisting of polenta, beans, cabbage and potatoes weakened people's bodies, made healing process difficult and favored the spread of germs and viruses. Nevertheless, the individual's belief in God prevailed over nutritional needs.

### **Epizootics over epidemics**

Just like in the case of swine or bird flu in the contemporary era, the pellagra crisis which occurred 100 years ago was accompanied by the danger of epizootics in Romanian villages. This additional danger could leave peasants without the main source of meat for their families. If people could afford to raise the animal in their farm (most often a pig), the meat provisions were over at the latest in the spring, before starting the hard work of the field. Therefore, as meat was no longer available, the Romanian peasants generally ate vegetable foods (mainly cabbage, beans, and potatoes) during the most physically demanding periods. Under these harsh circumstances, the possibility of a decent living with a balanced diet was merely an unrealistic ideal.

One of the infectious diseases that were transmitted from humans to animals was tuberculosis. Cattle often fell ill with this disease in the nineteenth century. Milk could transmit the infection both from a sick animal to humans and by a peasant who was sick during processing, as the consumption of non-pasteurized milk was common. The central administration implemented a policy for the prevention of diseases which are transmitted from humans to animals, especially those mentioned by the Health Service: rabies, glanders, scabies, etc.

Everyday life is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing and health of a community. One of the illustrative documents reflecting what daily life was like at the end of the nineteenth century was the Sanitary Statistics of Romania and Hungary (which had large Romanian communities) the year 1894, drafted by Dr. Iacob Felix. This is a period of significant efforts and attempts make positive changes, such as: the development of sanitary facilities (hospitals, dispensaries) hiring medical staff in rural communities, the use of spas for the treatment of diseases. Nevertheless, mortality, and in particular infant mortality, had still high levels among Romanians. One of the causes was alcoholism, a vice associated to poverty and malnutrition. Infectious diseases were, however, the leading cause of death. In the year 1894,

infectious diseases led to the death of 8,841 Romanians in Romania and 3,600 Romanians in Hungary. The most common causes of death were scarlet fever, diphtheria, cough, measles, and pellagra.

### **Mentalities and sources of information for rural inhabitants - risk factors**

In addition to this unfortunate state of affairs, sick people were popularly treated not with medications, but with enchantments and other such folk-inspired healing remedies. These healing practices were based on superstitions and obscurantism and were applied to people experiencing malnutrition-related symptoms. The social classes of the peasantry and the working class were vulnerable to diseases, due to their unhealthy and cramped housing conditions, house hygiene, poor clothing and deficient nutrition. After the agrarian reform of 1864, more than 82% of the country's population earned their living from agriculture, respectively 3.5-4 million peasants - a large, but insufficiently supported population.

One can trace a direct causality relation between the level of education and literacy on the one hand and the economic level on the other. This had a direct impact on the health of the population. The Romanian people's standard of living was lower compared to that of other ethnic groups, as stated by Dr. Iacob Felix based on the aforementioned Sanitary Statistics: "Foreigners are craftsmen and merchants, so they have an easy and good living; however, Romanians are not so much engaged in such occupations and usually have a troubled and bad life." (Beu, 1896, 61-62) If in Hungary there were 334 hospitals in 1894, in Romania their number was 132, including nursing homes. There were 4280 doctors in Hungary, while in Romania only 1413. Therefore, compared to other communities of the time, Romanian peasants were at a higher risk of disease and benefited from fewer treatment options.

This state of facts was further complicated because peasants favored traditional, empirical folk remedies to the detriment and in ignorance of scientific medicine, out of an inherited lack of trust, but also because the medical staff were not so easily

available to the rural population. Such health-related prejudices hindered prevention, but also healing. This idea was debated by Professor Dr. Victor Babeș, member of the Romanian Academy, during a meeting which took place on April 19, 1901.

Prejudices, ancestral beliefs, the inherited instinct to act unsystematically, based on personal belief rather than reason can be (even today) harmful to the health of the people. For example, peasants used plants as natural remedies based on their resemblance in terms of shape or color to certain organs, without any scientific follow-up of the effects of such treatments and with no doubts regarding their efficiency. The struggle of the system not against the moderation and rationalization of the trust given to prejudices and folk medicine passed down by word of mouth, had to be carried out together with officials, medical staff – an objective achieved at very low levels. The challenges faced by the system not to completely oppose these beliefs, but to balance and rationalize popular faith in folk remedies inherited by word of mouth had to bring together official authorities and medical professionals. This objective was only achieved to a very limited degree. Analyzing the negative effects and the regression triggered by natural remedy treatment practices did not aim to combat the effectiveness of medicinal plants. Doctors acknowledged that "medicinal plants were the first cures used by people, based on long-lasting experience, thus creating a tradition which is nevertheless far from providing precise notions on the use of the plant." (Babeș, 1901, 644)

Among the useless or harmful practices are "casting spells", "curing the evil eye" and other small rituals involving incantations, along with the consumption of various plants or substances. The empirical treatments used by peasants included countless remedies even for the diseases which doctors themselves could not cure. These procedures had a profound effect on rural Romanian birthrate, which had very low values during the 1900s. Concomitantly, death rate among newborn infants was huge. Among the most significant factors contributing to this effect were greater reliance on empirical than medical midwives, lack of knowledge about

antiseptic measures related to uterine wounds and navel wounds in newborns, fever and tetanus, infections on breastfeeding mothers, and many other similar conditions. Sick parents' children had low chances of survival, about 50%. A relevant example in this respect is the 1987 record from the pellagra institution in Păncești-Dragomirești. According to this, 216 married people in the institution had 1,043 children, of which 540 survived, 498 died and the situation of 5 children was unclear: either deceased or disabled (Felix, 1901, 407). This data proves that child mortality is caused not solely by lack of proper care, but also by health problems.

The rural deficiencies in terms of hygiene at that time are in opposition with the official propaganda of national beliefs and values. According to it, the concern for proper care and good sanitary conditions for children are promoted as national priority. Children are seen as an essential part of families and, by extension, of society and therefore they have a major role in the development of the nation. "The state, just like the family, is obliged to preserve the life and health of children, to develop their physical and intellectual strength, to defend them against disease, against degeneration, against premature death" (Felix, 1901, 311),

The configuration of the modern Romanian village from the second half of the 19th century is also marked by progress in agriculturally related aspects and peasants' lifestyle. The concepts of a more appropriate diet were introduced, not without difficulty, by means of educational strategies and also due to political changes (the annexation of Transylvania, the agricultural reform of 1921). Peasants' mentality is an important factor in treating pellagra. Even to this day, peasants form a compact group, with intense dynamics. People see each other often, meet at the gates, pay each other visits. This pattern of interaction was even more intense over a century ago: visiting sick people by relatives of all ages was an act of pure politeness or moral duty, which completely excluded considerations regarding the risk of contamination or the patient's exhaustion.

Romania was the primary corn producer in Europe around the 1900s and corn production provided a large part of the economy's income. However, the fight against pellagra benefited from limited financial investments from the state, a disappointing fact denoting the depreciation of the peasants, the acceptance of humble material and sanitary situations and overwork. The rural citizens of the nineteenth century who became ill with various diseases had to confront the disregard and ignorance of the state, instead of receiving the help and support which they needed. The attitude of the state was one of non-interference, based on the premise that the authorities had no obligation to intervene in family privacy by checking the health of its members or participating in the healing of the sick. At the International Hygiene Congress in Paris in 1900, this attitude was combated because of the danger posed by infectious diseases to many healthy individuals. This neutral position of the state made all treatment dependent solely on individual awareness and means. In 1901, Dr. Victor Babeș is dissatisfied with the state policy of non-involvement in matters regarding individual health: "The state has no right to enter family life and every citizen has the right to get sick and find treatment the way they see fit. (Babeș, 1901, 649). This unfortunate situation persisted *de facto* in many precarious regions, despite the fact that, ever since the eighteenth century (according to Dr. Filip Iacob), in Romania it was theoretically compulsory to declare diseases known to be infectious. This act which had to be followed by isolation, vaccination and disinfection – all activities performed by the state (Felix, 1901, 267-269). Among the measures which were finally implemented in the late nineteenth century were: the establishment of the wings for infectious diseases, or entire hospitals for infectious diseases, such as the ones for treating pellagra. The first institution opened for pellagra patients, from Păncești-Dragomirești, Roman County, was associated with an agricultural school whose purposes were, on the one hand, patient treatment and, on the other hand, education for a more rational land exploitation. However, it did not have the expected results, due to administrative reasons.

The simple peasant's need for information regarding a healthy lifestyle and norms of hygiene was imminent. The Romanian Academy offered prizes for writing textbooks on dietetics and folk hygiene, directly targeted for the peasants' needs and understanding. Also, the Transylvanian Association for Literature and Culture of the Romanian People supported health evolution by: awarding prizes for writing hygiene and nutrition books, popular lectures delivered in villages, publishing health materials and practical advice in *People's Paper*, in *Transylvania Magazine*, etc. The "almanacs" (the *Popular Almanac*, *Peasant's Almanac*, *Family Almanac*) included columns dedicated to the description of the real situation regarding health deficiencies, especially in the villages inhabited preponderantly by Romanians. As for other informative materials on the topic of family health and personal hygiene, their success was limited by the following aspects: the rate of illiteracy in rural areas was about 80%, most of the population lived in villages, books were scarce, the only ones which most families could afford were the almanacs. Also, taking into account the features of the lifestyle led by peasants, performing manual labor on the field from dawn till dusk, raising children in primitive conditions, taking care of animals, in constant fight to achieve basic necessities, it is understandable why reading was not a priority.

The two basic providers of confidence, the "omniscient, indisputable", beacons who brought light into the rural community were the priest and the teacher of the village. In addition to the didactic tasks traditionally assigned to them (teaching reading, writing and arithmetic) they were also the providers of alternative types of education: sanitary education, household management, cooking, housekeeping. However limited, these educational attempts raised awareness within the rural environment with regard to new, more modern and more effective practical activities compared to traditional practices. In the simple, rural world, teachers supported before there were medical staff employed in each village. Including lessons for daily practical use and for combating the diseases of the period were held in schools, the evolution, the change of society occurring from

small to large. In rural communities, it was common for teachers to offer support in situations requiring medical help, when professional caretakers were missing. Moreover, teachers taught daily practical activities for the prevention of diseases, motivated by the belief that societal change started with the young generations. The medical body shows gratitude and desire to collaborate with school authorities. Dr. Iacob Felix states: "We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the rural teaching staff in the fight against pellagra (but also alcoholism and other social evils); moreover, we consider this the teachers' sacred duty" (Felix, 1901, 184).

In order to improve the sanitary conditions of the people, the most common means were classes of personal health, hygiene manuals for public schools, and informative booklets especially written for rural populations. This approach was based on the principle that the less well-read, elevated and cultivated people are, "the less they are capable to retain and correct impressions in their brain, the less balanced their judgement and actions, and the more they are subjected to false beliefs and prejudices". (Babeş, 1901, 644)

### **The image of the Romanian peasant in the time of pellagra**

In the nineteenth century, the image of the Romanian peasant from the plain, is illustrative: hunched stature, hands hanging down, women's head tilted to one side, eyes moving lazily, continuous exhaustion, the pallor of the face, people who are weakened and aged, lacking vitality. The posture and the general appearance of the rural individual of the period was an alarm signal for the doctors and a mark of the degeneration of the Romanian people on account of poverty and poor health conditions. Despite the concern related to the deterioration of the sick and weakened rural community, one should also note the positive reactions emerging from high social classes pertaining to the improvement of living conditions in cities (Bărbulescu, 2015).

Given the fact that treated water and fountains were a rare occurrence, an unfortunate custom was the consumption of water full of

germs and other harmful microorganisms. At the end of the 19th century, steps were taken to build public fountains, urban fountains and deep wells in Romanian villages. Peasants drank water from simple pits where rainwater was collected. This practice continued in summertime, when stagnant water was drunk. Many medical ideas and recommendations did not go beyond the proposal phase due to financial reasons, although in Hungary, 231 urban fountains and 281 deep wells were built at the end of the century.

One of the problems that emerged during the eradication of pellagra and on which doctors have agreed is that the quality of corn is dependent on its preservation and on the ways it is processed. It was demonstrated that old mills allow a better, alteration-free preservation of the grain compared to modern ones (of the '90s), which functioned with "steam, as the finely ground corn that was heated by grinding is more prone to spoilage." (Felix, 1899, 180)

However, despite the rudimentary industrialization in Romania, the corn grown in our country was of a higher quality than that grown abroad. The smaller means and greater harvest achievements illustrate that the Romanian peasants' efforts and concern for agriculture and animal husbandry are a proof of constant, ancestral connection to such occupations.

Of course, one may conclude that the rural world has been too little concerned with building better sanitation in their households. However, such assessments are made from an external perspective and the infrastructure of the dusty nineteenth-century Romanian, with limitedly applicable sanitary laws, permits certain margins of error. Adding to the fact that there was a lot of disinterest in hygiene is the impossibility of finding the means to make progress and local administrative support.

In conjunction with the significant lack of interest in hygiene, there were also difficulties to make progress and to obtain local administrative support. Material resources hardly covered the family's food necessities and were procured by working with animals and working in the fields, a lifestyle which totally excluded any notion of leisure or time off work.

Under these circumstances, it was extremely difficult to improve the conditions of peasant households.

Sometimes, the rural world was accused of being miserable, dirty, repulsive, although this status was reached not out of complacency, but rather because people exhausted themselves through hard work. This hard work required the need to provide good quality nutritious food, a condition which was seldom accomplished. Under these circumstances, pellagra led to death in approximately 4 years upon onset. However, there were cases in which people suffered tremendous pain over periods of over 10 years, "in an impressive and frightening spectacle of physical and mental misery. A disease which seems to have been purposefully created for the peasant, an image of their miserable life, as it is portrayed by the elite." (Bărbulescu, 2015, 192) The Romanian rural poverty was reflected in this epidemic. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the pellagra cases became more and more rare until they disappeared, as predicted by Dr. Iacob Felix, once rural poverty hotspots became scarce.

Due to their precariousness, Romanian villages remained, by far, characterized by the lowest degree of modernization, similar to those in the third world, a perfect background for the development of social diseases. A series of renowned painters, such as Ștefan Luchian, Ion Andreescu, Dan Ialomițeanu (Figure 1), Nicolae Grigorescu (Figure 2) and others expressed their admiration, astonishment, compassion and helplessness at the rural world and its grieved, but dignified inhabitants, whose appearance was so different from city dwellers (much closer to their European intellectual counterparts).

The modest appearance of the houses made them resemble simple huts, often built of a fence covered with dirt. Only the houses of wealthier peasants were built of brick. These types of houses were insalubrious, failing to provide decent living conditions, lacking sanitary spaces, allowing insufficient separation between living areas and the constructions intended for animals (Figure 3).

Many patients of pellagra died untreated. The measures taken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, Trade and Domains

(Minister Petru P. Carp) were implemented consequent to a research on pellagra in Italy and Austria. We cannot fail to notice the similar approach of pellagra with that of the COVID-19 virus, which caused thousands of deaths in the Latin countries before it reached Romania, thus providing the opportunity of study. Institutions for pellagra patients were established and millers were sanctioned for grinding spoiled or wet corn. As it was impossible to cover the medical needs by building new hospitals, half of the beds in the existent regional and rural hospitals were reserved for pellagra patients. The Directorate of the Sanitary Service sent a circular letter in this regard, applicable for the period April - October 1902. The solutions recommended for the eradication of the plague were: changes of cleaning and cooking practices in households, the development of small rural industry, provision of drinking water (not stagnant),

compliance with hygiene rules, the implementation of rules in the dairy industry and other food industries (Asmarandei, 2014, 9-11). The treatment of pellagra implied peasants' acceptance of re-education, of re-learning norms, which constituted the foundation of their daily life, norms which were culturally inherited and which persisted at an almost primitive level until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The almost complete disappearance of poverty-related diseases demonstrates the incorporation of changes and modernity into everyday life and the partial fight against prejudices. An important factor was the approach of the state to acknowledge peasantry issues as topical with regard to Sanitary Service stipulations and to take supportive sanitary measures.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

**Figure 1.** Dan Ialomițeanu, *Portret de țăran* (*A Peasant's Portrait*).

**Figure 2.** Nicolae Grigorescu, *Țăran la câmp* (*Peasant in the Field*).

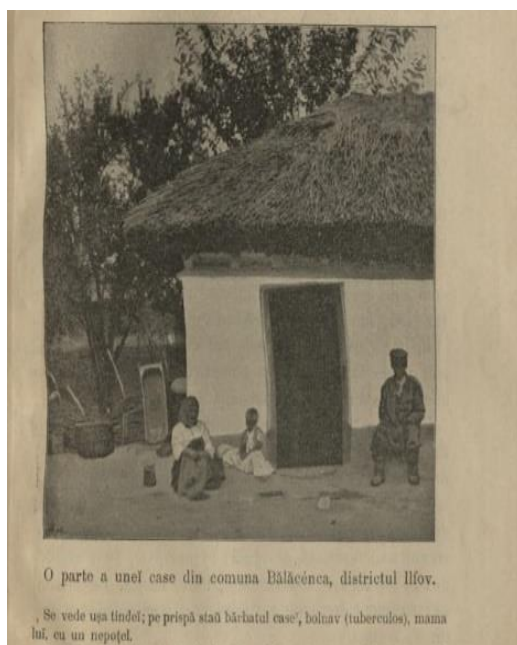
**Figure 3.** Nicolae Manolescu, *Igiena țăranului* (*The Peasant's Hygiene*), 1895



**Figure 1.** Dan Ialomițeanu, *Portret de țăran* (*A Peasant's Portrait*).



**Figure 2.** Nicolae Grigorescu, *Țăran la câmp (Peasant in the Field)*.



**Figure 3.** Nicolae Manolescu, *Igiena țăranului (The Peasant's Hygiene)*, 1895

## DEATH AS SEEN BY THE ROMANIAN PEASANT DURING WORLD WAR ONE

Iuliana Maria GAVRILĂ

PhD Candidate

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

The Faculty of History and Philosophy, The Doctoral School „Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură”

E-mail: ferent\_iuliana@yahoo.ro

**Abstract:** *The paper aims to address the issue of the image of collective death from a more unusual perspective. We will focus on the image of death during the First World War, more precisely the death among the soldiers from the rural areas of Romania. We will focus our discussion on the Romanian literature from the interwar period, namely the literary works of Liviu Rebreanu and Mihail Sadoveanu. We will present the image of this collective tragedy as it appears in the literary works of the two authors, emphasizing the phenomenon of death and suffering on the front in the mentality of the common peasant.*

*Literary works are the primary bibliographic sources for this research, they describe the image of the tragedy that was World War I in the smallest details. We chose interwar literature because society is very well reflected in literary works; Mihail Sadoveanu and Liviu Rebreanu are two authors who experienced the war differently and who participated in the war - their point of view and their experience is completely reflected in the pages of their works.*

*Therefore, literature helps us identify the image of rural society and its members during the First World War. The aim of the paper is to reveal the impact that the war has and everything that it implies in the mentality of the members of the Romanian rural communities. The article will also reveal what death means for the Romanian peasant and more precisely what violent death means, death on the war front, away from home and loved ones. We will illustrate how these people perceive the phenomenon of war, how violence and death combine and how they affect them. The images that literature constructs in this case vary from the image of the unsanitary conditions on the front and in hospitals, the image of cities full of the wounded and refugees and, most importantly, the image of the front and the breathless bodies.*

*We consider that this work is very relevant for the theme “imago mortis” and that it illustrates very well how the members of a community isolated from civilization and modernity cope with such a tragedy. All aspects of war: from disease and injury, to collective death and the interaction between soldiers - can be found in the pages of this article. Moreover, we present the mentality of the peasant, the impact that war and violence have on him, but also how he behaves in the face of death.*

**Keywords:** *collective death, war, traditional mentality, rural, imaginary*

**Rezumat:** *Următoarea lucrare își propune să abordeze tema imaginii morții colective dintr-o perspectivă mai neobișnuită. Ne vom concentra pe imaginea morții în timpul Primului Război Mondial, mai exact moartea în rândul soldaților din zonele rurale ale României. Perspectiva noastră vine din zona literaturii românești din perioada interbelică, și anume operele literare ale lui Liviu Rebreanu și Mihail Sadoveanu. Vom prezenta imaginea acestei tragedii colective așa cum apare ea în operele literare ale celor doi autori, accentuând fenomenul morții și al suferinței de pe front în mentalitatea țărânului de rând.*

*Operele literare sunt sursele bibliografice primare, acestea descriind imaginea acestei tragedii în cele mai mici detalii. Am ales literatura interbelică deoarece societatea este foarte bine reflectată în operele literare; Mihail Sadoveanu și Liviu Rebreanu sunt doi autori care au experimentat războiul în mod diferit și care au participat în război – punctul lor de vedere și experiența lor este relatată complet în paginile lucrărilor lor. Așadar, literatura ne ajută să identificăm imaginea societății rurale și a membrilor acesteia în timpul Primului Război Mondial. Scopul lucrării este acela de a dezvălui impactul pe care îl are războiul și tot ceea ce implică acesta în mentalitatea membrilor*

comunităților rurale românești. De asemenea, articolul va dezvălui ce înseamnă moartea pentru țărănul român și mai exact ce înseamnă moartea violentă, moartea pe front, departe de casă și de cei dragi.

Vom ilustra modul cum este perceput fenomenul războiului de către acești oameni, modul cum violența și moartea se îmbină și cum îi afectează pe aceștia – imaginile pe care le construiește literatura în acest caz variază de la imaginea condițiilor sanitare pe front și în spitale, imaginea orașelor pline de răniți și refugiați și, cel mai important, imaginea frontului și a trupurilor fără suflare.

Considerăm că lucrarea este una foarte relevantă pentru tema „imago mortis” și că ilustrează foarte bine modul cum membrii unei comunități izolate de civilizație și modernitate fac față unei astfel de tragedii. Toate aspectele războiului: de a boală și răni, la moarte colectivă și interacțiunea dintre soldați – se regăsesc în paginile acestui articol. Mai mult decât atât, prezentăm mentalitatea țărănului, impactul pe care îl are războiul și violența asupra sa, dar și modul cum acesta se comportă în fața morții.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** moarte colectivă, război, mentalitate tradițională, rural, imaginar

## Introduction

Over time, the study of history has begun to diversify, to include more and more fields of research and to analyze more and more facets of the past. If until now, traditionally, the study of history involved the study of written or material sources, lately we observe a collaboration with several scientific fields - history collaborates with biology and chemistry to date certain discovered objects as accurately as possible, there are studies in which psychology is used to provide information about how certain people's thinking etc.

Our study proposes a collaboration with literary bibliographic sources - more precisely an analysis of the literature from the interwar period that would provide us with more information about the image of death during the First World War. We focus on literature because it reflects the society and the events that the authors witnessed. The literature of the interwar period very much reflects the years of the war and the mutations that the society presented at that time.

To be more exact in our statements, in this study we perform an analysis of imagology: we want to illustrate the image of death in the mentality of the Romanian peasant. So, we do not focus on the general image of war and death on the front, but we detail the experiences of one social category: the villagers and how they manage to cope with death on the front. We would also like to mention that this article is part of a wider research, which aims to illustrate the image of the peasant and the rural world in the works of

interwar writers. Currently, the two authors who provided us with the information presented here are Mihail Sadoveanu and Liviu Rebreanu; the two write mainly in the period between the two world wars, both participate in the First World War and both describe their experience. Mihail Sadoveanu publishes a war diary, in which he notes his experiences and impressions but also the behavior of those around him. Thus, his diary also contains what appear to be "interviews" with his comrades, in which they set out their vision of life but also how they perceive death and war. Liviu Rebreanu, on the other hand, attributes his experiences to the characters from various novels and short stories, so that we notice the author's ideas and the position he adopts regarding the war.

As we stated above, we chose to present the mentality of the Romanian peasant. Why? The Romanian peasant, in the first half of the twentieth century, still lives in an archaic society, dominated by ancestral laws that order his life and behavior. The analysis of this behavior and the way the world is seen, revealed that the peasant differs from other social strata. He has a different philosophy of life, he understands spirituality and faith, so the experience of war is lived differently by the peasant, compared to the modern man. We wanted to see exactly what the peasant's behavior was in the face of death, wounds, the chaos of war; how he adapts to loss and suffering and how he explains such a tragedy to himself.

The image of death in the First World War has been analyzed by both Romanian and

foreign historians, so it is not a new topic. There are also studies on the Romanian peasant in the war: they present statistics and data on recruitment, the number of people mobilized, some describe the experiences on the front. We mention here works such as those of Ioan Bolovan (Bolovan, 2015), Gheorghe Negustor (Negustor, 2013), Bârlea Eugenia (Bârlea, 2004) or Keith Hitchins (Hitchins, 2017). But none of these studies focus on the peasant's mentality and how he sees the violent death in the war.

For this study, as we said, we used the works of Liviu Rebreanu - "Hora morții", "Catastrofa", "Calvarul" (Rebreanu, 1983) and of Mihail Sadoveanu - "Strada Lăpușneanu" (Sadoveanu, 1970) and "File sângerate. Povestiri și impresii de pe front" (Sadoveanu, 1917).

There are, of course, limitations to such a study: first, we will discuss strictly the image of death in the traditional mentality. Therefore, we will use information from the belief system existing in the villages, along with the behavior of the peasants in the face of this phenomenon, but we do not analyze the impact of death on the mentality of the Romanian peasant from a psychological point of view. The purpose of the article is to illustrate the image of death in the traditional mentality, not necessarily the psychology behind this phenomenon.

Secondly, considering that we are using literary sources, we will be especially careful with the information used. As in most literary sources, there is a degree of subjectivity that we must take into account: in the memories and front stories we have in mind, we find a lot of the opinions of the author who writes them. So, Sadoveanu presents a more stubborn peasant, more resistant to the horrors of war, while Rebreanu presents a peasant crushed by thoughts, more withdrawn from the war front, just as he was during the war. Considering this subjectivity, which can be present, in fact, in most historical sources, we will bring forward the image of death on the war front, as it is perceived by the Romanian peasant.

### **The reality of the war in Romania**

When we discuss about the First World War in Romania, we refer to a relatively short period of time, of only 16

months (August 1916 - December 1917). Although the Romanian country does not participate in the war throughout its duration, the period in which the Romanian soldiers are present on the war front is sufficient to make plenty of casualties and to mark the Romanian society.

Started in 1914, the war affects Romania indirectly, even if our country is not yet part of the belligerent states. The population is waiting for the inevitable: they expect to be asked to participate in the war, they expect the mobilization of troops on the front, leaving homes and families, maybe even an invasion of their country by foreign troops. All these are possibilities, starting with 1914; these are the things awaited by the inhabitants of Romania, whether they are from villages or cities. With the year 1916, the reality changes and what the citizens were waiting for with horror, takes place: Romania also enters this war of nations.

As for the village world during this period, it does not suffer much change. Villages in Romania, at that time, were relatively isolated and did not have easy access to information, so the reality of the war is seen differently here. The rural area, at the beginning of the 20th century, is where the vast majority of the country's population still lived; the main occupation being agriculture, we understand how the life of the peasant does not change as easily and as fast as that of the inhabitants of cities. However, in the time we are referring to, poverty and mortality are high in these isolated places. The life of the Romanian peasant is still reduced to working the land and surviving based on their crops: the possibilities were to sell the crops at farmers markets, or to store them for food; land and agriculture, along with shepherding, remain the main occupations in the village world.

In terms of modernization, villages are difficult to be reached; the life of the peasant is unchanged, over time. Telephony is almost non-existent in these areas, the only sources of information in a village being people and the word of mouth. Information came from newspapers and correspondence - usually the teacher or the priest kept the villagers informed about the happenings in the country. We present all this information because we want to create the framework for the outbreak

of the war in our country. The news is hard to reach in rural areas; therefore, the news of Romania's mobilization and entry into the war in 1917 reaches the village as a rumor, it is presented as a distant reality, not as a certainty.

With Romania's entry into the war, the reality in the villages suddenly changes. Recruitment will be massive here, because agriculture does not involve specialized labor, as work in a factory or in any type of industry does (Kisanovici, 2015). Of course, since most Romanian soldiers come from rural areas, the highest number of deaths and the highest number of wounded and disabled people were also recorded here.

Leaving the home, the village, the family is difficult; the main concern of those who left was the land and who was going to continue working it. This is an important concern because the land was the only means of income and food for the families left behind. Among the information that the soldiers on the front wanted to know from the families left at home – information found in the letters remaining from World War One – were concerning the state of the household, the fields, along with other news from the village. The statistics at the end of the war illustrate how hard the rural world was affected and how much the Romanian villages suffered: for example, in the village of Pojogeni, Gorj County, out of the 370 men recruited in the war, 120 died on the battlefield (Isaac, 1986, 7). Many of those who returned were wounded or maimed, so they could not work; some returned sick and perished shortly after their return.

The general picture of villages is desolating after the military conflict: destroyed households, village labor is now made up of women and children, the population is declining and mortality is rising - if before the war villages were threatened by malnutrition and famine, now things are much worse. In the war years and immediately after, hunger and disease exacerbated by lack of food are among the leading causes of death in the village.

On the front, the situation is much more difficult than that of the villages left without their men. After passing the military training, the soldiers are assigned to their posts and sent into action.

The Romanian army faced an extremely difficult situation during the war - from poor or non-existent hygiene conditions, to imminent danger and inconsistent food rations. All of these lead to the demoralization of the army, to the weakening of soldiers and deterioration of the general situation on the Romanian war front.

Soon, death becomes a common image, found not only on the front, but also in ditches, fields, roadsides etc.; as the troops marched, a large number of casualties followed. Many, weakened by hunger and disease, died on the roads, in ditches, their deaths being hardly noticed in the violence and turbulence of the war (Bembea, 2011). With the arrival of the cold weather, the clothing of soldiers also becomes a problem, especially in the context of long marches and retreats in 1917. The image of the Romanian soldier becomes that of a hungry man, cold and sick, but most importantly - who goes on further. Although there were many deserters (especially Romanian soldiers who fought in Transylvania and deserted so as not to have to fight against the Romanian army), one of the realities of the war is that the Romanian army endured. As we have said before, many soldiers were recruited from the peasantry; these people did not make conscientious objections against what they were ordered to do, they did not fight or contradict the information they received and obeyed the orders of their commanders. This loyalty can also be attributed to the ignorance about the world in which they were living and fighting, but despite the difficult conditions they had to endure, the soldiers were still marching.

The image of the war front was one of misery: from infectious diseases, to lice and dirty clothes (because there were no change uniforms). Typhoid fever appeared, which gave doctors and hospitals too many patients to treat - historical sources give the example of large units, such as the 4th Infantry Division, which at the beginning of the war had a staff of 336 officers and 16,361 soldiers. From this division, later in the war there are 50 victims of typhus and other associated diseases every day (Bembea, 2011, 12).

In the conditions of increased mortality, violence and misery on the front, we ask ourselves the question: how is this whole situation seen by the Romanian peasant, who

was thrown in the middle of these events, from a quiet and isolated world. We were also curious to see the peasant's position on the war: cowardice or courage? In the face of death and the chaos of war, does the peasant fight or flee? How is this phenomenon understood and what are the reactions in face of the inevitable?

### **Death on the front line: behavior and motivations**

War and death are two aspects that can only be considered together - war generates death. Man's reaction to death is one of the realities of war. Death at home, in one's own bed, due to a long illness, is greeted in a completely different way.

In the comfort of his home, the Romanian peasant mourns his dead for several days; he performs certain rituals, depending on his traditions and the area from which he comes. But regardless of faith or origin, the traditional man has time to say goodbye to those he has lost and to reconcile with the idea and image of death.

On the front line, however, the situation is completely different. The image of death changes - it is always violent and cruel. One of the main features of this phenomenon is that men do not have time to say goodbye to their comrades. The dead are not buried, they are left on the battlefields; war is not a time for mourning or for performing all the necessary rituals. Death on the war front comes quickly, often unknowingly and always violently. Soldiers resist through this conflict and continue the battle, despite all sorts of pressures: physically, they are weakened by disease and famine and mentally they are weakened by the sad image of abandoned houses, bombed villages, the corpses they leave behind. This image is very well described by G. Ibrăileanu:

*In the four months of the war, the battles in the mountains, in Dobrogea, in Oltenia and on the river Argeș had carried all those indistinguishable people as in a raging storm, without respite. Now, scattered on the roads of retreat, gathered by chance, bewildered, they walked like others, in funeral trains, searching for their lost units. This tragedy of an entire people could not be interpreted in their simple souls and in*

*their poor speech. But in moments like these, when the memory of the disaster struck them like a breath of death and the unknown, they stood motionless and with their eyes fixed, as on the vigil of a dead man. (Crohmălniceanu, 1972, 202).*

“Simple souls” and “poor speech” are exactly what helps soldiers from rural areas move forward: a simple prayer helps them, in their souls this practice means a lot. The “poor speech” makes them remain silent and obedient, move on and defeat their enemy.

Accepting death is part of the belief system of those soldiers that come from the villages of Romania - accepting the death of a loved one is done through a practice called “priveghi” – or a wake – where people stand by the dead ones and pray for their soul. Also, an important part in accepting death is remembrance (remembering the dead is one of the main actions that the living can do; by remembrance, the soul's journey to heaven is ensured, in the traditional mentality and in the Christian religion) and especially the religious service.

Of course, on the front line, these things are difficult to achieve, and the Romanian peasant must learn to accept the new reality and adapt. Therefore, there can be no discussion of war without discussing the image of death. In the case of the literature analyzed by us, we noticed two ways of seeing this phenomenon: the first is that of heroic death, seen as a sacrifice for the country and the nation - an image used mainly by propaganda materials - and another is that of accepting fate and implicitly, of accepting fatality.

### **Heroic death**

Mihail Sadoveanu is best known for his idyllic perspective on the rural universe, seen as traditional and perfect; his landscapes are flawless, his villages are home to the qualities of men and the characters he presents are resilient, hardworking, brave. It is not a utopian presentation of the Romanian village, but it is the conviction of the author. His opinion is that the village is the source of the positive human values and that the Romanian peasant is the successor of an ancient civilization. Sadoveanu even sees in the



peasant a brave character, able to face anything.

These values are also identified by the author on the front line; he sees in the Romanian peasant a brave soldier, who is heading for death without regrets and without fear. Sadoveanu sees in the Romanian peasant a fearless bison:

*A bison cornered by a pack of wolves in a forest, near a lake. He has a ruffled mane, angry and cruel eyes. He scrapes the ground with his hooves, blows hot steam on his nostrils and moans. Blood, entrails and split bodies surrounded him. But the beasts are many, they howl, they surround him, they harass him incessantly. There are more and more of them and the forest is roaring with their screams.*

*With his back in an old oak tree and his horned head ready to attack, the bison fully understood the danger. But he is the freest and greatest guest of the woods - and he must fall with dignity.*

*The pack, stubborn and loud, gives one last blow. They cornered him, jumped on his back. Then, shaking and roaring fiercely, the bison tensed its neck, jumped and crashed into the waves. He pushed his enemies to the bottom, snored on the shine, and sank. Then he climbed over to the shore, into the clearing, dripping with blood, but great and unyielding — in the final golden glow of the sunset.*

*Those who will come after us will remember this old bison - the coat of arms of this land - when they read about the war of our soldiers today. (Sadoveanu, 1917, 3-4)*

As we are shown in the citation above, the death of the Romanian soldier is primarily heroic - he fights thousands of enemies but manages to achieve his goal. One of the ways in which death is seen in the First World War is the heroic one; fallen soldiers on the front line are still remembered today in ceremonies and commemorations. Their heroic death led to the Great Union of 1918; this would be the positive image of death on the front, an image widely used in propaganda at the time.

Despite all the difficulties encountered, the soldiers had to be kept on the front line, they had to be motivated and helped to find the mechanisms necessary for the continuation of the march and the fight.

Therefore, among the main images used by propaganda literature but also in the speeches of officials, there is the image of this heroic death. The ownership of lands and political rights were also offered: King Ferdinand, at Răcăciuni, promised the soldiers - most of them being peasants - that they would receive “the right to own to a greater extent the land on which they fought” along with “a wide participation in political affairs.” (Bembea, 2011, 13-14).

The spirituality and faith of the Romanian soldiers were also appealed to - one of the most common phrases used in the language of propaganda is “God save the country!” and “Die or win!” (Negustor, 2013, 66). Therefore, along with heroic death and death presented as a sacrifice, this tragic end was probably also presented as a relief, as an impulse for courage. Like Sadoveanu's bison, the Romanian soldier is encouraged to fight for his country and to be confident that, if he does not survive, his sacrifice will not be in vain.

### The “inevitable” death

This association of terms may seem inappropriate, as death is always inevitable. But this inevitability is seen differently from the comfort of one's home, when the reality of death is still far away, and in an entire different from the front line of a war that causes thousands of casualties every day, a war from which the soldier cannot escape. In this case, death becomes both inevitable and real; for many soldiers who survived and saw their comrades fall in battle, death is seen colder, without so much fear. And after days, weeks, months of suffering, death is no longer rejected, often being the relief that soldiers expect. To support these statements, we offer a quote from Constantin Gane:

*“With what passion they fought at first, with how much will, - and later with how much despair! What desires drove them [the soldiers] before? They had left behind everything that is said to give a little happiness on earth: home, grandparents, wife and children, memories of the past and future hopes. And what can they expect for the future? Fatigue and hunger, pain of all kinds and then maybe, and then of course, a bullet in the forehead or chest, an unknown death in a trench*

*bottom! So what? They go on, singing in marches and singing in attacks, joking in fights as one jokes at a wedding, going to death with a smile on their face, facing danger with indifference, ignorance, often even with pleasure.” (Negustor, 2013, 66).*

We also notice here a temporal criterion on which we can discuss death: at the beginning of the war the soldiers are characterized by the urge to go to battle. Not witnessing events like a war, they do not have that fear of death and are not familiar with the precarious conditions existing on the front line. Towards the end of the war, however, death is greeted with open arms, as a much desired and long-awaited inevitability.

The peace and reconciliation men found in the face of the phenomenon of death also comes from spirituality. The Romanian peasant on the war front, after surpassing the shock of the first contact with the war and the violence, is described as being very at peace with his fate - in his daily and normal way of living, he lives a life governed by religion and fate. He finds refuge in his faith - according to popular belief, everything that happens in a man's life is “written” beforehand, God dictating man's fate.

Inevitable death is now much better understood - being “written” by God, man cannot resist in the face of his demise, therefore fear is useless.

### **The spiritual aspects of death**

Derived from the idea of the inevitability of death, the spiritual vision of death is very important when discussing about the mentality of the Romanian peasant. He sees death as part of his life and accepts it because of his faith. A large part of the way in which villagers see death is formed by the Christian religion in which the Romanian peasant is raised and the practices and rituals that help him to accept more easily the passing away of those around him.

On the front line, the idea of spirituality is even more accentuated as the uncertainty and inevitability of death increases. Alone on the battlefield, the peasant returns to divinity. In many of the letters that came from the front line or in the testimonies of the survivors, we see evidence that soldiers

pray in the face of death - whether it is their death or that of their comrades, they feel powerless, unable to help otherwise and prevent death, so they pray and converses with God. An example of such a conversation with God is given to us by Mihail Sadoveanu, from what he observed on the war front:

*(...) –Therefore, I, Mr. Lieutenant, go through this war without fear. Be what it may. If I were to fall and leave this world, I would appear at the throne of the kingdom, upstairs, and God would look at me and ask me: “Who are you?” “- I, God, am Dulham the soldier, from Balotești.” “And what did you do?” – “Well, Almighty God, I fought with the dirty enemies of this country... They came to trample our country. I fought alongside my brothers for justice. I fell on the border of my country.” Then God will caress my forehead full of sweat and blood, and He will bless me, and He will say to me, “Go, Dulham, to the kingdom of the righteous, and rest from all that you have suffered until the end of the ages...” And then I will rest, lieutenant; but until then we must do our duty. (...)” (Sadoveanu, 1917, 59-60).*

Private Dulham is no longer afraid of death – the lack of fear is due to his faith in God and in what is written for him. He entrusts his life to fate and accepts what will happen to him. He is convinced of the justice of the war - here we can also see that courage we mentioned above, from the beginning of the war, the heroism of the soldier, who is convinced that he is fighting the invaders of his country for a righteous cause. We see how, in the simple mentality of the country man, things are not complicated - the war is caused by the invaders who want to conquer Romania, and the soldiers are called to defend their lands. Death in war is thus likened to martyrdom - those who fall on the front are being blessed by God. This is such a strong belief that most soldiers in the rural world accept any fate: death in war is accepted as the peace that comes after this violent conflict, and survival is seen as a chance to see and help the families that were left behind.

Another example we encountered in Sadoveanu's literature illustrates the discussion imagined by the soldier Petrea Negruț with God and Jesus (Sadoveanu, 1917,

96), on the verge of his death. He confesses his sufferings and shows that the reasons why he went to war were for his love for the Romanian land. Discussions with the divinity appear as a common element in describing the image of death on the battlefield. These point to the strong connection between man and his faith. The divinity also plays a role in explaining the war: many of the soldiers in rural areas do not understand the reason for which this war is happening. For them, there is no other reason to go to battle than to conquer more land for one's crops or to defend yourself from attackers. In their simple mindset, the war in which they were all engaged is a divine punishment for their many sins. In the traditional mentality, everything has a divine purpose; all events take place because God allows it. This being said, war is a punishment and death appears, this time, as a sad but deserved fate. To exemplify, we offer a passage from Liviu Rebreanu's works:

*- Many of us have perished, the wounded man begins again.*

*-Many. And more will perish from now on! He is silent for a while and then follows: Many... Ilie Onu is gone. The bullet hit him in the head... And George al lui Bucur from Tihuța. And Dolga Mihai, you know him, that little boy from Bîrgău, who only did naughty things... They all went out!*

*-May God give them rest...*

*-Many, many... Dumitru Hrișca was hit right in the heart. He ran a little further, and then he collapsed like a boulder, he didn't say a word... Who knows all of the ones who died? ... The field is full of them. And the moats.*

*- God's wrath!*

*- The war, Ioane! ... That's the way it is: blood, death, pain, the nuisance of the world... (Rebreanu, 1983, 69).*

Apart from the image of war as "God's wrath", in the quote above we also notice something specific to the traditional Romanian behavior: the remembrance of the dead. One of the most common practices in traditional communities is to mention the dead, to talk about them, to mention them in prayers etc. The purpose of this practice is to ensure that they are remembered, to honor the memory of those who died. It is one of the only practices from the village world that can be performed

on the front line. Wakes, candle lighting, religious services are not possible – therefore, the Romanian peasant does not renounce this part of his behavior. By remembering those who died, he made sure that their death was not in vain, but also that he would not forget them.

## Conclusions

Death is one of the topics that can reveal many details about a community. The way we treat the deceased, the rituals we perform to help us move forward, the behaviors and reactions to this phenomenon are an important part of what characterizes a community. The traditional Romanian community is deeply spiritual; the course of daily life, the climate, the meteorological phenomena, the wars, the plagues, everything that happens in the life of the village is ordained by God, as far as the peasants are concerned. The divine plays an important role in the peasant mentality, representing the engine of daily life.

When it comes to war, religion is all the more important. The Romanian peasant exposed to such violence and tragedies is confronted with a harsh reality, which he must learn to accept. This is where the phenomenon of death comes into play, which we discussed at length in this article.

In the face of death on the front, the Romanian peasant is disarmed. He cannot prevent death, which is inevitable, especially in the context of a war like the First World War. Therefore, we see how he has to adapt and learn to accept and function in the reality of war.

We have as examples the hero peasant, for whom death is a sacrifice for the wellbeing of his nation and homeland, a sacrifice he is willing to make. Also, another face of death on the front line was accepting that to die is inevitable. Another part we elaborated in this study is that of the spirituality of the traditional man; the spiritual part is very important when we talk about the traditional mentality.

The Romanian peasants "reconcile" with this phenomenon and learn to accept the death of themselves and their comrades. The general attitude is to turn to prayer, to God, to the sacred, even there, in the middle of the war.

What does this behavior tell us? Even in the face of violent death, the Romanian peasant maintains his faith, which is like an anchor, that keeps him linked to the world from which he came. Through spirituality, the Romanian peasant manages to face the reality of war and to accept his fate. Also, through spirituality and respecting the ancient behaviors that have been left from generation to generation, those who remain at home accept the death of their loved ones, either on the front line or once returned home.

This article analyzed, therefore, the way in which the Romanian peasant sees and behaves in the face of death, during the participation in the First World War. The literature of Mihail Sadoveanu and Liviu Rebreanu provided the necessary examples for this article and illustrated the sacred and tragic character of death on the front.<sup>1</sup>

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## DEATH COMES FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE OCEAN

**Tudor UREA**

PhD Student

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences

E-mail: tudor\_urea@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1912, The Royal Mail Ship Titanic, the largest liner in the world, left on its maiden voyage from Southampton (Great Britain) to New York (United States of America). On the night of April 14<sup>th</sup>, at 11:40 P.M., after four days on her journey, the Titanic struck an iceberg. The news of the sinking of the largest and most luxurious transatlantic liner ever built travelled the world. The press all around the world reported the unfortunate event, which would become the most read news of 1912 and which would make the Titanic a true legend in time. The terrifying testimonies of the survivors that would appear over time in the written press and what audio-visual, largely inspired writers, screenwriters, directors. The Royal Mail Ship Titanic has been featured in numerous films, TV productions, and notable TV episodes. From an immense human tragedy, the Titanic disaster has become a modern folk tale. And, like all folk tales, the way we understand what is happening, in fact, is altered by the way the disaster was told as soon as the dark waves of the Atlantic swallowed the ship. Through size, luxury, and technology, the Titanic became the symbol of the second industrial revolution, of the progress of human society. But the sinking of the Titanic becomes a symbol of the destructive power of the industrial age. The loss of the Titanic is often seen as prefiguring the First World War as the final act in the slow demise of the technologized utilitarian vision of speed and mechanical efficiency, which characterized world economic growth since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. After more than 100 years since the sinking of the Titanic, the subject remains of current interest.*

**Keywords:** *Titanic, iceberg, disaster, wreck, sinking*

**Rezumat:** *La 10 aprilie 1912 RMS Titanic, cel mai mare pachebord construit vreodată va pleca în călătoria sa inaugural de la Southampton (Marea Britanie) la New York (Statele Unite ale Americii). În noaptea de 14 aprilie, la ora 23:40, după patru zile în călătorie, pachebotul izbește un aisberg. Vestea scufundării celei mai mari și mai luxoase linii transatlantice construite vreodată va face ocolul lumii. Presa din întreaga lume a scris despre nefericitul evenimentul, care va deveni cea mai citită știre din anul 1912 și care va face din Titanic o adevărată legendă în timp. Mărturiile terifiante ale supraviețuitorilor care vor apărea de-a lungul timpului în presa scrisă și ceea audio-vizuală, vor inspira scriitori, scenariști, regizori. RMS Titanic a fost prezentat în numeroase filme, filme TV și episoade TV notabile. Dintr-o mare tragedie umană, dezastrul Titanic a devenit o poveste populară modernă și, la fel ca toate poveștile populare, modul în care înțelegem ce se întâmplă în fapt este alterat de modul în care ni s-a spus despre dezastru, imediat ce valurile întunecate ale Atlanticului au înghițit vasul. Titanicul prin dimensiuni, lux și tehnologie a devenit simbolul celei de-a doua revoluții industriale, simbolul progresului societății umane. Dar, scufundarea Titanicului devine un simbol al puterii distructive a epocii industriale. Pierderea Titanicului este adesea privită ca prefigurând Primul Război Mondial, ca fiind actul final în starea lentă a viziunii utilitariste tehnologice despre viteză și eficiență mecanică care a caracterizat creșterea economică mondială de la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea. La mai bine de 100 de ani de la scufundarea Titanicului, subiectul rămâne de interes.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Titanic, iceberg, dezastru, epava, scufundare*

### Introduction

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1912, The Royal Mail Ship Titanic, the largest liner in the world, left on its maiden voyage from Southampton (Great Britain) to New York (United States of America).

The passengers of the cruise ship were a mixture of wealthy people, who occupied the first-class luxury apartments, and poor immigrants, who left for the land of promise and who occupied the third-class cabins.

On the night of April 14<sup>th</sup>, at 11:40 P.M., after four days on her journey, the Titanic struck an iceberg. The impact noise was compared to “the tearing of calico, nothing more.” The collision was fatal, and soon the frozen water swallowed the ship forever. From that fateful night, The Royal Mail Ship Titanic went down in history.

The wreck of the largest liner became the subject of assiduous searches, all failed. Although it was the largest ship in history, it lay in an unknown place. It was not until 73 years later that the wreck of the Titanic was discovered, somewhere in the cold waters of the North Atlantic at a depth of 3,800 meters.

Just a few months after the sinking of The Royal Mail Ship Titanic, the Astors, and Guggenheims, luxury passengers on the liner, took the first steps to bring the wreckage to the surface and, with it, the jewelry and precious goods swallowed by the cold waters of the North Atlantic.

The search for the immense wealth sunk with the Titanic has excited the imagination of many treasure hunters. These daredevils would come up with equally fanciful solutions.

The incredible discovery of the wreck of the Titanic in 1985 was believed a purely scientific endeavor. But the story we thought we knew was just the tip of the iceberg. Is finding the wreck related to the height of the Cold War? The man who discovered the wreck of the Titanic, Robert Ballard, was a secret agent on a mission in the interest of the US Navy. His mission was to investigate the disappearance of two American nuclear submarines, Thresher and Scorpio, which had been missing, during the Cold War, since the 1960s. Ballard had only been allowed to search for the Titanic if he had time left at the end of his mission.

In 2018, speaking to CNN about the untold story of the Titanic discovery, Robert Ballard said:

*“When we found the Titanic, we naturally were very excited, because it was a tough job. We got it, scoring the winning goal at the buzzer.”*  
(Levenson, 2018)

Since Ballard’s discovery, many submarines have managed to retrieve a lot of objects from the Titanic.

The wreckage’s photos show that it is devoured by rust much faster than previously thought. It seems to be a bacterium. Will The Royal Mail Ship Titanic, the largest liner in history, turn

into a colossal rust stain on the ocean floor? Only the future can give an answer.

### **The most read news of the year. The sinking of the Titanic**

The news of the sinking of the largest and most luxurious transatlantic liner ever built travelled the globe. The press around the world reported the unfortunate event, which would become the most read news of 1912 and would make the Titanic a true legend in time.

The Royal Mail Ship Titanic was one of the fascinating stories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its sad story marked the imagination of writers, journalists, but also of set screenwriters and directors. The generation of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century journalists on both sides of the Atlantic would make the sinking of the liner the news of the century. The first information created a lot of confusion among the journalists of the most important American, Canadian, and British newspapers.

The Titanic sank, swallowed by the cold waters of the North Atlantic, and with it, 1,500 people lost their lives. The world was amazed to discover that the Titanic, the largest and most luxurious liner that ever existed, an engineering marvel, could not stand the force of nature.

The Titanic disaster, based on an extensive collection of contemporary newspapers, offers a rare understanding of the tragedy in which more than 1,500 passengers and members of the crew died, from the time the news broke for the first time to the findings of American and British investigations a few months later.

Newspapers hungry for amazing news provided new opportunities to see the story from different angles.

The first news about the sinking of the Titanic was the radiograms and the lights of the signal missiles transmitted by the liner hit by the iceberg and taken over by the ships near the disaster.

In the first stage, the news of the disaster was confusing. The newspapers on the East Coast of North America will say that no passenger of the Titanic lost their lives and that it was towed to port.

On Monday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1912, *The Vancouver Daily World*’s edition printed on its front cover: “Titanic Sinking; No Lives Lost.” American newspapers pick up the same news. The front page of the *Daily Mail* appeared on the April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1912,

headlined the statement: “No lives lost” (Dearlove, 2012).

Christopher Sullivan, an editor on the features desk at Associated Press in New York, told Journalism.co.uk:

*“In the course of the wireless chatter someone asked the question: Are the Titanic passengers safe? [...]”* (Dearlove, 2012)

*Shortly after came back the answer:*

*“The ship is being towed to Halifax and everyone is ok.”* (Dearlove, 2012)

*Christopher Sullivan comments:*

*“That second transmission was accurate, except it didn’t refer to the Titanic.”* (Dearlove, 2012)

On the same day, *The New York Times*’ front page included the more conservative “probably 1,250 perish” but also provided a partial list of the survivors. *The Washington Post*’s front page printed “One thousand eight hundred souls lost,” a quote taken from a radio transmission from the Titanic’s sister ship Olympic.

The general state of confusion spread by newspapers on the East Coast of North America lasted until the first survivors of the catastrophe, about 700 people arrived in the port of New York aboard the first ship to reach the scene of the disaster, Carpathia, called by the chronicles of the time “the ship of widows.” This happened three days after the sinking of the Titanic.

*The Daily Sketch*, a British national tabloid newspaper, on its April 16<sup>th</sup> edition reported that:

*“Six hundred and fifty-five of the Titanic’s passengers and crew are known to have been saved (...). It is feared that the others have been lost. (...) Passengers were put off in lifeboats, and fortunately the sea was calm. They were taken up by the liners without difficulty (...). This is the first disaster of such awful magnitude that has befallen a mammoth liner in the open sea.”* (Bryceson, 1997, 10)

*The Washington Post* devoted the whole front page of its April 17<sup>th</sup> edition to the disaster (\*\*\*, 2012a). The newspapers were beginning to introduce the human face of the disaster to the reading public, just as *The Washington Post* was

talking about the “great heroism shown in face of death” as the ship went down.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* dedicated the second page of its April 17<sup>th</sup> issue to the Titanic liner. The newspaper shows that there were not enough lifeboats on the Titanic, so not everyone could be rescued.

*“Enough is already known of the Titanic disaster to establish the awful fact that the lives of about two thirds of her passengers and crew were sacrificed for no better reason than that the lifeboats and life raft equipment provided for this most pretentious of ships was so meagre as to be barely adequate to the needs of the remaining one third aboard her, who were actually rescued. The appalling casualty has brought to public notice the even more disquieting fact that in thus providing facilities inadequate in such an emergency the owners of the Titanic were complying fully with British regulation governing the subject though it is conceded that these admiralities’ regulations are obsolete and were framed to provide for vessels of a maximum size of 10,000 tons.”* (\*\*\*, 1912b)

As the full dimension of the disaster became clear, journalists started to interview the survivors and to write about the final moments of the wrecked ship.

Newspapers on the West Coast of America took over the news about Titanic published in New York and Washington newspapers. *The San Francisco Call* will take over from the East Coast press the interviews that appeared the day before with some of the survivors of the disaster. The article published on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1912, under the title “Heroes of Titanic Faced Death Smiling and Aiding Others,” contains the testimonies of Titanic survivors who speak about Major Archibald Butt and Colonel John Jacob Astor.

Miss Young, a survivor of the disaster and a former teacher to the children of former President Roosevelt, said about Major Archibald Butt:

*“The last person to whom I spoke on board the Titanic was Archie Butt, (...). Then he stepped to the deck of the steamer and the boat T was in was lowered to the water. It was the last boat to leave: of this I am perfectly certain. And I know that I am the last of those who were saved to whom Archie Butt spoke. As our boat lowered*



*and left the side of the steamer Archie was still standing at the rail, looking down at me. His hat was raised and the same old, genial, brave smile was on his face. The picture he made he stood there, hat in hand, brave and smiling, is one that will always linger in my memory.” (\*\*\*, 1912c)*

The story of the richest passenger aboard The Royal Mail Ship Titanic, who was thought to be among the wealthiest people in the world at that time, Colonel John Jacob Astor, was related on *The San Francisco Call* in the same edition by George A. Hardy of Brooklyn, a survivor of the disaster:

*“When Colonel Astor had assisted his tearful young wife and her maid into a lifeboat he tried to put in a boy, but the sailors refused to let him in, saying that the room then was only for girl children. Colonel Astor then picked up a woman’s hat from the deck and placed it on the boy’s head and brought him back to the boat. He said: ‘Here, little girl, climb in,’ and the officers of the ship let the boy through. As the boat was lowered away Colonel Astor stood on the deck waving goodbye.” (\*\*\*, 1912c)*

News of the Titanic disaster would reach the farthest corners of the world. Newspapers in Australia and New Zealand covered news no older than one day from the American and British newspapers.

Even Romanian newspapers paid particular attention to the sinking of the Titanic. In April, *Gazeta ilustrată* announced that:

*“The whole world was horrified when he learned of the catastrophic disaster of the transatlantic liner Titanic. The frightening news of the sinking of the gigantic floating city, which was on its first voyage to New York, spread like wildfire all over the globe where the spark of the telegraph could penetrate!” (Kaliani, 2020, 1)*

More than two-thirds of the people on the Titanic lost their lives, still one of the worst peacetime disasters at sea. Years passed, but the sinking of the Titanic remained a hot topic for the print and audio-visual media. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1936, BBC Radio broadcasted an interview with Commander Charles Herbert Lightoller, the second officer on board The Royal Mail Ship Titanic and the most senior member of the crew to survive the Titanic disaster.

*“A bit later the forward funnel guys carried away and the funnel weighing perhaps 50 or 60 tones fell down with a crash on the water (...). Next thing I remember I was still hanging on to a bit of a rope attached to the raft but some 30 or 40 yards away from the ship. The wash of the falling funnel had evidently picked us up, raft and all, and flung us clear of the ship all together. Several of scrambled up onto the slippery bottom of the raft and it was from there I saw the Titanic sink.” (BBC Radio, 1936)*

In 1957 BBC television broadcasted an incendiary show of interviews with Titanic survivors. The show was moderated by Peter West, a BBC presenter, and sports commentator. The survivors were: Edith Russell, James Witter, Walter Hust, Gershon Cohen.

The last interview with a Titanic disaster survivor was in 1993. Eva Hart was only 7-year old when the Titanic sank.

*“The sounds of people drowning are something that I can not describe to you, and neither can anyone else. It’s the most dreadful sound and there is a terrible silence that follows it.” (Hart, 1993)*

The Titanic disaster has continued to afloat in the public’s imagination over time, and the media, written, visual or audio, have found new news in the sinking of the Titanic and in the testimonies of survivors that has kept the public interested in the subject. Moreover, over time, the Titanic has become a powerful symbol in human consciousness.

Human history has faced collective tragedies that are sometimes difficult to imagine. This is also the case with The Royal Mail Ship Titanic. The attitude towards death has always been a topic of interest to the public. And the flea reacted in different ways, from placid indifference to a morbid interest, from compassion to altruism.

### **Survivors’ testimonies, video documentaries and oral history in films**

The tragedy of the Titanic on the night of April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1912, is one of the most captivating events in human history. It is a story about how easily human inventiveness can fail in a short meet with the forces of nature. It is a story about how

human beings react to the danger, some calmly accepting death, others fighting to the last breath.

The terrifying testimonies of the survivors that have appeared over time in the written press and audio-visual media would largely inspire writers, screenwriters, directors.

The RMS Titanic has been featured in numerous films, TV productions, and notable TV episodes. This list includes the 1943 German Nazi propaganda film *Titanic*, filmed on board the German liner SS Cap Arcona, the 1958 British drama based on the eponymous book, regarded as one of the most historically accurate Titanic disaster films, *A Night to Remember*, and the 1997 American romantic epic film *Titanic*, which combines fictional main characters with some portrayals of passengers and crew based on historical figures.

Although a production of German Nazi propaganda, the 1943 film *Titanic* subordinates the plot and fictional characters to the historical characters on board the ship. So, a fictitious German First Officer on the Titanic became the hero.

Steve Cramer, in his paper “Neoliberal and Social Democratic Versions of History, Class and Ideology in James Cameron’s *Titanic* and Roy Baker’s *A Night to Remember*,” remarks that:

*“The 1943 ‘Nazi’ Titanic (Herbert Selpin, Werner Klingler) which saw the death of its original director, Selpin, in Gestapo custody before the film was completed, centred on the moral decrepitude of the upper-crust group of stock-market speculators occupying first class. These characters are condemned by a very Aryan German First Officer implausibly included in the crew of the Titanic as a last-minute replacement for a missing British officer. The experience of steerage passengers, who barely appear in the film, is neglected.”* (Cramer, 2017, 110)

It was filmed on board the German liner SS Cap Arcona, which would have the same tragic fate as the Titanic. It would be sunk by the Royal Air Force, with civilian loss of life overtaking that of the Titanic.

Of the many films about the Titanic sinking, only Roy Baker’s *A Night to Remember* (1958) and James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997) seem to approach the issue in some intensity. Each of these films pretended the “authenticity” and historical fidelity

to the events of the last voyage of the Titanic and, in particular, to its final hours.

About the British film *A Night to Remember*, all critics agree that it presents the most accurate image of The Royal Mail Ship Titanic disaster. It was based on the book with the same name by Walter Lord, which depicts events through the eyes of multiple individuals, violating simple chronology to present an overlapping series of narratives.

Francis Bosley Crowther Jr., an American journalist and film critic for *The New York Times*, dedicated an article on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1958, to the British film *A Night to Remember*.

*“Even though the tragic story of the sinking of the Titanic is an old and oft-repeated one, it still makes for tense, exciting and supremely awesome drama on the screen. In the British-made film, A Night to Remember, (...), it is given as fine and convincing an enactment as anyone could wish – or expect. Based on material assembled in a recent book of the same name by Walter Lord, with certain additions, subtractions and reinforcements of some dramatic points, it puts the story of the great disaster in simple human terms and yet brings it all into a drama of monumental unity and scope.”* (Crowther, 1958)

Mrs Sylvia Lighttoller, the widow of the late Commander Charles Herbert Lightoller, the second officer on board The Royal Mail Ship Titanic and the most senior member of the crew to survive the Titanic disaster, gave an interview to *The Guardian* and she told that: “The film is really the truth and has not been embroidered.” (Lighttoller, 1958)

As Jeffrey Richards comments of *A Night to Remember* in his book *The Definitive Titanic Film: “A Night to Remember”*:

*“From the outset, the watchword of Baker and MacQuitty was ‘authenticity.’ The poster promoting the film was to proclaim in capital letters ‘As it really happened.’ Unlike the previous sound film versions, this was not to be a romantic melodrama; it would be a docu-drama.”* (Richards, 2003, 31)

Cameron’s film meticulously recreated life on the Titanic. He uses one of the few photographs made by an Irish priest, Frank Browne, of one boy who was playing on the deck of the Titanic’s first-

class boat. Speaking of historical accuracy, Cameron stated:

*"Where the facts are clear we have been absolutely rigorous in restaging events. Where they are unclear, I have made my own choices, a few of which may be controversial to students of Titanic history."*

After 20 Cameron films, Jensen speaks in an article of the impression that the film left to a great-grandson of passengers Isidor and Ida Straus:

*"While Paul Kurzman, great-grandson of passengers Isidor and Ida Straus, says he was stunned by the accuracy of Cameron's picture, the filmmaker admits he took some creative liberties, which he deeply regrets. He says he wasn't always sensitive to how his choices would impact the characters' families."* (Jensen, 2019)

Cameron's *Titanic* focuses on the fictional love story of Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Rose (Kate Winslet). Cameron's version favors the show, relying more on the heart than the history.

The film takes into account a series of events which happening on the Titanic on the night of April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1912. These events were proven after the ship sank by investigations, testimonies of witnesses and survivors, research conducted in more than one century following the disaster.

If the main characters in Cameron's film are fictional, it should be mentioned that some of the secondary characters are real. Victor Garber plays Thomas Andrews, the chief designer of the Titanic. Just like in the film, while the ship was sinking, the real Andrews was last seen staring at a painting of the Titanic on a wall in the first-class smoking room, where he is believed to have died. Kathy Bates plays Molly Brown, a first-class passenger who helped people get on the lifeboats, kept them calm, and even tried to get the lifeboats back and forth people.

Much of *Titanic* is based on theory rather than certainty. This is due in part to Cameron's narrative decisions. The film depicts third-class passengers being forcibly barricaded below deck, preventing them from reaching the upper decks and lifeboats. According to the British Inquiry Report of 1912, the Titanic did not lock passengers below deck. The gates were in accordance with American immigration laws, separating emigrants in third

class so that when they arrived in New York, the ship could drop them off at Ellis Island to be processed before docking in Manhattan. The report also claims that many did not want to leave or part with their luggage when the boat was sinking.

*"It had been suggested before the Enquiry that the third class passengers had been unfairly treated; that their access to the Boat deck had been impeded, and that when at last they reached that deck the first and second class passengers were given precedence in getting places in the boats. There appears to have been no truth in these suggestions. It is no doubt true that the proportion of third class passengers saved falls far short of the proportion of the first and second class, but this is accounted for by the greater reluctance of the third class passengers to leave the ship, by their unwillingness to part with their baggage, by the difficulty in getting them up from their quarters, which were at the extreme ends of the ship, and by other similar causes."* (British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry Report, 1912d)

We see the dramatic effect over historical accuracy in the portrayal of Bruce Ismay, president of the company that built the Titanic. Ismay survived but was considered a coward and lived in shame afterwards. Some survivors claimed that he boarded the first lifeboat, while others say that he was ordered to board one by the chief officer. In *Titanic*, Ismay (Jonathan Hyde) pressures the captain to go faster so that the ship will arrive early in New York and get good press.

*"As to the attack on Mr. Bruce Ismay, it resolved itself into the suggestion that, occupying the position of Managing Director of the Steamship Company, some moral duty was imposed upon him to wait on board until the vessel foundered. I do not agree. Mr. Ismay, after rendering assistance to many passengers, found 'C' collapsible, the last boat on the starboard side, actually being lowered. No other people were there at the time. There was room for him and he jumped in. Had he not jumped in he would merely have added one more life, namely, his own, to the number of those lost."* (British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry Report, 1912d)

In the purely Romanian style, the sinking of the Titanic is treated in a melodramatic register. The Romanian film *Titanic Vals*, released in 1965, written and directed by Paul Călinescu, after the

theatre play by Tudor Muşatescu, parodied the sinking of the Titanic, some characters classifying the event as a “splendid catastrophe.”

### **The Royal Mail Ship Titanic – unprecedented in luxury, size, and technology**

The shock of the sinking of the Titanic was great because The Royal Mail Ship Titanic was considered the ultimate passenger liner - unprecedented in luxury, size, and technology.

Construction of the Titanic began on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1909. The Royal Mail Steamer Titanic was an expression of the rivalry that existed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century between competing transportation companies.

The Royal Mail Ship Titanic was the largest human-made passenger ship of its time. It was the largest man boat ever built by man. The size of it was impressive: 269 meters long and 28 meters wide. Taking over 26 months to construct, the estimated costs of building the Titanic was \$7,500,000, based on inflation and modern exchange rates. This would bring the 2016 cost equivalent to roughly \$166,000,000.

The Titanic was the epitome of modern technology, a symbol of engineering, safety, and luxury. Engineers had designed the Titanic with a double steel hull and 16 separate compartments capable of being sealed off from one another in the event of an emergency. Believing the Titanic was the model of safety, the ship was promoted as being “unsinkable.”

A hundred years after the loss of The Royal Mail Ship Titanic, Gordon Day, IEEE President – the world’s largest technical professional organization, declared that:

*“In 1912, the Titanic was the pinnacle of maritime technology. (...) It had the most advanced shipboard wireless available and, were it not for that, few if any passengers would have survived. Had nearby ships been similarly equipped, and had it been the custom to operate communications systems around the clock, more passengers would probably have been saved.”* (PR Newswire, 2012).

The real Titanic was an amazing technical achievement, but if she had not met with a sinister disaster, it would soon have been superseded by other performance of technology. The Royal Mail Steamer Titanic had an electrical control panel that

controlled all of the fans, generators, and lighting on the ship, the condensers that turned steam back into water. There also were four elevators on the Titanic. But, the supreme technical glory on the Titanic was the wireless communications setup for Morse Code, the most powerful setup in use at the time.

Considering the White Star Line’s reputation for superior comfort and luxury, the RMS Titanic had wide facilities for first-class passengers.

The huge size of Titanic allowed it to have unusually vast rooms, and to be equipped with the latest technologies. So, the comfort, hygiene, and convenience made The RMS Titanic the most luxury liner. Staterooms and public spaces decorated in different styles show attention for artistic detail. The first-class suites were richly decorated in various period styles, including Adam, Louis XIV, XV, and XVI, French Empire, Georgian, Jacobean and Italian Renaissance (O’Donnell 1997, 85). The pieces of furniture and the marquetry made from exotic imported woods such as Mahogany, Sycamore, Walnut, Oak, and Satinwood. The grand staircase was one of the most impressive features on board the Titanic and the center of first-class activity. Each level was constructed in solid English oak with sweeping curves and the surrounding spaces panelled in the sleek neoclassical William and Mary style. The balustrades displayed distinctive wrought-iron grilles with ormolu swags in the style of Louis XIV (Tibballs, 1997, 36-37). The Titanic featured numerous sporting and relaxation facilities, including a gymnasium, Turkish baths, private massage room, swimming pool, squash court, and also the gathering places: reception room, lounge, smoking room, reading room, promenade deck.

### **Titanic between myth and symbol**

From an immense human tragedy, the Titanic disaster has become a modern folk tale. And, like all folk tales, the way we understand what is happening is altered by the way the disaster was told as soon as the dark waves of the Atlantic swallowed the ship. Titanic was the largest moving object on earth, sailing between the two wealthiest nations, which foundered on its maiden voyage with massive loss of life among rich and poor alike. It was the ultimate news story in an era when news’ newfound ability to race around the world instantaneously was in its infancy.

More than a hundred years after the disaster, the Titanic persists in the public's imagination. Ward considers that this is due to:

*"(...) the disaster happened beyond the usual confines of time and space. It took place in neither the old world nor the new, but in a liminal space between the two. Having vanished below the horizon west of Ireland, the Titanic never reappeared. Instead, unseen in the witching hour of a moonless night, for the eternity between the collision and the final plunge, her passengers and crew found themselves poised between life and death."* (Ward, 2012, vi)

Through size, luxury, and technology, the Titanic became the symbol of the second industrial revolution, the symbol of the progress of human society. But the sinking of the Titanic becomes a symbol of the destructive power of the industrial age.

The loss of the Titanic is often seen as prefiguring the First World War as the final act in the slow demise of the technologized utilitarian vision of speed and mechanical efficiency, which characterized world economic growth since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Duffy, 2009, 66).

Dr. Kenneth J. Heineman, head of the History Department at Angelo State University, said that:

*"Two years later, the outbreak of the First World War in Europe upended all notions of human progress and left in its wake a ruin of death, violent revolution and psychological despair."* (ASU News, 2012)

The Titanic can be compared to the "Ship of Fools," an allegory about a ship with a dysfunctional or non-existent crew. The parable is intended to represent the governance issues that prevail in a political system that is not based on expertise. The whole event of sinking consists of an endless chain of absurdities, inexplicable, and tragic facts.

### **The death on the Titanic**

After the sinking of the Titanic, transatlantic liners searched for the floating corpses of the victims in the cold waters of the Atlantic.

On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1912, the German liner Bremen reached the zone where Titanic sunk. Mrs Johanna Stunke, a first-cabin passenger, described the scene from the liner's rail.

*"We passed within a hundred feet of the southernmost drift of the wreckage, and looking down over the rail we distinctly saw a number of bodies so clearly that we could make out what they were wearing and whether they were men or women."* (Marshall, 2009)

It is said that death does not choose. And in the case of the Titanic, death did not choose. The macabre images of corpses floating in ocean water described by Mrs Johanna Stunke are a testimony to the Titanic disaster:

*"We saw one woman in her night dress, with a baby clasped closely to her breast. (...) There was another woman, fully dressed, with her arms tight around the body of a shaggy dog. The bodies of three men in a group, all clinging to one steamship chair, floated near by, and just beyond them were a dozen bodies of men, all of them encased in life-preservers, clinging together as though in a last desperate struggle for life. We couldn't see, but imagined that under them was some bit of wreckage to which they all clung when the ship went down, and which didn't have buoyancy enough to support them."* (Marshall, 2009)

There were marked sex and social class differences in survival among passengers on the Titanic.

The proportion of third-class passengers saved falls far short of the proportion of the first and second-class, but the British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry Report gave only brief attention to the social disproportions. The inquiry concluded that the social class differences in survival derived in large part from the behaviour of the passengers.

Some of the ship's most famous passengers who became the victims of the Titanic disaster are the millionaire John Jacob Astor, the architect of the Titanic, Thomas Andrews, the mining magnate Benjamin Guggenheim, and the steel magnate George Dennick Wick.

It can be said that death on the Titanic did not choose. Rich or poor, man or woman, child or old, they all paid with their lives equally.

## **Epilogue**

After more than 100 years since the sinking of the Titanic, the subject certainly remains of current interest due to the image of what the Titanic meant, but especially to the symbolism of its sinking.

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## **“REVOLUTION MEANS CONFUSION”. SERGIO LEONE’S TAKE ON THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION**

**Marius Adrian SCHEIANU**

PhD Candidate

“George Emil Palade” University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology of Târgu Mureș

E-mail: adi4real@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *Mexican Revolution, was a multi-sided conflict, and a highly confusing and traumatic period in the history of Mexico, beginning in 1910 and involving very broadly, an uprising against an authoritarian dictatorship that turned into a bloody civil war that ravaged the impoverished country for more than a decade. The Revolution was one of the world’s major conflicts to be captured by film. Over the years the image of the Revolution made a lasting impression on film fiction. In the early ’60s of the last century in Italy a subgenre of Western movies emerged. Branded soon by the film critics and the audience as “Spaghetti Westerns” these types of movies were a composite of several global influences. With the Hollywood western, and the American mythology illustrated here, as the top one. Some Italians film-makers used films set in revolutionary Mexico as vehicles for political commentaries on different topics. The most known among them is, no doubt, Sergio Leone who approached the subject in one of his most overlooked films. The story of an unlikely partnership between an Irish revolutionary and an amoral and selfish Mexican bandit, with an increasing fervor towards the revolution. The coming together of two disparate figures at the same place and same time in history is set against the background of one of the first phases of the Mexican Revolution. With this movie, Leone breaks with the tradition of the Italian political western and the uncertain approach to violence and the legitimacy of armed resistance featured there.*

**Keywords:** *Mexico, revolution, Italian western, cinema, Sergio Leone, violence*

**Rezumat:** *Revoluția Mexicană a reprezentat un conflict complex și o perioadă profund traumatizantă și confuză în istoria mexicană. Începută în 1910 ca o revoltă împotriva unui regim dictatorial s-a transformat într-un sângeros război civil care a bântuit țara pentru mai bine de un deceniu. Revoluția a fost printre primele conflicte majore care au fost surprinse pe peliculă. De-a lungul anilor imaginea Revoluției a făcut o impresie puternică în filmul de ficțiune. La începutul anilor ’60 ai secolului trecut în Italia s-a născut un sub-gen al filmului Western. Etichetat de criticii de film și de public ca „western spaghetti”, acest gen de filme fiind o sumă de diferite influențe având în prim plan western-ul hollywoodian și mitologia americană ce o ilustra. Unii cinești italieni au folosit Mexicul drept vehicul pentru a transmite comentarii politice pe diverse teme. Cel mai cunoscut dintre aceștia este, fără îndoială, Sergio Leone care a abordat subiectul într-unul dintre filmele, relativ ignorate, ale sale. Filmul spune povestea unui improbabil parteneriat dintre un revoluționar irlandez și un bandit mexican amoral și egoist, dar cu o feroare crescândă față de revoluție. Asocierea celor două personaje diferite are loc pe fundalul uneia dintre fazele de început ale Revoluției Mexicane. Cu acest film, Leone rupe tradiția western-ului politic italian și cu controvesata abordare a violenței și a rezistenței armate comune acelor filme.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Mexic, revoluție, western italian, cinema, Sergio Leone, violență*

### **Mexican Revolution, historical coordinates and inspiration for cinema**

The Mexican Revolution is considered the first major social revolution of the XX

Century and, one of the most important of such kind, at least due to the internal impact that crucially changed the historical, economical and social aspects of Mexico throughout the last

century. Since its basic inception 1910, due to the overthrow of the dictator Porfirio Diaz, the intensity and the unexpected duration, of the conflict, along with the mobilization of different social classes, determined Mexico set apart from the other internal conflicts and frequent coups d'etat which tore Latin America apart since its independence. For 10 years the revolution passed through different stages, to these days, its impact it's still unclear to most of the general public outside Mexico. As a matter of fact, the tense situation in Europe on the brink of the First World War determined that the events from the most populated Hispanic country difficult to be barely known and understood by people in Europe, for instance. The fact that there was no centrally planned bid for power as with the Russian Revolution of 1917, added to the confusing nature of this era. The apparent chaos of switching alliances and the speed they were made and broken, the good ones became the bad ones and so on, contributed to the fact that the dynamic of the changes in Mexico seemed far from being clear so it created confusion. By the time, the Mexican Revolution started to be implemented as a major social transformation, the Russian Revolution started in 1917, so, at international level, it has been somehow overshadowed.

Even though the unrest that Mexico was going through has been carefully watched in the United States of America, by the American authorities as well as the public eye, the fact was mainly due to the geographical proximity and also the diplomatic, economic and political interests upon the southern border. To the Mass Media, the Mexican Revolution presented all the ingredients to catch the attention of the international audience: bloody confrontations, rigorously ruled military campaigns, guerilla fights, foreign interventions, conspiracy theories, charismatic and strong character leaders. That situation was especially exploited by Mexico's northern neighbor. Thus, the Mexican Revolution was one of the first conflicts that were captured by the invention of the Lumiere brothers: the cinema.

Besides the mercenaries, adventurers, and journalists, film operators from the United States and elsewhere arrived in Mexico (Mraz, 2009, 8). So, due to them, the images they

succeeded to capture during the military clashes, revolutionary Mexico's image is known all around the world, making a strong and lasting impression on how was received and then illustrated in all kinds of social environments, the complex conflict here.

Even some of the Mexican revolutionaries sensed and exploited the propagandistic potential of the cinema. So, the best known of them, and also the most familiar image of those involved into the revolution, Francisco "Pancho" Villa signs a contract with a North American film company to follow him during his military campaign in the North area of Mexico (Krauze, 1997, 311).

Soon, the Revolution became a source of inspiration for fiction movies. In the silent film era of the Mexican Revolution, the film presented to the American public an image with which they were already accustomed from the previous century, a stereotypical image of Mexico, in antithesis to America and the American spirit. For many Americans, what was happening in Mexico represented disturbances that endangered stability in the area and American interests.

The major social transformation brought about by the Revolution, the first of its kind in a third world country populated by a vast majority of peasants, the social and political trials, the challenges launched by some of the revolutionary leaders of foreign capital domination in the country's economy, has attracted the attention of left-wing intellectual circles. The revolution is beginning to be perceived as a popular insurrection, an uprising of the people against an oppressive regime subject to outside influences, the ideal of social reform for which the Mexican peasants fought, arousing the imagination of those influenced by political radicalism. It will not be long before in art, mainly in cinema, the representations of the historical framework offered by the Mexican Revolution and the characters that populate it will try to capture the complexity of the events south of Rio Grande. The revolution in Mexico was beginning to become more, in the popular imagination, than a source of unrest and agitation, overcoming the barriers of the clichés initially offered to the general public in many cases.

### The Spaghetti Western and the temptation of insurrection

The Western, rightly considered the quintessential American film genre, suffered a not inconsiderable setback in the early 1960s. The causes of this decline in popularity are mainly related to the socio-political context in the US in those years. The social unrest, the struggle for extended civil rights waged by disadvantaged groups in society, the Vietnam War, are challenging the conservative values by the new generation. Therefore, the values conveyed by the classic western in which good and evil were delimited, for example, found only a low addressability among the moviegoers.

The revitalization of the genre comes from Europe, more precisely from Italy, when, also from the beginning of the '60s, numerous films will appear on the market bearing the label of "western spaghetti". Considered a parody of the American genre, these films are rather, initially, low-budget productions that present new versions and variations on different themes of the overseas western. Thus the main characters are, in general, the antiheroes who shoot from behind without warning, hit under the belt and have an original sense of justice, which is in antithesis with the standard hero of the classic American western. Although it often relies on an aesthetic of commercial violence and nihilism in order to give the film a shocking image, several Italian filmmakers are seriously addressing political and social issues, which is why these types of films will soon be taken seriously by the critics. The tradition of Italian cinema, especially the neorealism of the second half of the 1940s, deeply involved in social issues, helped those who set out to approach bold themes. The image of Mexico and Mexicans was also familiar to European moviegoers thanks to American cinema, so it is no accident that some of the most important and ambitious Italian westerns will have Mexico and events in Mexican history as a background, especially the decade of the revolution. since the beginning of the twentieth century

Directors like Sergio Corbucci, Sergio Sollima or Damiano Damiani, screenwriters like Franco Solinas, place the action of their films in revolutionary Mexico, Mexico being used as a

background for projections in time and space as well as for political comments on contemporary political events. Once again the socio-political context has influenced certain approaches to film production, Italy of the 7th decade of the previous century, amid an economic boom, was going through a period when clashes between left and right forces intensify, migration from the less developed south to the industrialized north reaches unprecedented heights, and the privileged relationship that post-war Italy had with the United States of America is challenged. International crises and postcolonial movements, such as those in Algeria or Cuba, have also made a deep impression. A number of Italian filmmakers had strong left-wing sympathies, even being involved, in their youth, in the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation of Italy in World War II. And these reasons make films like *A Bullet for the General*<sup>1</sup>, *Companeros*<sup>2</sup> or *Tepepa*<sup>3</sup>, for example, to fully exploit the political vein offered by the Mexican Revolution in its transposition on the screen (Fisher, 2014, 117). The influential screenwriter Franco Solinas was a member of the Italian Communist Party (Pineda Franco, 2019, 102). There were elements of populism, agrarianism, socialism and anarchism among those carrying forward the Mexican Revolution and that's why leftists groups emerging in the '60s, found all these appealing and looked for inspiration in past and contemporary Latin American, and Asian, struggles as their models, but with little reflection on their applicability or likely consequences in the Italian situation. As a result, such groups accepted a dangerously casual attitude towards violence (Ginsborg, 1990, 313).

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<sup>1</sup> *A Bullet for the General/ Quen Sabe?*; director: Damiano Damiani, script: Salvatore Laurani, Franco Solinas; actors: Gian Maria Volonte, Klaus Kinski, Martine Beswik; 1967

<sup>2</sup> *Companeros/ Vamos a Matar Companeros*; director: Sergio Corbucci; script: Dino Maiuri, Massimo de Rita; actors: Franco Nero, Tomas Milian, Fernando Rey, Iris Berben, 1970

<sup>3</sup> *Tepepa*; director: Giulio Petroni; script: Ivan Della Mea; actors: Tomas Milian, Orson Wells, John Steiner; 1969

Sergio Leone is considered the initiator of the genre, with the film *A Fistful of Dollars*, the first part of a trilogy hailed as the archetype of the spaghetti western. His career as a director for almost a quarter of the century includes a relatively small number of films (only seven). Probably the least neglected and least known film in his filmography, apart from the one he made his debut with, is the one made in 1971, a film that makes a special note among the films directed by the Italian filmmaker. The action of the film is entirely set in Mexico in the 1910s, the historical background being well defined. The previous films had also had Mexican characters, being placed in the world of the American-Mexican border, with incursions in Mexico (*For a Few Dollar More*<sup>4</sup>) or taking place against the background of a real historical event like the American Civil War (*The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*<sup>5</sup>), but none has been so anchored in a concrete historical reality and concerned with historical detail like *Duck, you sucker!*<sup>6</sup>, which makes the film to transcend the boundaries of the western genre, although it retains some characteristics of the genre that brought Leone notoriety.

In fact, the other Italian filmmakers who focused on their films about the Mexican Revolution had not set out to treat the issues conventionally related to them. Damiano Damiani, the director of the first important film of the genre, that dealt with Mexico, *A bullet for the general*, declares that his film is not and does not intend to be a spaghetti western, but, a film about the Mexican Revolution, “set in the Mexican Revolution, and therefore it is clearly a political film and nothing else”, thus defying the label set by critics and audiences (Fisher, 2014, 121). Mexico was becoming an allegory of events in contemporary Italy or in the recent past

for which they chose to place the action of their films in revolutionary Mexico.

A possible explanation for this preference would be the low success in Italy of neorealist films, despite the international appreciation, which presented the realities of post-war Italy without disturbing rhetoric or lamentation (Procacci, 1975, 486). Even Sergio Leone reminded that the films of his friend and colleague, Francesco Rosi, deeply involved in Italian political realities, attract only an elitist but small audience (Frayling, 2012, 231). Mexico in the early years of the twentieth century as a symbol of a country of social and national inequity and conflict proved to be a safer place as an allegory for the present. Sergio Leone's account of the Mexican Revolution was released on screen in 1971, film production began in 1968, a year defined by unprecedented political radicalism in post-war Europe and the world. From the escalating conflict in Vietnam, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, to the student demonstrations in Paris in the spring, the state of tension and the challenge to authority spread all over the world. In Italy, universities are occupied by students, and far-right forces are also mobilizing and becoming much more vocal. All this left its mark on Sergio Leone's creation. (Uva, 2020, 76) The film marks the director's distancing from the ideology of political film promoted by a series of Italian filmmakers. As has already been pointed out, Leone's take on the Mexican Revolution followed a great heritage of movies about the conflict, but where those that had typically charted the revolutionary, more or less, heroic of Villa or Zapata. Unlike other Italian filmmakers, Sergio Leone less committed to the idea of political cinema and attempted to satirize political Spaghetti, in what will prove to be his last film related to the western genre (Frayling, 2012, 231). The director chose for his project the title *Once Upon a....Revolution*, but this working title was rejected by the Italian partners of the director (Frayling, 2012, 226), deciding that the name of the movie should be *A Fistful of Dynamite* (a nod to a previous success of the director) for the opening in the United Kingdom and *Duck, You Sucker!*, an approximate translation of the Italian name of the movie, *Giu la Testa!*, for the United States of America.

<sup>4</sup> *For a Few Dollars More/ Per Qualche Dollaro in Piu*; director: Sergio Leone; script: Sergio Leone, Fulvio Morsella; actors: Clint Eastwood, Gian Maria Volonte, Lee van Cleef; 1965

<sup>5</sup> *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly/ Il Buono, il brutto I il cattivo*; director: Sergio Leone; script: Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone; actors: Clint Eastwood, Lee van Cleef, Eli Wallachi

<sup>6</sup> *Duck, You Sucker!/ Giu la Testa*; director: Sergio Leone; script: Sergio Leone, Sergio Donati; actors: Rod Steiger, John Cobrun, Romlo Valli; 1971

### **The historical context of “Duck, You Sucker” and the depiction of violence**

An energetic quote from Mao Zedong prepares the explosion of violence unfolding for most of the film, not at all gratuitous, violence serving the director in his attempt to illustrate the methods of survival of the main characters in a brutal, confusing and unpredictable environment, emptied of any clear ideological relevance. The film tells the story of the unlikely meeting and partnership between Mexican Juan Miranda, the leader of an extended family of robbers, and John (Sean) Mallory, a former Irish Republican Army member and disillusioned Irish revolutionary, an expert on explosives, who is in the service of a German mine owner. Deciding to rob the bank in the city of Mesa Verde, they end up becoming heroes of the Revolution, when they take part in the action to release the political prisoners in the city. All this attracts the brutal intervention of the federal army with tragic consequences

The action of the film is set between the assassination of President Francisco Madero (1913) and the entry into Mexico City of the joint forces of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata (1914), during the presidency of General Victoriano Huerta. The introduction to the historical landscape is made from the beginning of the film when the passengers of a stagecoach that recreates a micro-universe of the upper class (including an American businessman, a landowner and a priest), make derogatory comments about the Mexican peasantry and praise General Huerta for stopping agrarian reforms

Leone does not accidentally choose this time frame as it was one of the most confusing and violent of the phases of the Mexican Revolution. Although he did not intend to make a historical film about Mexico, the director's attention to detail led him to carefully document Mexican history, the result being a detailed and credible reconstruction of Mexico during the years of the revolution. Historical inconsistencies such as John Mallory's membership in the IRA (the IRA was formed a few years after the events depicted in the film) serve to refer to the present. The film makes references to important participants in the

historical events that form the background of the action of the film, although none of the historical figures mentioned appear in the film. Like in other cases Mexico served as a metaphor as the Italian director said about his movie “.. the Mexican Revolution in the film is only a symbol and not the Mexican Revolution, only interesting in this context because of its fame and its relationship with cinema. It's a relationship with the cinema. It's a real myth.....To avoid misunderstandings, I rejected the romance of the sombrero, preferring to deal with the theme of the friendship which is so dear to me”(Frayling, 2012, 225).

The coup d'état led by General Huerta brought to power, after the assassination of President Madero, the conservative elements again, dissatisfied with the liberal policies and reforms proposed by the former president (Knight, 2016, 43-44). Huerta. was a brutal and corrupt military dictator who, when faced with challenges to his authority, reacted with unbridled cruelty, giving his soldiers and paramilitary police free rein to torture and execute opponents without trial or redress (Easterling, 2012, 66). In the government, the key positions are occupied by generals appointed by Huerta, resorting to the intervention of the army to extinguish the various outbreaks of revolt throughout the country, campaigns brutally led by unscrupulous commanders. In the film, the main antagonist is Colonel Gunther Ruiz with a familiar Prussian allure (note the first name of the character), a possible reference to the German military advisers attached to the staff of the Mexican army at that time. The taciturn officer is seconded as an antagonist by the corrupt governor of Mesa Verde, whose portraits resides over a reign of terror and who appears in person when trying to skedaddle with the spoils (Friedlung, 2006, 190), a discreet presence in the film's economy but symbolic to illustrate the compartment of government representatives in the provinces.

Like all the civil wars, the Mexican Revolution witnessed a great deal of brutality on all sides. Here many were killed, estimates suggest as many as two million. or displaced (moving from being primarily rural dwellers to urban inhabitants. The movie, through its

massive appeal to abundant violent scenes, manages to capture the bloody setting of a country in turmoil.

The column led by Colonel Ruiz comprising cavalry and infantry is notable for the threatening presence of armored vehicles and although their practical effect in military clashes was insignificant ( Jowett, de Quesada, 2006, 18), the impression left by their image in rural areas was directly proportional.

Likewise, the presence of the train carrying government troops illustrates the destructive potential of the machinery controlled by the oppressive state. One reason why Mexico remained an economically underdeveloped country in the second half of the 19th century was also related to the lack of an adequate network of trade routes. The lack of watercourses suitable for transport and land routes that made it difficult to transport large quantities of goods made connections between different regions difficult. General Diaz is dealing with the expansion of the railway network, the expansion of the railway system has increased the profitability of agricultural land.(Hart, 1997, 131-132). Due to growing demand, large estates have become lucrative and profitable businesses. This breaks the relatively fragile balance that existed until then in the rural world, the large landowners wanting to seize more land to the detriment of villages and landowners. An agent of modernization, the train was seen as a diabolical machine by many peasants, paving the way for new abuses by the wealthy. The explosive battle at the end of the film, which begins with the derailment of the train carrying federal troops, is probably inspired by the bloody battle of Zacatecas, which took place near an important railway junction (Katz, 1998, 348).

The civilian population suffered more from neglect than anything else, with disease and famine causing more casualties amongst the ordinary people, but armies campaigning through a region would freely requisition food and property, and looting and rape were not confined to any particular faction. Captured enemy troops were executed more often than not, and the sight of a man facing a firing squad with his back to a wall is one that seems to epitomize the war and one of the lasting of the

images of the Revolution. Federal troops had always executed any rebels they captured. with the revolutionary returning the favor when they had the chance to capture officers ( Jowett, de Quesada, 12). Indeed, mass executions, arrests, torture, and military harassment of poverty-stricken peasants and their allies are a constant backdrop to *Duck It, Sucker!*. Visual inspiration for a firing-squad sequence came from Goya's "Disasters of War" series (Frayeling, 2012, 137). In the movie the scenes with firing squads in action, executing revolutionaries, peasants or deserters, lead to the shocking depiction of a large-scale massacre when the federal army soldiers execute prisoners, unloaded out, which seem to be, of cattle cars that look like those that took Jews to concentration camps. The somehow stylized and glamorous depiction of violence, which characterized the earlier works of Sergio Leone is traded here by a far grittier and darker atmosphere.

Depicting the massacre of civilians and combatants alike, the film makes clear that revolutions are never clean, nor is the violence inherent to them in any way noble or honorable. In short, revolution is a brutal enterprise, and anyone proposing such a thing from the comfort of an university, for instance, should understand the consequences. This is echoed in the movie by the intellectual Dr. Villega the mastermind of the uprising in Mesa Verde. The doctor Villego occupies the position of intellectual revolutionary. Neither the embodiment of noble cause nor a traitor, Villego is a competent revolutionary who breaks under torture and he betrays his comrades (Friedlung, 2006, 190-191).

John, also an intellectual, a reader of Bakunin, who works for a capitalist, the german Aschenbach, the owner of a mine, a former idealist is, too, a quite a morally ambiguous character and lacks a conscience. He is a reckless and self-destructive political extremist who relishes any opportunity he has to rid "the world of a few uniforms", regardless of who they serve. To this end, he quite happily dynamites a large stone bridge that hundreds of federal soldiers are taking refuge beneath. That doesn't mean the film is on the side of the oppressive authorities. Indeed, the emphasis is placed on the brutality dealt with by the

government forces, with lengthy sequences depicting massacres and summary executions. Throughout all these events, the specifics of the Mexican Revolution and the various factions fighting it are only alluded to in vague terms. Rather, the conflict appears to stand for the concept of revolution in a generic sense.

The movie carries a clear political lesson for those who are inclined to use the means of violence in a revolutionary cause to recreate the world as they wish to be. Thus Leone offered a direct rebuke to the high pretensions and the irresponsible advocacy of revolutionary theory in political westerns (Fisher, 2014, 159).

.Disillusionment with both the Italian politics and Italian political cinema, Sergio Leone's conclusion about resorting to violence for political purposes is summarized by the quote from one of the film's characters, the former idealist John Mallory after he resurrected his passion for insurrection: "Revolution means confusion".

Sergio Leone's account on the Mexican Revolution is an exercise to the deconstruction of the mythology of the romanticized nature of revolution and at the same time an allegory that shed light on the political instability in his native contemporary Italy.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

- Fig. 1.** American actors James Coburn and Rod Steiger as John (Sean) Mallory and Juan Miranda.
- Fig. 2.** Juan Miranda, the Mexican bandit, hailed as a hero.
- Fig. 3.** Blowing up a bridge crossed by an army convoy.
- Fig. 4.** French actor, Antoine Saint-John, as col. Gunther Ruiz, the antagonist of the movie.
- Fig. 5.** Depiction of a “social” massacre
- Fig. 6.** Plotting the insurrection in Mesa Verde





**Fig. 1.** American actors James Coburn and Rod Steiger as John (Sean) Mallory and Juan Miranda.



**Fig. 2.** Juan Miranda, the Mexican bandit, hailed as a hero.



**Fig. 3.** Blowing up a bridge crossed by an army convoy.



**Fig. 4.** French actor, Antoine Saint-John, as col. Gunther Ruiz, the antagonist of the movie.





**Fig. 5.** Depiction of a “social” massacre



**Fig. 6.** Plotting the insurrection in Mesa Verde

# SOCIAL HIERARCHY REFLECTED IN THE POSITIONING OF BURIAL PLACES. A CASE STUDY - ORĂȘTIOARA DE SUS VILLAGE, HUNEDOARA COUNTY

**Antonia-Ruxandra BERA**

PhD Student

“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

The Faculty of History and Philosophy, The Doctoral School „Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură”

E-mail: antoniaruxandra27@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *This study represents a part of one of the chapters from my dissertation. The study concerns the analysis of funerary spaces in relation to the existing social hierarchy in the village, and it is based on interviews with the people from Orăștioara de Sus, that have been taken between May and August of 2019. As inspired by the 1973 study of Françoise Zonabend, "Les morts et les vivants. Le cimetière de Minot en Châtillonnais", the main elements that the study focuses on are: the funerary spaces in the village and best/worst burial places to have, ways of obtaining the desired burial place, the criteria for choosing the burial place and the tombstone, as told by the villagers.*

**Keywords:** *burial place, cemetery, social hierarchy, tombstones.*

**Rezumat:** *Articolul face parte din teza mea de masterat și analizează spațiile funerare în legătură cu ierarhia socială existentă în sat. Studiul se bazează pe interviuri cu locuitorii din satul Orăștioara de Sus, realizate în perioada mai-august 2019. Conform studiului din 1973 "Les morts et les vivants. Le cimetière de Minot en Châtillonnais", semnat de Françoise Zonabend, elementele principale asupra cărora se focalizează articolul sunt: spațiile funerare din sat și cele mai bune/ cele mai rele spații de înmormântare, modalitățile de obținere a locurilor funerare dorite, criteriile de obținere a locului de veci și a pietrei funerare, conform celor relatate de către săteni.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *loc de veci, cimitir, ierarhie socială, pietre funerare.*

This study was inspired by Françoise Zonabend's study of the Minot cemetery, *Les morts et les vivants. "Les morts et les vivants. Le cimetière de Minot en Châtillonnais"*.

The study of the cemetery in Minot is based on interviews with the people from Minot and focuses on how "the geography of the dead reflects the morphology of the social space of the living" (Zonabend, 1973, 7) and on the rituals associated with the cemetery. Similarly, I chose the village of Orăștioara de Sus as my case study, which houses a mainly Romanian and Orthodox community, intending to find out how the social hierarchy from the village is reflected in the placement of tombstones in the cemeteries. Orăștioara de Sus is a village with a number of 469 inhabitants that is part of the commune with the same name located in the eastern part of Hunedoara county. The village is also the residence of the commune. Here are located

the main institutions of the commune such as: The Village Hall, Primary School, Human Dispensary, Veterinary Dispensary, Communal Police Station, Cultural Center, Post Office, and others. The commune consists of eight villages that fall into three types of settlements: meadow, located on the Grădiște river (inhabitants being also called "răureni"), hill (the inhabitants being also called "delureni") and mountain (the inhabitants being also called "mărgineni"). The village of Orăștioara de Sus is part of the meadow settlements, and the occupations of the inhabitants are raising animals, especially cattle and sheep, and cultivating crops, the latter only of subsistence<sup>1</sup>.

Richard E. Meyer in the introduction to "Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture", compares cemeteries to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://comuna-orastioaradesus.ro/>, accessed 07.08.2018.

museums because of the cultural importance of funerary monuments as "artifacts" of individual stories and ethnic and religious specifics of the community represented (Meyer, 1995, 2). Combining two different methodologies and two different primary sources leads to new perspectives on new areas of study and on matters that were disputed in the past. In our case, the very personal and varied accounts of the informants regarding the choice of the burial place and the tombstone, combined with the field research of the funerary places, offer an interesting perspective on the social importance of cemeteries for their respective communities. From a Christian point of view,

*graves and cemeteries are places of rest and peace in which we place the bodies of our dead, waiting for the resurrection and the last judgment. Although they are gone from us, the dead thus remain with us through their bones. Their graves keep alive in our souls the memory of those who sleep in them and the invisible connection with them. At the same time, they keep the thought of death awake in us and urge us to prepare for it (Mandita, 2004, 24).*

In the village of Orăștioara de Sus, there are three spaces where the deceased are buried. The first and largest is "the large cemetery", which, as the name suggests, houses most of the tombs. The second is the "small cemetery", or "the cemetery across the river"; its name reflects the small number of graves and the village's division in two by a river. Those who live on the other side of the river prefer to bury those dear in the "small cemetery". The third space that houses graves is the courtyard of the church in Orăștioara de Sus, where those who died on the front and personalities from the community or church are buried.

"The large cemetery" is located at the exit of the village and is the place where most of the community buries their loved ones. Of the 179 graves existing in the 3 spaces, 147 are in the "large cemetery", 19 in the churchyard, and 13 in the cemetery across the river. It should also be mentioned that attempts are currently being made to increase the capacity

of the „large cemetery", given that it has almost reached its maximum capacity, and in this regard, one of the villagers has donated a plot of land to the church.

We must mention the fact that the burial places are not paid in the village of Orăștioara de Sus. The villagers have to talk to the epitrope or the priest to choose a burial place in one of the two cemeteries, as mentioned by the priest from Orăștioara de Sus:

*in some places, people pay for the burial place if it is the church cemetery, if not, people do not have to pay; it also depends on the parish council. But here, it is free<sup>2</sup>.*

Marian, who as an epitrope, deals with the division and establishment of eternal places, told me the following about the granting of burial places:

*In our village, the burial place is free of charge. For us, poor, rich people, it doesn't matter. The village bought the cemetery and now everyone, whether they choose to or not, does not pay. Everyone has a burial place provided, without money, without payment"<sup>3</sup>.*

Olivia explained to me how the burial places are decided:

*We don't pay, they [the burial places] are placed in a row<sup>4</sup>.*

Given that burial places do not have to be paid for, they can be chosen at no additional cost during one's lifetime or by the family after one of its members has died. However, in this village, the choice of burial places during one's life seems to be a new practice and not as widespread as the choice of the eternal place by one's family after death, as Emilian told me:

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Sturza Mircea, parish priest in Bucium village and Orăștioara de Sus village, 64 years old.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Gridan Marian, epitrope in Orăștioara de Sus village, 56 years old.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Bodea Olivia, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 74 years old.

*In the past, no one chose, our elders, they did not choose. But now it's a mess, now they go, buy some land, make a crypt, make a stone monument, everything. They don't know that the heavier those monuments are, the more you will carry them back to the Other World. So it is written in the Holy Scriptures. We were born from the ground, we go to ground, so let the ground be put on us! We don't build a crypt, we don't do anything<sup>5</sup>.*

The choice of the burial place during one's life is not welcomed by the community, being considered only a means to stand out through an act of pride and exposure of material possibilities, as Vasile explained to me:

*Especially nowadays I have noticed [that the choice of burial places during life is practiced]. The cemetery has grown here. It was crowded. And someone from the village donated a garden he had next to the cemetery. And nowadays they started nicely, they went and made vaults so that they have the place ready [for when they die], taken and I don't know what... I don't agree with that! If the children or relatives who remain after me are not able to even do this little, to find a piece of land somewhere and make a pit for me, then let them be! I would not do such a thing. Many have done it now, they have bought it, they have made it with cement. I disagree! As one said, «You came into this world naked, you go naked!» [...] Those who buy the land, think of when they will be buried... This is the Romanian mentality, they think that: «What is going to happen to me, if I'm put there far in the cemetery, but if I'm making my pit now and I'm making it with concrete, no one is moving it from here!» This is what they think: «Woe to me, how good I am, I'm better than others. Let me not be on the sidelines anymore, let me be in the middle because that's where I want to be!» I don't see the point [...]»<sup>6</sup>.*

In other words, the consensus would be that the choice of burial places during life is the prerogative of the wealthy, who want to expose their material possibilities and the social status of the family by erecting a funerary monument while being alive, given that the places cannot be bought, as Olivia said:

*Some of the wealthiest do something else, make their grave, go and measure it, and they want their relatives to be all in that same place, the graves to be close to one another. The family must have the graves close. The gravestones are made at Simeria, they are made with marble or with small mosaics, they make them more wonderful now, they make them black"<sup>7</sup>.*

Thus, it can be said that, although in theory the fact that burial places do not have to be paid for would mean that social differences exhibited by the burial places are eliminated. In fact, the differences are still present because those who have financial resources can choose the place and invest in the funerary monument, while those who do not have the financial means to erect a funerary monument, prefer to leave this task to the family after their death. After the 1989 revolution, and the emergence of a new wealthy class, social and economic discrepancies became more and more visible even in the aspects of cemeteries (Grancea, 2005, 245). This may explain the fact that the practice of choosing the burial place during the lifetime is relatively new. Also, the attitude of the villagers disavowing the exposure of the material state by acquiring a burial place during life is in accordance with Christian dogmas, which support modesty, especially in this case, given that Jesus Christ was so poor that was buried in a grave donated by someone. Probably this is also the reason why crypts are not present in the village of Orăștioara de Sus, per the Christian dogma which stipulates that man should be buried in the ground only (Mandita, 2004, 31). Another possible explanation of the disavowing attitude that the villagers have towards this practice could be

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Dănescu Emilian, verger in Orăștioara de Sus village, 64 years old.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Dunca Vasile, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 50 years old.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Bodea Olivia, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 74 years old.

the fact that is a relatively new practice, contrary to the one people were used to. And that naturally attracted the community's disapproval.

As for the burial places that are considered the best in the cemetery, the ones in front of the cemetery and its center are considered the best, as Marian told me:

*Now everyone would like to be in front, in front of the cemetery.*

Trandafir told me the same: "Everyone wants to have the front [burial places]<sup>8</sup>".

There are several criteria according to which the front burials places, considered to be the best, are given, according to Marian:

*[...] But there is another option so that there are no problems. People who come to church are also respected. If there is a man who attends church, he must be put in front of the cemetery, he cannot be put in the back, and if he is someone who does not come to church, you cannot put him in front. These things are respected a little [...]<sup>9</sup>.*

Also, the age of the deceased can be a criterion to receive a better place in the cemetery, according to Marian:

*But even depending on the sorrow, the youngest are given the front burial places. But it usually depends on what place is next in the row<sup>10</sup>.*

Another criterion for obtaining a place in front of the cemetery would be the availability of financial resources to make a funerary monument as aesthetic as possible, given that the front of the "large cemetery" is very close to the street and can be seen from the main road (DJ 705 A), as Emilian explained to me:

*The best places in the cemetery are the places in front because when people pass by, they come and look and say: look, he was a richer man or so. They have an obligation if they have a place in the front to do more beautiful works, so more expensive and more aesthetic crosses. We cannot put a person in front of the cemetery who is not able to make a cross or make a beautiful monument<sup>11</sup>.*

This criterion again reveals that the social status has a say in the location of graves in the cemetery, since those who have the financial resources can afford to erect a more impressive monument, which "would look well" in front of the cemetery. That takes us again to the discussion regarding the transformations that the society suffered after 1989, including the emergence of a new class of wealthy people, willing to show off their financial resources, even through their tombstone:

*The "new rich" make ostentatious tombs, often in bad taste, with an eclectic architectural style; most of the time they are noticed only because of the dimensions, the presence of plastic reproductions, the polished granite, the tiles, the plasterboards, the galvanized sheet (Grancea, 2005, 245).*

Other criteria make a place of eternity to be considered better than others, as Marin mentioned to me:

*Many would like, for example, to be at the front of the cemetery. And I have a place in the cemetery, but not there in the front, on that hill. On the hill, because in the front, as it is on a slope, can be water and the roadside and dust. It is better there on the hill<sup>12</sup>.*

Also, Lidia said:

*In any case, not where water comes out or where weeds grow. We have weeds so high*

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Gridan Marian, epitrope in Orăștioara de Sus village, 56 years old.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Dănescu Emilian, verger in Orăștioara de Sus village, 64 years old.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Urican Marin, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village.

*that you can no longer see the crosses. There are also snakes. But now they mowed*<sup>13</sup>.

Also, if one of the family members has died, the places of the other close family members will be chosen according to that respective place, so that the family members are as close as possible to each other, as Claudia told me:

*The place from the cemetery is either chosen during one's life, or the epitrope alongside the family of the deceased choose the place in the cemetery after the man dies. Many have their parents or spouse buried and then they will be buried next to their spouse. Because although the first cross, the wooden one, is individual, the marble, cement or granite one includes both spouses. Both spouses or more family members will be written on it, for example, parents or children. So from the beginning, the respective members are written with the date when they were born, the date of death and the name of the deceased [on marble, cement, granite tombstones]. That's because those wooden crosses deteriorate over time*<sup>14</sup>.

Another criterion that must be taken into account is the position of the spouses in relation to each other, the wife having to be to the left of the husband, according to Aurelia:

*[...] It is said that the man would be on the right and the woman on the left and according to Claudia: Usually the wife is on the left and the husband on the right. Only if there is another grave next to that one and there is no more space is the place reversed*<sup>15</sup>.

It should be noted that most of the information above regarding the positioning in the cemetery and the criteria for choosing the

places of burial refer to the "large cemetery". Although both cemeteries are located on a slope, and both are located near a street, the positioning of the graves in the "small cemetery" starts from the back, i.e. from the opposite side of the exit to the street. Thus, if in the "large cemetery" the placement of the graves starts from the base of the slope and moves towards its top, in the small one things are the other way around. Probably the fact that the small cemetery's exit to the street is not as spectacular as that of the "large cemetery", determined people to choose the location of the graves in a higher point, protected from the water or other factors. There also seems to be greater demand for places in the "large cemetery" even from people living on the other side of the river, because, as I mentioned, it is to be expanded. Among the informants who live on the other side of the river, many have their burial places in the "large cemetery".

Other criteria dictate the place in the cemetery, such as the case of those who resorted to suicide or those of a non-Orthodox faith. In this regard, Rodica told me the following:

*Only neo-Protestants are not left in the cemetery. They place them on the sidelines, not among the others. I had an aunt and she fell ill with a foot disease and she was not able to go to church. She was a great believer. She also liked to listen to the service, she was happy but she was not Orthodox ... this true and just religion*<sup>16</sup>.

Septimia mentioned this to me about the case of some neighbors with a son that committed suicide:

*He is buried at the edge of the cemetery. If they hang themselves, like this child, they are placed on the sidelines, because they are not allowed in the cemetery*<sup>17</sup>.

Indeed, the situation in the cemetery regarding those who resorted to taking their lives or are of another denomination is exactly

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Romășan Lidia, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 80 years old.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Pascu Claudia, daughter of epitrope Gridan Marian, ex-resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 31 years old.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Gridan Aurelia, mother of epitrope Gridan Marian, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 75 years old.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Muntean Rodica, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 84 years old.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Groza Septimia, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 79 years old.



the one described by the informants. My guide in the cemetery was the epitrope, Marian, who showed me the place where those who took their lives are buried, a hardly visible place. To be able to photograph that area, it was necessary to position the camera on a higher point and use the maximum zoom, because access was impossible due to the vegetation. According to Christian dogma, those who commit suicide should not be buried in the cemetery at all (Mandita, 2004, 32).

However, the community has sympathy for those who end their own lives and their families, as Emilian said:

*Their burial place should not be in the cemetery. But we have an area further on, at the bottom of the cemetery and on the sidelines, and we bury them there. Where else should we put them? They have to be put somewhere too<sup>18</sup>.*

Also, in Orăștioara de Sus, some people preferred, especially in the past, to be buried in the garden of their house, or in one of the orchards outside the village, as Emilian told me:

*Usually, our elders were buried in the garden surrounding the house. But now with the new law and after the revolution, so many laws were passed. Now it is only allowed to bury in the cemetery. So we, for example, bought a lot more land at the church to have a reserve for people because it is no longer allowed to bury in unauthorized cemetery. In the past, people were buried at home, in their garden and no one cared<sup>19</sup>.*

Despite what Emilian said, we have not discovered any law that could prohibit one's burial in its garden, as long as this was the will of the deceased, or if without expressing this wish during the lifetime, the family came to this decision.

Funerary monuments are the artifacts that give cultural importance to cemeteries, and their characteristics are telling for the

culture they represent. In Orăștioara de Sus we met a lot of special monuments through their architecture and epitaphs. About the monuments from the village of Orăștioara de Sus, Emilian said:

*When they bring the dead to the grave, they bring a wooden cross. Meanwhile, according to how they decide, the family can surround the grave with marble or cement, and erect a cross... There is a big competition when it comes to crosses, many come to sell their merch. So that's that. Of course, they make for a beautiful cemetery<sup>20</sup>.*

About the materials used for the construction of the monuments, Vasile told me this:

*The first cross is made of wood. When they buy the coffin, they also buy the wooden cross. In the past, an oak or acacia cross was made, carved. Even my father, God rest his soul, made a lot of crosses. He made them from oak or acacia. That was the first cross. After six weeks, a carved cross was made. Those who had money, those who didn't, had a wooden cross covered with tin, beautifully written with paint, that's all. Nowadays most make marble crosses and so on. Anyway, that doesn't help the dead or anything, but that's how they got used to do it<sup>21</sup>.*

Rodica also told me about the materials used for making the funerary monuments:

*The first one must be made of wood, and it is put at the dead man's head. Then they build a cement or a stone monument, as they wish. On the tombstone it is written the name of the dead, how old he is, when he was born, when he died, that's all. Others write a few words on behalf of the family, but not too much<sup>22</sup>.*

If the connection with the social status is not so well established when it comes to burial places, in the case of tombstones things

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Dunca Vasile, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 50 years old.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Muntean Rodica, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 84 years old.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dănescu Emilian, verger in Orăștioara de Sus village, 64 years old.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*

are more nuanced. If the financial possibilities do not allow the erection of a monument made of stone, concrete or marble, wooden or metal crosses are the ones used. Marble crosses, depending on their ornaments and size, are characteristics of wealthier people, and those of stone and concrete or mosaic are the most numerous and represent the midpoint between wood and marble. The preference for stone-like materials manifested by the community in Orăștioara de Sus (marble, mosaic, concrete, etc.) is not uncommon. Even today stone is associated with perpetuating the memory of the deceased, having a long history of being associated by old beliefs with a house for souls and symbolizing divinity in the Old and New Testament (Grancea, 2005, 277).

However, it should be noted that tombstones can be considered an investment. Thus, many people who would not normally be able to afford a marble monument through savings could purchase the desired tombstone. So, although the distribution of monuments according to the material from which they are made may be representative of the social status of the family or the person to whom it belongs, there may also be exceptions in this regard.

Olivia raised another interesting issue, telling me about her experience with her husband's tombstone:

*I didn't like my husband's [cross to be] black and I told them not to be black, to make it white! And I didn't want to make a cross as great as God, as others did. A small, beautiful cross. And the priest liked it, he said to my child: «Nicușoare, I like how you did it because you didn't do it as great as God, but is beautiful!». Well, you don't even have to<sup>23</sup>.*

That being said, the size of the monument can also be a means of exposing the social status of an individual in contradiction with Christian dogmas, the father's reaction to the small monument being eloquent in this regard.

Thus, both the place occupied in the cemetery and the tombstone can say a lot about the existing social hierarchy in the village and

how it is reflected in the cemetery. We saw how in Orăștioara de Sus, the social status and financial possibilities are reflected in the positioning of the burial places and in some characteristics of the funerary monument, such as the material of which it is composed and its size. Regarding the burial places that are considered to be better, the access to these places is conditioned by the participation at the religious services, the capacity to build a funerary monument as aesthetic as possible, and sometimes even of the age of the deceased, those who died young having priority. The places in the back of the "large cemetery" are not desirable to anyone, these being reserved for those of other denominations than the Orthodox one or for people that commit suicide.

Even if combining two different methodologies is relatively new for Romanian researchers, it reveals new areas of study and new perspectives of interpretation. In our case, exploring the social hierarchy that exists in the village through interviews with the villagers, and the field research of funerary spaces, reveal that social hierarchy does, in fact, influence the positioning of burial places, as well as the characteristics of the tombs or other aspects of the funeral spaces.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Bodea Olivia, resident in Orăștioara de Sus village, 74 years old.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

**Fig. 1.** Tombs at the very back of the "large cemetery", belonging to people that committed suicide.

**Fig. 2.** Tombs at the front-center of the "large cemetery", belonging to brothers who died 3 years apart. They fit the criteria of the young being offered a better place in the cemetery. The epitaph of the tomb on the left reads: "My dear beloved parents / I left you to suffer / And you my brother / Mourn me forever and ever" ("Dragii mei părinți iubiți/ V-am lăsat să suferiți/ Iar tu frățiorul meu/ Să mă plângi mereu, mereu"). The epitaph on the tomb on the right reads: "The parents and me / We always mourn you / Now I am coming to you / My little brother" ("Părinții cu mine/ Te plângem mereu/ Acum vin la tine/ Frățiorul meu").

**Fig. 3.** Large tomb at the center of the large cemetery.

**Fig. 4.** Tomb in the church's yard, belonging to a person that died on the front of Stalingrad in 1942.

**Fig. 5.** Tomb in the "small cemetery".



**Fig. 1.** Tombs at the very back of the "large cemetery", belonging to people that committed suicide.



**Fig. 2.** Tombs at the front-center of the "large cemetery", belonging to brothers who died 3 years apart.



**Fig. 3.** Large tomb at the center of the “large cemetery”.



**Fig. 4.** Tomb in the church’s yard, commemorating a person that died on the front of Stalingrad in 1942.





**Fig. 5.** Tomb in the “small cemetery”.

# THE “SPANISH” FLU AS IT WAS REFLECTED IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLICATIONS OF TRANSYLVANIA (1918-1919)

**Elena Andreea TRIF-BOIA**

Lecturer PhD.

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Studies

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

E-mail: boia\_andreea@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *Spread at the end of the First World War, 1918-1919, the “Spanish” flu has been one of the most dreadful pandemics of the entire history. It affected between 25-30% of the entire world population and it usually killed young persons, individuals who were in the prime of their lives, this being one of the defining specifics of this disease. The present paper aims at analyzing the manner through which this pandemic has been reflected in the Romanian Transylvanian periodicals, focusing on the period of the years 1918-1919. The present work shall begin with the presentation of several general data concerning the pandemic, namely, its overall spreading, the fatalities estimates and the epidemic curves. Later, we shall give special attention to the information from the Transylvanian press in order to perceive the pandemic’s impact locally, the flu virus’ virulence, the population’s vulnerable categories, the prevention measures and the medical treatment recommendations.*

**Keywords:** *Spanish Flu, Transylvania, Romanians, periodicals, collective mentalities, 1918-1919.*

**Rezumat:** *Răspândită la sfârșitul lui Primului Război Mondial, 1918-1919, gripa „spaniolă” a fost una dintre cele mai cumplite epidemii din istoria omenirii. Aceasta a afectat 25-30% din întreaga populație și a ucis de obicei tineri, aceasta fiind una din trăsăturile definitorii ale bolii. Articolul își propune să analizeze modul în care această epidemie este oglindită în publicațiile periodice din Transilvania, focalizându-se asupra perioadei 1918-1919. Studiul începe cu prezentarea unor date generale despre epidemie, răspândirea, estimările efectelor și vârfurile pandemice. Atenție deosebită este acordată informațiilor din presa transilvană pentru a depista impactul local al pandemiei, virulența virusului, categoriile vulnerabile ale populației, măsurile de prevenție și tratamentul medical.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *gripa spaniolă, Transilvania, românii, publicații periodice, mentalități colective, 1918-1919.*

## Introduction

The “Spanish” Flu of 1918-1919 has been one of the most devastating pandemics of all history, with a very grim total estimate of 40 to 50 million deceased compared to more than 500,000,000 infected individuals (Taubenberger, 2006; Martini *et al.*, 2019, 66). Apparently, it initially burst in the United States’ Camp Funston, Kansas, in March 1918. From that initial point it continued to quickly spread in Europe encompassing since April already the whole of France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain (Martini *et al.*, 2019, p. 64), in order to later reach the states of Central and Eastern Europe and those of the Balkan Peninsula (Martini *et al.*, 2019, p. 64; Tsoucalas *et al.*, 2016, 24). Concerning its contagion level, we have the following data: during May 1918 the flu encompassed the North of Africa (Martini *et al.*, 2019, 66); China has reported its first cases in the month of June the same year, while as of July we find it reaching Australia too (Martini *et al.*, 2019, 66).

The present study is analyzing the manner that the “Spanish” flu has been perceived by the Romanian periodicals of Transylvania during the years of 1918-1919. From a structural point of view, the considerations regarding the general characteristics of the “Spanish” flu pandemic, the description of its world impact, will be followed by the analysis of a case study—that of the Romanian province from inside the Carpathian Curvature.

## The “Spanish” Flu around the world

As it is known, the name of “Spanish” Flu does not truly reflect the origin of the virus that has affected mankind at the end of the First World War, but it is due to the fact that Spain, being a neutral country during the war, has reported the disease and has constantly published news about its devastating effects. In the fall of 1918, to give an example, the first pages of the peninsula newspapers listed the names of those deceased as a result of being infected with this virus, while the

belligerent countries, in order not to panic their citizens, opted to apply censorship against all news materials accordingly (Martini *et al.*, 2019, 65).

The researchers estimate that the pandemic has affected anywhere between 25% and 30% of the entire population of the world, having a particularly heavy fatal toll on the young adults (Taubenberger, 2006; Billings, 2005), the death rate due to flu and pneumonia being 20 times higher in 1918 for individuals aged between 15 and 24 years (Taubenberger, 2006). Besides, the flu generally proved being fatal especially to those aged up to 65 years, as 99% of the total deaths of 1918-1919 being registered within this age range (Taubenberger, 2006).

In Europe and America, the flu pandemic has known at least 3 epidemic curves. The first curve manifested in the spring of 1918, the months of March-April, and has had a much lower fatality rate that was similar to that of seasonal flu. The second epidemic curve proved to be much more virulent beginning with the end of August and up to November 1918 with a very high fatality rate which was due, according to the scholarly literature, to a mutation that would have occurred in the virus. To give an example, in Spain 75% out of the total number of flu fatalities have been recorded during this epidemic curve, of which 45% were recorded only for the month of October 1918 (Trilla *et al.*, 2008). At last, the third epidemic curve menaced humanity at the beginning of 1919 but did not have the same intensity as the prior curve (Tsoucalas *et al.*, 2016, 24; Taubenberger, 2006).

The real number of those deceased as a result of the “Spanish” Flu cannot be precisely known, it can only be estimated. It is assessed that somewhere between 550,000 and 675,000 Americans had died because of the flu (Tsoucalas *et al.*, 2016, 26), 11,000 just in Philadelphia (Humphreys, 2018, 225). In Great Britain the number of victims touched 220,000 (Tsoucalas *et al.*, 2016, 26), in France the number was situated somewhere between 120,000 and 250,000 (Guénel, 2004, 165), in Germany it almost reached 200,000 (Grancea, 2011, 565), while for Spain the assessment counted approximately 200,000 victims<sup>1</sup>. The disease manifested much more nocuously in Asia and in the areas that had not been previously affected by respiratory diseases of this kind. In India, for example, the number of fatalities is assessed to have been as high as 12 million victims, while in several

areas of the Pacific the fatality rate reached as high as 20% (Emmeluth, Alcamo, 2003, 89).

### The “Spanish” Flu in Transylvania

In the Transylvanian press, the 1918 pandemic has been known under the name of “*Spanish Flu*”, “*Spanish malady*”, “*Spanish plague*”, “*the new sickness*” or “*the rebellious influenza*”. However, there is a scarcity of data in the press because in this province too, just as in other areas of Europe, authorities decided to apply censorship against information access concerning the pandemic in order to avert popular panic. Furthermore, the press was chiefly focused on the events of the First World War and, subsequently, on their consequences which had the effect that any news concerning epidemics was usually demoted to a distant second rank.

The earliest perceived data make their appearance in the fall of 1918 and mention the unusually high fierceness of the flu virus. In October-November, to give an example, several periodicals were signaling the virus’ presence in Europe and in the province, indicating the symptoms, the categories of vulnerable persons and emphasizing the precaution measures that were to be taken. An article that appeared in October 1918, “*Gazeta Poporului*” from Sibiu, for example, was describing the disease as “*severe*” and “*dangerous*”, especially to those who already had health issues, while recommending everyone to appeal to treatment in due time in order not to incur complications or even death. The periodical was also mentioning the illness’ symptoms such as the high fever, the headaches, the bone aches, the abdominal pains, the eye aches, the stomach pains and the intestine pains, and, finally, it emphasized the importance of maintaining mouth and nose hygiene (\*\*\*, 1918b, 7). In their turn, the periodicals “*Unirea*” from Blaj and “*Alba Iulia*” offered information about the scale of the pandemic catastrophe. Speaking about the effects of the flu in Europe, the first periodical showed that the climax of the epidemic curve had been reached in the fall of 1918, “*at the end of October*” (\*\*\*, 1919a, 4), when 800,000 deaths had been recorded, most of them concerning individuals “*at the prime of their life*” (\*\*\*, 1919a, 4). Concerning the situation in the province, the same publication was marking the “*horrifying*” proportions of the ravaging flu in some villages outside the city of Blaj. In the village of Sâncel, for example, the periodical showed that “*innumerable fatality cases*” were recorded, 5 of which in just one day, the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1918 (\*\*\*, 1918e, 4).

<sup>1</sup>147.114 in 1918, 21.235 in 1919 and 17.825 in 1920. See Antoni Trilla, Guillem Trilla, Carolyn Daer, *op. cit.*



"*Alba Iulia*", in its turn, presented the alarming situation from the villages and cities all around Transylvania and mentioned data concerning the situation in Hungary pointing out that in Pesta 413 infections and 54 deaths were recorded in just one day (\*\*\*, 1918a, 4).

One of the most detailed materials published on this subject appeared in "*Unirea*", the Blaj periodical of the Romanian Church United with Rome. In several materials that were edited in October 1918, the periodical presented the opinions of the army doctor Vasile Hâncu (1870-1951), who was the founder and the director of the Blaj hospital. Very upset because of the idleness of health authorities on this issue, the doctor was manifesting his observations concerning the treatment applied to flu patients, offered data concerning the pandemic impact in the city of Blaj and, equally, was reviewing the features of the influenza virus, its idiosyncrasies specifically, as they were presented in the scholarly literature. Dr. Hâncu was cataloguing the "Spanish" Flu as "highly contagious, epidemic and transmissible" (\*\*\*, 1918e, 4) and showed that it was spread fairly quickly in Blaj by the military men from the hospitals and, subsequently, by the students. According to him, the situation quickly worsened in the city: the students' dormitories had to be transformed into "real hospitals", sheltering up to "18-12-16" patients at once (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4) — the doctor offered as example 3 dormitories in the pedagogical school where he could identify only 4 beds patients free (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4); on the other hand, he made even more dismal descriptions about the access roads in town, "actual caravans of wagons full of sick people that come to and leave from the doctors of Blaj" (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4).

The same Vasile Hâncu offered important data about the moment when the first cases of "Spanish" flu were perceived in the Carpathian province. The doctor spoke about 2 patients, husband and wife, he had 6 months prior to the pandemic in the city of Blaj, whom he diagnosed with "rebellious influenza", learning only much later, as the illness' numbers grew, that it was a new form of flu (\*\*\*, 1918e, 4). Hâncu emphasized the "severe" complications of the disease, including swellings of the brain, particularly to the patients who were not timely treated against it, and he pointed clearly who were the social categories incurring high health risks:

"this disease reaches individuals of any age, but especially those who are worn out, fatigued, exhausted, feeble—particularly those between

the ages of 10 and 50-60 years old." (\*\*\*, 1918e, 4)

Prophylaxis was another theme addressed by the Romanian press of Transylvania. Doctor Vasile Hâncu was taking into consideration the lock-down of the city schools, a decision that was taken as the number of cases was growing alarmingly and, at the same time, was informing its readers about the measures that could be taken by everyone in order to avoid contagion and sickness. Among those mentioned we remind the importance of cleanliness, of healthy food, of clean water, of rest, the handwashing with soap, the avoidance of gatherings, the cleaning and the limewashing of houses, of fences and of the households' gates (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4). Those who got infected anyway were advised to visit a medic without delay, "before being too late", and to isolate themselves inside the house for at least 10 days, even though they were cleared of any symptoms (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4). The periodical "*Gazeta Poporului*" published the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1918 an extensive material on this issue. Lessons for fighting the plague called Spanish contained some of the advices given by the Blaj doctor. Moreover, the paper recommended their readers to completely avoid any contact with ill individuals (\*\*\*, 1918k, 7), to bury the dead within 24 hours after death, without exposing the body in the Church for the view and without physically approaching it (\*\*\*, 1918k, 7), to sterilize the quarters where the sick dwelled, by washing the floors, the windows and by lime washing the walls (\*\*\*, 1918k, 7).

Finally, a last subject that came to be identified is that of the curative care. With the help of the periodicals, the specialists recommended bed immobilization of the sick, drinking liquids, hot teas in particular, treatment with Epsom salt and with "*aspirin*" powders (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4; \*\*\*, 1918k, 6). Moreover, in order to decrease bodily temperature, indications for compresses with warm water for the chest were given (\*\*\*, 1918f, 4; \*\*\*, 1918k, 6).

## Conclusions

Although having an extremely strong impact, the 1918-1919 "*Spanish*" Flu epidemic was not what one would call an intensely debated subject within the pages of the Romanian periodicals of Transylvania — a situation that was due to the censorship imposed by the authorities, but also to the First World War and its geopolitical and economic consequences.

During the years of 1918-1919, the Romanian press was focused on the foreign and

domestic policy issues: it reported about the military combat operations, it offered news about the closing of hostilities and related the public about the consequences of the closing of the war, particularly concerning the Romanian inhabited territories. The Union of Transylvania with Romania, to give an example, was met with such enthusiasm that all other problems were almost entirely put aside. Speaking about the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918 Alba Iulia Great Assembly, to give another example, the "*Libertatea*" periodical pointed out the very high number of participants, 100 times greater than expected, and the joy these people felt for their direct involvement with the event, revealing that they ignored the "hardships of the moment", meaning the "muddy, clogged" roads and the "Spanish plague" that spread "everywhere" (Adunarea Națională, L, 22 November/5 December 1918, 1).

Apart from the subjects that regarded the politics of the day, the periodicals also published data about the Transylvanian epidemics, but they were generally brief news, warnings accompanied by numbers, reports about the symptoms, cures or prevention cautions, but also detailed materials such as the ones written by doctor Vasile Hâncu within the pages of the "*Unirea*" newspaper, which are very important sources for the evaluation of the Spanish Flu's impact in our regions. The common trait of all these was the emphasized accent about the severity, the extremely contagious character and the high fatality rate of the new form of flu. A "dreadful" illness against which the medicine of the day had no standing or, to use the words of a contemporary actor, against which medicine was "almost entirely unavailing" (\*\*\*, 1918e, 4).

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRAȚIILOR

- Fig. 1** U. S. Army Camp Hospital Number 45, Aix-les-Bain, France: Pneumonia porch No. B, withawnings up. Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine. Digital Collections (<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101399293-img>)
- Fig. 2** Image En Angleterre on combat l'épidémie de grippe [la potion donnée aux enfants], photographie de presse, 1919, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53016722z.r=Grippe%20espagnole?rk=64378;0>. Last time accessed in 20.06.2020.
- Fig. 3.** Iosif Stoichiția, Ce trebuie să știm despre boalele molipsitoare?, Sibiu, 1931
- Fig. 4** Boala spaniolă (Nathan) sau Influența rebelă, „Unirea”, 2 October 1918.



**Fig. 1** U. S. Army Camp Hospital Number 45, Aix-les-Bain, France: Pneumonia porch No. B, withawnings up.



**Fig. 2** En Angleterre on combat l'épidémie de grippe [la potion donnée aux enfants], 1919.



Fig. 3. Iosif Stoichiția, Ce trebuie să știm despre boalele molipsitoare?, Sibiu, 1931

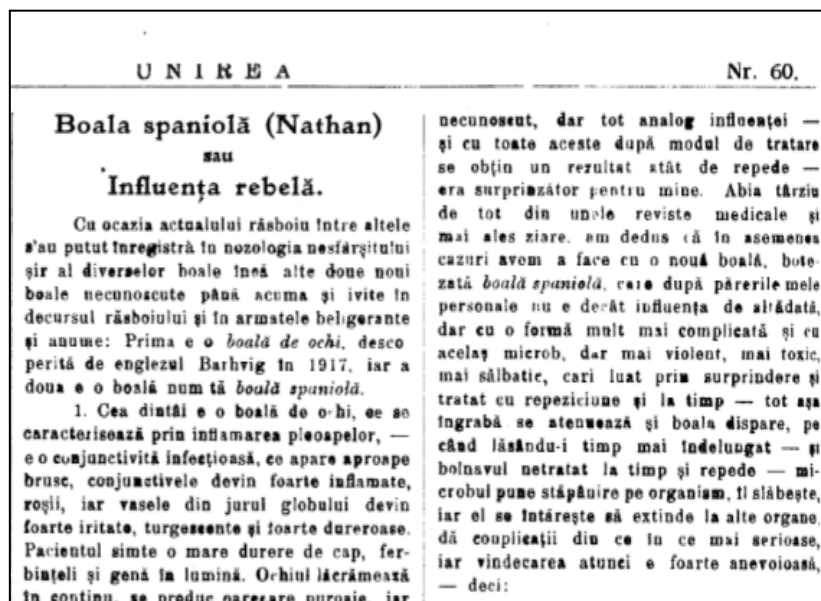


Fig. 4 Boala spaniolă (Nathan) sau Influența rebelă, „Unirea”, 2 October 1918

# KATYŃ MASSACRE: SHAPING THE HISTORICAL MEMORY THROUGH THE POLITICAL NARRATIVE

Alexandru-Ionuț DRĂGULIN

Ph.D. Student

Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest

E-mail: dragulin.alexandru-ionut@fspub.unibuc.ro

**Abstract:** *With respect for the Second World War, historical memory of European society today continues to be a political instrument. Scientific knowledge is often overshadowed by the political narrative to control the social image of undemocratic regimes. The „Katyn massacre” is a controversial episode of the war, which implies not only the violation of the human rights but especially the concretization of the Soviet strategy to create the „New Man” through the elimination of officers and intellectuals. Both during the Cold War and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the historical memory of Europe continued to relate to these ideas and actions of totalitarianism from different perspectives, subordinated to the political contexts and national or regional interests. The Russian point of view on this question, in confrontation with the Polish one, to which the rest of Europe joins, are discussed here. An extensive process of deconstruction of the mystification of history began right after the end of the war, but the researches have expanded only after the fall of communism in Central and Southeastern Europe. This article attempts to detail, using the research methods of the political science, the plurality of perspectives on the Katyn massacre of 1940, showing that the influence of elites on the masses contributes decisively to shaping social attitudes.*

**Keywords:** *memory of politics, national identity, collective attitudes*

**Rezumat:** *Cu privire la cel de-al doilea război mondial, în prezent, memoria istorică a societății europene continuă să fie un instrument politic. Cunoașterea științifică este adesea umbrită de narațiunea politică pentru a controla imaginea socială a regimurilor nedemocratice. „Masacrul Katyn” este un episod controversat al războiului, care implică nu numai încălcarea drepturilor omului, dar mai ales concretizarea strategiei sovietice de a crea „Omul Nou” prin eliminarea ofițerilor și intelectualilor. Atât în timpul Războiului Rece, cât și după prăbușirea Uniunii Sovietice, memoria istorică a Europei a continuat să se raporteze la aceste idei și acțiuni ale totalitarismului din perspective diferite, subordonate contextelor politice și intereselor naționale sau regionale. Punctul de vedere rusesc asupra acestei chestiuni, în confruntare cu cea poloneză, la care se alătură restul Europei, este pus în discuție în acest articol. Un amplu proces de deconstrucție a mistificării istoriei a început imediat după sfârșitul războiului, dar cercetările s-au extins abia după căderea comunismului în Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est. Acest articol încearcă să detalieze, folosind metode de cercetare ale științei politice, pluralitatea de perspective asupra masacrului de la Katyn din 1940, arătând că influența elitelor asupra maselor contribuie decisiv la modelarea atitudinilor sociale.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *memoria politicii, identitatea națională, atitudini colective.*

## Literature review. How political discourse shapes collective memory

Sheldon Stryker has pointed out that “identity remains unproblematised and untheorized in the social science literature” (Stryker *et al.*, 2000, 22). Identity can easily become a residual category used to explain any variation unaccounted for by “universal” models. Especially in constructivist studies of international relations, “identity” figures as a constant that is said to explain irrational preferences; in other words, identity comes from the bottom up, and the state’s representatives are subject to similar

beliefs and preferences as the rest of the population. Memory studies, in contrast, have been more open to analysing memory and identity as convenient tools wielded by elites.

Katyn has been the subject of numerous historical monologues. These have dealt with questions of historical truth, such as exposing the NKVD as the perpetrators of the crime (Fitzgibbon, 1972; Montfort, 1966; Paul 2010), the willingness of the allies to accept the Soviet cover-up narrative, despite convincing evidence of their intentions, and the fact that the perpetrators were never convicted (Sanford, 2005). Little space

has been allocated to the role Katyn has played in the discourse of Polish elites and memory politics since the fall of Communism. George Sanford, Andrzej Przewoznik and Jolanta Adamska refer to “memory” in their studies, but they mean the true memory of the Katyn massacre as opposed to the official lies, not the role Katyn plays in Polish collective memory (Sanford, 2005).

More recently, Katyn appears as a paradigmatic case in memory studies. A study led by Alexander Etkind – “Memory at War” – devoted its first conference to this issue in June 2011, subsequently resulting in a well-documented publication (Etkind et al., 2012). A common theme is that political elites are willing to shape cultural memory and use antagonistic rhetoric.

The concept of the *Other* is essentially attributed to memory studies, as it is through interaction with the *Other* that the essence of the *Self* is made clear. Iver Neumann has said that “Russia is liminal to European identity” and the new Eastern European states have portrayed it as a brutal and uncivilised “Other” (Neumann, 2002, 121–125); Katyn features prominently in such arguments in Poland. Here I will heed Jeffrey Olick’s call not to “reinvent the wheel” every time “we talk in terms of collective memory” (Olick, 2008, 26–27) and instead refer to Olick *et al.*’s overview of this literature (2011).

Identity emerges in the borderlands where the *Self* and *Other* meet, and it is the existence of the national states that creates identity (Barth, 1969). Events that highlight distinctiveness do not emerge by themselves, they are chosen: for example, Habermas and Derrida emphasise that “historical experiences are only candidates for self-conscious appropriation; without such a self-conscious act they cannot attain the power to shape our identity” (Habermas, Derrida, 2003, 295). In other words, elites attempt to shape identity in a specific direction by highlighting one historical experience over another, as in the Polish – Russian disputes over the controversial recent past. According to this view, historical events are activated in order to epitomise the nature of the *Other* and to justify an antagonistic position, rather than expressly as part of foreign policy.

Identity forming *Othering* tends to be analyzed as to some degree artificially constructed. Benedict Anderson (1983), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) consider national identity as a social or an elite-led construct. Anderson sees identity as imagined, but not false; to Hobsbawm and Ranger identity is actively created by elites for political purposes, while

Ernest Gellner contends that (nationalist) identity is deliberately constructed to satisfy politicians’ needs (Gellner, 2008). In this top-down view of identity formation, elites emphasise an interpretation of historical events that gives a popular meaning to them, thus gaining legitimacy in the eyes of (at least part of) the citizens, and consequently increasing their (political) power.

As it can be seen, most of the studies on Katyn massacre insist on the subjects of the national identity and collective memory, and at this moment we have found sufficient materials (articles, books and chapters) with reference to the problem of using political discourse to give a desired sense of these historical events. Politicians have multiple interests to create myths in order to obtain public support and, consequently, have access to the decision-making process. In the next sections this article explores some concrete examples illustrating the political intervention in creating collective perceptions and nationalist attitudes at a large scale.

### **Politics of memory today. Hypotheses of the study**

Politics is usually a domain of the most people’s daily life. It not means that they view politics through their own “lenses”, but rather means that many social and historical views are shaped by the political discourse in the media. As Leszek Koczanowicz states:

*if we perceive our social world as a construction of actors, we are likely to conclude that the past is not a land to be merely observed, interpreted, and left untouched by any kind of intervention from the present. On the contrary, there is a growing body of evidence to the effect that social memory transforms and changes the past in order to preserve a society’s identity (Koczanowicz, 1997, 259).*

Deep in the Soviet Union in the spring of 1940, 21.768 Polish prisoners of war were executed in the Katyn Forest near present-day Belarus. Unknown to the rest of the world, their mass graves were covered and all but forgotten. As the war raged and territorial occupation shifted, the graves were discovered and the missing prisoners were found. But the question of who was to blame was left unanswered for decades. The wide-spread post-war version advanced by Western and Polish elites is the Soviets, fearful of the implications of their guilt, concealed evidence and withheld the truth, but the



Poles and the Western world demanded an answer. The fight to uncover the so-called “truth about Katyn” and save its memory from being erased in the darkness of the Soviet past began. For Stalin and his successors, the struggle was to conceal the memory in order to protect themselves. For the Polish, the struggle was the long-term effort to establish and secure the memory of the victims in the minds of people everywhere.

This article explores how the Katyn massacre was used to construct a selective collective memory in Poland. Politics of memory is a useful concept to describe these practices. Political narratives often have recourse to history in order to create an image of the past in accordance with the party ideology or personal views of politicians. Searches for the truth are in opposition with the elaborated, sophisticated strategies of the mystification, and most people tend to trust the information heard or read from the political actors. These practices impact on the historical memory and have consequences on the community’s own perception on its historical past.

In this study I start from the assumption that identity is viewed as a tool used frequently by politicians, and activating collective traumatic memory may be thought of as a strategy with specific costs and payoffs: antagonistically pursuing historical justice and truth in the international sphere comes at the cost of damaging relations with a country’s neighbours. In this contextual case, two hypotheses can be formulated. First, political actors suddenly invoke contested memories such as Katyn to achieve domestic trust and to gain a distinctive ideological position. Escalations in memory conflicts will therefore frequently coincide with party competition, since contested memories serve a mobilizing function. These costs and payoffs will vary depending on the degree to which political actors need to balance the domestic and international consequences of antagonistic discourse. As a consequence, the second hypothesis is that the cost of tendentious historical interpretations is high for government actors who seek good relations with their neighbours. Opposition actors are not constrained and therefore are more likely to interpret historical events antagonistically.

These starting points are related with some ascertainties by Rolf Fredheim. He states that:

*Katyn is invoked in order to achieve domestic or international results. It is hard to distinguish*

*between international and domestic motivation as politicians invariably claim to act in the national interest rather than for personal gain (Fredheim 2014, 1169).*

But in the same time, the individual efforts, historical findings or judicial proceedings affect the significance of the event, political discourse or other patterns in which the Katyn massacre is debated. There are different manners to deal with this historical episode:

*efforts such as those by the Katyn families will be relatively constant, while the voice given to them by politicians at international summits or in sympathetic media outlets may vary (Fredheim, 2014, 1169).*

Political discourses around the commemoration of the execution ordered by Joseph Stalin during the spring of 1940, are a concrete evidence of how the actual community use the historical events as symbols to recreate a public trend and to manipulate the mass behaviour. Only the largest of the grave sites, Katyn, a forested area near Smolensk, Russia, has come to signify the whole process of killing Poland’s “pride and promise” during its brief stint of independence in the interwar period. Poland’s conservative president from 2005 to 2010, Lech Kaczyński, declared “Katyn” an act of genocide, and the parliament has been urging other governments – Russia, in particular – to do likewise.

We try to demonstrate the consequences of recent “memory events” on Poland’s relations with its eastern neighbours. According to Alexander Etkind, a “memory event” is a “revisiting of the past that creates a rupture with its accepted representation” (Etkind *et al.*, 2012, 10). Memory events acquire their significance, according to Etkind, only through dialogue (or “trialogue”) between competing parties to the memory, in this case Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. Thus, while Andrzej Wajda’s film *Katyn* (2007) was certainly a major event in the commemoration of the 1940 massacre, it became a profoundly more significant memory event after screening on Russian television in 2010. Most notably, 1940 made international news again when the Polish president and many members of the country’s elite died during an airline crash en route to Smolensk for the opening of the Katyn memorial on April 10, 2010. Solidarity leader and Poland’s first democratically elected president

Lech Wałęsa even referred to the crash as “Katyń-2” (Etkind *et al.*, 2012, 132).

### **Constructing national identity in the discourses of the elites**

East European memory have progressed significantly since Nina Tumarkin published “The Living and the Dead: The Ascent and Fall of the Clique of World War II in Russia” (1995), which analyzed and deconstructed the Soviet legends and myths of the Great Patriotic War of unified suffering at the hands of Nazi Germany (no unique stories for Jews or different nationalities) and subjective, asymmetrical cult of invented heroes (the Russians were the best in the war). Since glasnost, cracks rose in this account, in Russia as well as most particularly in the other previous Soviet republics, and nations behind the Iron Curtain. Ukrainians now struggle with questions of whether the Famine of 1933 was an act of genocide by the Stalinist regime on par with, and similar to, the Holocaust, and of how to treat the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), a nationalist paramilitary briefly allied with the German occupation that fought the Red Army (Zhurzhenko 2013, 241-269; Zhurzhenko 2011, 597-639). Was the Soviet Union no different from Nazi Germany, and could a group that advanced an ideology similar to fascism – and who instigated acts of ethnic cleansing – be celebrated as heroes of a broader struggle for Ukrainian national liberation? The fall of Communism also has allowed Poles to celebrate different heroes from the war, such as the Home Army (Armia Krajowa), and to examine their own roles as perpetrators in the Holocaust, alongside their roles as victims of Soviet political violence (Gross, 2002; Polonsky *et al.*, 2003).

Katyń was a singular event in pre-war Soviet history, in that all other acts of mass repression were conducted against Soviet citizens. Since the formation of the People’s Republic of Poland, however, the ruling Polish Workers’ Party clung to the explanation that the Nazis did it. In 1941, after Germany had taken Smolensk, the SS conducted excavations after hearing rumours about what the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) had done; they found the bodies and, in the words of Joseph Goebbels, used Katyń as “anti-Bolshevik propaganda” (Etkind *et al.* 2012, 5).

The Soviets in turn blamed the Germans for the atrocity, and, in what became known as the “Katyń lie”, claimed that the 1940 massacre actually happened in 1941. This notion of a “monstrous Nazi atrocity” dominated any

discussion of the event during the Communist period, and even mention of the year 1940 was grounds for imprisonment in Communist Poland (Etkind *et al.* 2012, 5). Nonetheless, émigrés and dissidents kept alive the truth that it was a Soviet act. Collections of oral testimonies and documents circulated among people opposed to the regime, and individuals erected Katyń-40 monuments under the cover of night and threat of imprisonment.

Although the fall of Communism destroyed the Soviet-sponsored „Katyń lie”, with the Russian state even offering Poland documentary evidence that the NKVD performed the massacre, it was not until Wajda’s *Katyń* was released in 2007 that the issue became part of Polish popular culture.

The attempts to find the truth about *Katyń* and to commemorate its victims acquired political significance regardless of the specific intentions of individual truth seekers. In Communist Poland, even personal references to Katyń by the victims’ widows and children posed a political challenge to the authorities determined to make the topic of Katyń unmentionable. As a rule, Polish cultural memories of Katyń were shaped, preserved, and transmitted under political pressure, and so they became an intrinsic element of Polish political discourse, indeed a key indicator of political and moral loyalties under Communism.

The article “Forests, Families, and Films: Polish Memory of Katyń, 1943-2014” (Kosicki, 2013) draws a comprehensive, thoroughly documented survey of the Polish cultural memory of Katyń. In this material, the researcher investigates the key verifiable, political, social, social, human, and institutional variables molding this memory. Published not long after the aggregate volume “Recollecting Katyń”, by Alexander Etkind and others, Kosicki’s article supplements (now and again polemically) this book yet in addition to the contemporary Anglophone debates on Katyń by lighting up realities just as interpretive facts unexplored inside. With regards to late Polish – Russian relations, particularly equivocal Russian perspectives to Katyń under Putin, this topic has, once more, been resounding in contemporary Polish public narratives. It keeps on procuring new political hints and leaves brief period and space for researchers to create methodological points of view and systematic language safely inaccessible from Polish governmental agenda. Hence, maybe definitely, any examination of the latest echoes of the Katyń topic in Poland will undoubtedly fuel a further conversation,

particularly among researchers giving close consideration to the actual political life. Piotr H. Kosicki's article, notwithstanding its investigation of Polish cultural memory of Katyń since World War II, additionally presents a significant starting point for such a further discussion. Placed within this illuminating context, other three articles by Izabella Sariusz-Skapska, Nikita V. Petrov, and Ireneusz C. Kamiński possess dual significance. They present detailed scholarly explorations of their particular themes and, at the same time, constitute important statements by major actors in the long-standing struggle for full disclosure and memorialization of the Katyń massacres.

"The Katyń Families: A Polish Lesson in Contemporary History" (Sariusz-Skapska, 2013) is a historical account of the pivotal role played by surviving families of Katyń victims in preserving the memories of their loved ones during the Communist period of Polish history, and in creating public forms for their commemoration after the fall of Communism. But, the significance of this article does not end there. Its author is a granddaughter of Katyń victim Bolesław Skapski, and the daughter of Andrzej Sariusz-Skapski, the former president of the Federation of Katyń Families, who died alongside ninety-five other Polish public figures in the catastrophe in Smolensk, on April 10, 2010. She replaced her father as the president of the Federation. In her account, historical facts and debates are described as intensely personal phenomena, just as they have been experienced by many families of the Katyń victims.

Today, the struggles of "Katyń families" to keep the memory of Katyń alive present an important chapter in recent Polish cultural history. It takes a scholar with a personal background as distinctive as that of Izabella Sariusz-Skapska not only to compose a solid empirical account of these struggles but also to illuminate their deep private dimensions. The article is both academic account and personal testimony revealing how multiple human memories devoted to Katyń victims have been transformed into a key theme of contemporary Polish cultural memory.

"Katyń: The Kremlin's Double Game" (Petrov 2015) focuses on a key turning point in the history of Russian attitudes to the Katyń massacres after the fall of the Soviet Union – namely, the termination in 2004 of the official investigation of the Katyń massacres by the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation. The choice to end the examination was secret and was shown by the public only later after the fact. This was a significant stun to the

individuals who had accepted that the main commonsensical route for the specialists of the Russian Federation to manage this Soviet wrong management of the past was to uncover all the obvious things, articulate the conspicuous decision, and consciously permit the Katyń slaughters to go into history.

For all of those who shared this astonishment, Nikita V. Petrov's article may provide an enlightening explanation. The author, a specialist in archival research on Stalin's political police, and the deputy chair of the Memorial Center for Research and Education in Moscow, analyzes how the Kremlin has handled the Katyń theme in the context of the politicization of history under Putin. Needless to argue, this process has clearly been moving away from earlier Russian efforts to reflect critically on Soviet history, and towards imperialistic nostalgia with the resurgent cult of Stalin as one of its pillars.

The genuine popularity of this nostalgia for a long-gone oppressor puzzles most people outside of Russia. At the same time, it is impossible to understand contemporary Russian society and politics, both foreign and domestic, without analyzing this phenomenon. Petrov emphasizes that Stalin's responsibility for Katyń is hardly mentionable within the frame of mind in which the Kremlin seems inextricably mired. The Kremlin's "double game" regarding Katyń has consisted of, on the one hand, legally non-binding comments by Russian authorities, including presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev, admitting Stalin's responsibility for Katyń. On the other hand, Russian authorities have consistently avoided any legally binding admissions to this effect.

The end of the Katyń investigation by the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office in 2004 was equivalent to an admission that the authorities of the Russian Federation lacked sufficient evidence to figure out who was responsible for Katyń, Tver, Kharkiv, and other locations. "The issue of Katyń and its solution has become more than a question of Russian – Polish relations", Petrov writes. "Now it involves the relationship between Russia and Europe. The Kremlin's readiness to take decisive and concrete steps to lay the Katyń case to rest will also signify its legal readiness to make a decisive break with the Soviet past. And, in a larger sense, it will determine the priorities and further course of the country's political development". Petrov wrote this less than a year before the Russian intervention in Ukraine. In this context, one cannot help but notice the author's

effort to emphasize that, despite everything, at that point not all hope was yet lost that the Kremlin would change its policy and not only resolve the Katyń case but also normalize Russia's relations with Poland (the former being a clear condition of the latter). Since then, the Kremlin has made its choices. As a result, Russia seems further today than it has been in the last twenty-five years from making a decisive break with its Soviet past and from normalizing its relations with Poland, Europe, and the rest of the world.

Both the 2004 decision to terminate the Russian investigation of the Katyń massacres and the text of the final document containing the conclusions of this investigation were classified top secret by the Russian authorities. While Nikita V. Petrov views this as a direct violation of the Russian Federation's Law on State Secrets, Ireneusz C. Kamiński – a law professor at the Jagiellonian University of Cracow and, currently, an *ad hoc* judge of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg – adds that this was also a violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. In response to this decision, a group of families of Katyń victims appealed to the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation, requesting access to the information gathered by the investigators, concerning the circumstances of the deaths of their closest relatives. The Chief Military Prosecutor's Office rejected their appeal, concluding (contrary to the widely available evidence) that there was no sufficient basis to determine that the burials in Katyń resulted from Soviet mass killings. As far as the Office was concerned, the Polish victims were in Soviet custody in 1940 and then "disappeared" from it.

A primary feature of Katyń memory that Etkind and his co-authors highlight involves the use of metonym and metaphor. On the one hand, Katyń functions to advance the trope of Poland as a martyr nation, along with the whole of Eastern Europeans' suffering under Communism. On the other hand, Katyń as metaphor becomes a way for groups and individuals to claim the suffering that Poles experienced for themselves, or as a way for Poles to compete with others who also claim victim status. Katyń itself frequently becomes relativized. The authors explore this process in Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, and Russia. In each of these cases, nationalists and other post-Communist elites searched for "their own" Katyń, either as a means to compete with Polish claims of victimhood, or to appropriate such a successful method of nation building. President Viktor

Yushchenko, for example, after viewing Wajda's *Katyń*, claimed that it "shed light on a part of our history too", despite the fact that the film made no mention of Ukraine or Ukrainians (Etkind, 2012, 54).

Uncovering the truth concerning Katyń proved to be less than easy, given the state of global politics in the mid-1940s. Many assumed that the unanswered questions concerning the missing Poles would be addressed at the end of World War II. However, the Cold War froze communication as the Soviets retreated into diplomatic isolation. Increasingly, families of the Katyń victims and those who sought to uncover the truth found these questions to now be unanswerable.

During the Cold War, fears of global nuclear destruction dominated politics and the uncovering of Soviet War crimes was apparently of little importance. The United States Congressional Hearing in Chicago in 1952 was of little consequence since there was no way the Soviets would respect any findings. Stalin had completely wiped out any possibility in the minds of the Russian people that the Poles had been executed at the hands of the Soviets. He continued to blame this entirely on the Nazis. Stalin's death brought no further information and it seemed that the truth and the chance at uncovering it could have died with him. In 1992, however, Russian President Boris Yeltsin proved otherwise (Upman, 2011).

In an attempt to secure his political position of authority and demonstrate his ability to cooperate with the West, Yeltsin released previously classified political documents to researchers. Among these documents was a proposal dated March 5, 1940, written by NKVD chief Lavrenty Beria that called for the execution of the Polish officers. The proposal was approved with the signature of Stalin himself (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2010).

This information, along with much more that was found in the other declassified documents sparked massive national interest among the Russian public at uncovering what were called the "blank spots" (Upman, 2011, 94) in the Soviet past. Unfortunately, this lasted only a short time as the public and the government quickly grew tired of the negative facts that continued to surface. Many of the documents were reclassified and closed off to the public and researchers.

The Russians had moved out from under the Soviet Communist regime and into a new era. It was finally a chance to redefine their national identity. These documents seemed to prevent this

as they tied such devastating events to the Russians. They did not want to be associated with the atrocities of their former government and wanted to prevent any further negative information from being made public. Thus, perhaps unknowingly or even out of political habit, fearing the consequences that would result from the publishing of political secrets, the new Russian government reacted in a similar manner as the Soviets. They hid the information and refused to cooperate in discussions or external inquiries.

The efforts to recover the truth were at the same time with the more and more politicization over this event. After 1990 when the political competition in Poland achieved a nationalist pattern, an important number of politicians began to use the significance of Katyn massacre in their public speaks to achieve electorate.

On 1 September 2009, when Europe's political leaders gathered at Westerplatte, a peninsula in Gdansk, and to Poles a symbol of their heroic resistance to Nazi aggression, with the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, there were a clash of discourses between the Polish President Lech Kaczynski and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin over the memory of this historical event. "It appeared that Polish and Russian memories of the war were fundamentally incompatible: Kaczynski recalled the brave Polish soldiers who fought against the Germans until 17 September and 'the stab in the back from Bolshevik Russia', while Putin likened the execution of Polish nationals at Katyn to the death of Soviet soldiers in Polish prison camps during the 1919–1920 Polish – Russian war" (Fredheim 2014, 1165). The confrontation has continued: "Kaczynski further claimed that 'the Red Army's treacherous attack brought 'the night of occupation, the essence of which was the Holocaust, Auschwitz, Katyn. One might ask, what connects Katyn with the Holocaust? The Jews were killed because they were Jews, the Polish officers because they were Poles. Such is the comparison'". In his speech, "Kaczynski presented a narrative whereby Poland was attacked by the equal and opposite hostile forces of Russia (rather than the USSR) and Germany that harmed Poland in equal measure" (Fredheim, 2014, 1165). This narrative is generally accepted in Poland. Such an interpretation was fundamentally incompatible with the Russian view where the Red Army had liberated Europe from fascism and Katyn was merely one of many Stalinist excesses.

Finally, after years of avoidance and seclusion, the Russian government seemed to be making strides at dealing with the dark Communist past. In 2010 Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, alongside Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, attended a commemoration service in the Katyn Forest. His presence marked the first formal acknowledgement from a high-ranking Russian official that the Soviets were, in fact, responsible for the mass murder that took place seventy years before (Voice of America, 2010).

The argument at Westerplatte was not the first time Katyn was brought up internationally, but it was the first time the Russian side faced the issue head on. In 2005, Polish opposition politicians cited Katyn as a reason why President Kwasniewski should not participate in the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow. The cases brought to the European Court of Human Rights, where victims' families demanded those executed be recognised as war crime victims, were covered in the international media. Katyn gained further international significance following the tragic death of President Kaczynski and his entourage en route to the 70th anniversary Katyn commemorations held in April 2010 near Smolensk, and later that year the Duma officially reiterated Yeltsin's admission that Stalin was responsible for the massacre.

Throughout the Cold War and the two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and Poland remained exceedingly tense. Much of this was due to the Polish demand for acknowledgement of Katyn, and the Russians reciprocating with equal obstinacy. This face-off constituted a long-term political frustration, and drove the knife of Katyn even deeper into the hearts of Poles. Now it was not just that the Poles blamed the Russians, they hated their unwavering decision to ignore the obvious truth and confess to their crime. Thus, Putin's decision to attempt finally to bridge this gap, though it was a necessary step, it was just that – a step did not fix anything immediately, but it did help to satiate the seventy-year aggravation.

It seems that Putin knew this himself as well, which is important if the relationship was to mend. In his speech at the Commemoration, Putin stated, "No matter how difficult it is, we must move toward each other, remembering everything but understanding that we can't live only in the past" (R.F.E./Radio Liberty, 2010). This demonstrates his understanding that it is equally as difficult as it is necessary for two peoples to simply move on. The Russians' guilt for such an atrocity is obviously an obstacle, as is the

victimhood of the Poles, but in the striving for unity, a peace can be found.

Tusk also spoke along this vein, of movement towards progress as two nations. "A word of truth can mobilize two peoples looking for the road to reconciliation. Are we capable of transforming a lie into reconciliation? We must believe we can", asserted the Polish Prime Minister (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2010). Tusk, also making mention of the existence of the Soviet lie, provided his fellow Poles with the satisfaction that the Russians were now truly coming clean about their abuse of the Poles. The Poles always knew the Russians were lying, but now everyone, including the Russians, knew it. This sort of vindication, though perhaps hinging on selfishness, is inherently necessary for the victim to accept an apology and reach an understanding with the antagonist. Tusk was also asking the Poles to acknowledge that the fight was over. The gap had been bridged, and now what lies ahead remains only each side's attempt to cross it. This long-awaited political action very well could have been the watershed for Russian and Polish relations that had been tense long before *Katyń*, and perhaps still can be. However, it will not be without difficulty.

## Conclusions

*Katyń*, encompassing multiple killing fields and mass-graves, is unique as a place but plural as a symbol.

The historian Klas-Göran Karlsson has systematized six uses of history, respectively scholarly, existential, moral, ideological, political, and non-uses. Considering the instrumentalization of the Poland's romantic tradition, what he defines as the "ideological use" of history especially helps understanding how the *Katyń* massacre has been politically used in Poland. This event has become an electoral tool and the historical, cultural significances can be lost. The ideological use is a political process resulting in "new grand narratives" to emphasize a sense of national and cultural independence by arranging historical elements into a relevant context. This is strongly connected to the construction of legitimacy through narratives that contain clear dichotomies and a visible continuity of history, all of which proves particularly useful for nationalists.

History is intentionally miss-used in the political discourse. The hypotheses of this study are confirmed: Polish national identity is shaped by a strong sense of victimhood rooted in the view that Poland's history is essentially a series of attacks from its neighbours and treachery by

unpatriotic Poles, favouring a continuous betrayal of the interests and freedoms of Polish citizens. In this logic, it takes a strong Polish nation state to restore order and morality. This interpretation, linked with Polish Catholic messianism and its mission of salvation, constitutes the romantic construction of Polish identity and unity. But the Russian case is similar: Putin maintains his authoritarian power using a populist discourse which includes many references to the USSR history and making a portrait of a glorious Communist era compared to the actual time.

In spite of the fact that for more than 70 years *Katyń* has been a source of highest contention between Russia and Poland, even on the global political level, it appears that gradually, steps are being made in the long process of reconciliation. Russia and Poland have centuries of issues to work through in order to achieve any real levels of trust or reliance, but it does not have to be impossible. As long as people are continuing to strive in their efforts to connect to each other, be it through the blogs over the *Katyń* film, or now through Facebook, as previously stated, reconciliation lies in the hands of the public. Governments have political and economic purposes for making amends, but healing and restoration will come from those who have direct connection with *Katyń*. With seemingly limitless effort, the Soviet Union attempted to conceal their actions for decades from the Western world. If it had not been for the greater persistence of those willing to fight for the truth, they may have succeeded. It is with this same persistence that people must continue if the memory is to remain alive and active.\*

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## THE CARLTON BUILDING, THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1940 AND THE NATIONAL-LEGIONARY STATE

Valeria SOROȘTINEANU  
Senior Lecturer, Ph. D.  
“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu  
E-mail: valeria\_sorostineanu@yahoo.ca

**Abstract:** The year 1940 was considered the most nefarious year in the history of contemporary Romania. At a national level, the territorial loss of Transylvania, Bessarabia and the northern Bukovina, as well as the Cadrilater (Southern Dobruja) brought the collapse of Carol II reign and the come back of Mihai on the Romanian throne, which took place under the patronage of an authoritarian national-legionary state led by Ion Antonescu.

Another disaster, the earthquake on the morning of 10 November 1940 was perceived as a tax for unbelief. The crash of the most modern building in Bucharest, built on the American model, became the symbol of the Romanian lack of responsibility and maturity of the builders. The earthquake, the struggle to save the victims proved the dangerous aspect of the political fight that foreshadowed the future evolution of the Romanian state.

**Keywords:** national-legionary state, head of the state, the earthquake of 1940, the Carlton building, national disaster

**Rezumat:** Anul 1940 a fost considerat cel mai nefast an din istoria contemporană a României. În plan național, pierderile teritoriale din Transilvania, Basarabia și nordul Bucovinei, precum și a Cadrilaterului au avut urmări de colapsul domniei lui Carol al II-lea și de revenirea la tron a lui Mihai I. Aceasta a avut loc sub patronajul proclamării unui stat autoritar, național-legionar, stat condus de Ion Antonescu.

Un dezastru în formă fizică, cutremurul din dimineața zilei de 10 noiembrie 1940 a fost preceput și drept pedeapsă pentru necredință. Sinistrul a fost simbolizat de prăbușirea celui mai modern bloc din București, bloc realizat după model american, a demonstrat lipsa de maturitate și de răspundere a celor care construiau în capitală. Cutremurul și munca de salvare a sinistraților au accentuat diferențele politice dintre armată și legionari. Dincolo de acțiunea în sine, evenimentele au prefigurat viitoarea evoluție a statului român.

**Cuvinte cheie:** statul național-legionar, șeful statului, cutremurul din 1940, blocul Carlton, dezastrul național

### The earthquake of 1940

The year 1940 was considered the most disastrous in the Romanian contemporary history, while November added a new physical disaster to the list of territorial losses of the same year. As others mentioned, a national disaster doesn't come alone (Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 33).

The earthquake took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 at 3.39 a.m. and lasted 45 seconds, leaving numerous victims, material destruction, a lot of pain and political confusion. The events that took place after the earthquake

added madness to the entire political picture. The ruins were still smoldering when a wave of fanaticism enlivened the legionaries. The newspaper *Bunavestire* presented the calamity as a divine punishment, while the national-legionary state installed 2 months ago did not avenge the death of its captain. In the first days of November 1940, 64 people were arrested, considered guilty directly or indirectly in the murder of the legionary captain. They were sent to Jilava prison and killed on the night of November 26 (Bratu, 2004).

The pre-modern and modern era saw other earthquakes in Romania caused by the dangerous seismic area of Vrancea. Thus there were earthquakes mentioned in 1738, 1802, 1838; the 1802 earthquake had a magnitude of 7.9 and the 1838 of 6.9. The news were provided by chroniclers or by engineers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially foreigners who came to assess the damages. These natural disasters contributed to creating and fueling the myth of the divine punishment, especially valid for the Bucharest area, a myth transmitted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mobee project, 2014).

The first big earthquake in contemporary Romanian history represented a disaster difficult to assess for specialists. Therefore, those who evaluated the magnitude found it difficult to establish conditions to set the projection of future buildings that would be resistant from the seismic point of view. In the same year, such an analysis was realized in the U.S.A., after the earthquake in California, with the epicenter in El Centro.

According to the studies of Jeffreys in 1935, the typology of Vrancea earthquakes was established; the great number of intermediary ones took place in the lithosphere, at 60-200 km.

With a magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale, even of 7.9 at the depth of 130 or 133 km, the earthquake of November 1940 was the most powerful of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of released energy and it was preceded by a series of smaller earthquakes (the one of 22 October 1940 had a 6.5 degrees). It had devastating effects in the center, south of Moldova and in Walachia, with far-reaching effects in the Soviet Union, to Moscow, Samara, Odesa, as well as Istanbul, Athena, and Marseille.

After the earthquake, the General Association of Engineers in Romania wrote a study regarding the influence of the seismic waves on the buildings made of reinforced concrete, while the geologist Ion Atanasiu (1892-1949) delineated the seismic map of Romania in the postwar period. Moreover, experts elaborated on new norms of construction (Golmeanu, 2018, Mărmureanu, 2017, 58-61).

The earthquake was especially analyzed in the newspapers of France, Italy and the U.S.A. It was on the first page of the French newspapers *Paris Soir*, *Figaro*, *Le Matin*, *Le*

*Petit Journal*. The best newsreel was kept in France of 1.41 minutes within the French Institute of Broadcasting (Dragomir, 1940).

Besides Bucharest that was greatly damaged, the Panciu town was destroyed 95% - out of 371 built houses only 5 were standing and 57 made of timber. Other affected towns were Focșani, Mărășești, Galați and Iași. A wing of the Doftana prison collapsed, while in Chișinău there were 78 victims, 2.795 damaged buildings out of which 172 were destroyed.

A great number of churches and monasteries were hit, starting with the Strehaia monastery in Neamț county, those in Bârlad and the Patriarchal Palace in Bucharest till the northern Dobruja (Mobee project, 2014; Mărmureanu, 2017, 58-61).

There were also destructions in Ploiești, Târgoviște, Leordeni, Vălenii de Munte, and Galați. The riverbeds of the Prahova and Cricov rivers were modified, there were landslides, while sand of various colors came to the surface, as well as waters smelling of fuel oil and sulfur. In the Prahova county, 40% of the buildings were destroyed (Lungulescu, 1940, 1-2).

The central press of Bucharest described at length the earthquake and offered images of the disaster, with data concerning the dead and wounded. Thus, the newspaper *Universul* of 11 November 1940 wrote at 5 a.m. about the first data:

*The capital was shaken by an earthquake of extraordinary violence. The produced panic was higher and greater as the majority of the inhabitants were taken by surprise in their sleep. The seismic movements situated us close to the final catastrophe. Cars and taxis run toward the peripheries. The majority of the population took refuge in the Cișmigiu. The Carlton building collapsed and at the place of the sinister place came all the posts of firemen who liberate the territory. At 4.20 a.m. the astronomic observatory announced that the power of the earthquake was 8-9 degrees.*

From the beginning, there were many unclear facts regarding the number of victims, especially caused by censorship. Thus, the first data mentioned around 300-500 dead at the national scale. At the meeting of the Council of

Ministers, General Petrovicescu, Ministry of Internal Affairs showed that the capital, Valea Prahovei, Galați, Focșani were greatly affected. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 it was established the number of 267 dead and 476 wounded. Concerning the Carlton building, 54 inhabitants were dead and 82 wounded out of 226.

According to the newspaper *Curentul* of 12 November 1940, there were 2 miracles at the Carlton building: several persons were saved from the underground, while the Sergeant Bâgu, present at his observation post on the roof of the building found himself on the street after the earthquake, mildly wounded from where he ran to the barrack King Ferdinand and raised the alarm. The almanac of the newspaper *Curentul* mentioned 140 dead, hundreds of wounded in 1941, whereas the official statistics stated the number of 136 dead (Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 40, 49).

In Bucharest 183 buildings were evacuated and 402 were damaged. We mention the following buildings: Ateneul Român, Teatrul Național, Opera, on Calea Victoriei, Casa de Depuneri, Palatul Poștei, Palatul Justiției. Moreover, almost all ceilings of showrooms collapsed, the rubble of the building Uniunea Camerelor de Comerț from Sărindar Street blocked the street, and the spire of the church on Berthelot street fell. Also, the church Popa Tatu collapsed and the Calea Victoriei was sprinkled with collapsed walls. Among the other important buildings that were damaged, we mention the American Embassy, the hotel of the Post, the building of the Ministry of Agriculture, the building of the High Command, situated at the Cișmigiu entrance, where the statue of General Cernat fell off the socket. Moreover, the Belvedere building was damaged, along with the Wilson building and all the clocks in the capital stopped. 2.500 requests for assisting the damaged buildings were registered in the capital alone.

The earthquake of 1940 left more marks in the capital than the 1977 one although the high buildings were built regardless of the seismic norms and the shock waves were propagated differently. The petroleum area Ploiești-Câmpina was seriously affected according to the data from Agenția Rador in the

period 11-13 November 1940 (Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 37, 40-41).

On the first day after the earthquake, the first data mentioned that the emergency hospital housed 135 wounded, 50 people at the Salvare, and 60 dead at the morgue. The general atmosphere was described as black sorrow throughout the country. Among the victims of the Carlton building, there were famous actors Ion Vasilache, Angela Arapu, Octavian Arbore. The sacrificing team at the Carlton building was formed of ten young men with asbestos cloaks who entered the underground of the building to remove bodies and objects. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1940, the first snow fell over the capital; Colonel Zăvoianu, the prefect of police of Bucharest, undertook a series of actions – the shows were suspended, the shops and warehouses of building materials had to be opened all day, while the healthy inhabitants had to help gather the rubble and the bricks in front of their houses. Police inspectors were sent to assess the number of victims. Trucks from the sanitation departments were used, as well as field kitchens for the saving crew from the army and powerful cranes from several companies from Bucharest (Ciotoran, 2012, 28-29, Apostu, 2019, Lungulescu, 1940, 1-2).

The edition of the 12<sup>th</sup> of November of *Universul* stated that the population was still in shock, most of them were refugees in the parks of the capital or the square of the Army Club, whereas information about the situation in the country was scarce.

In Bucharest, the epitome of the disaster was the Carlton Building, a symbol of modernization, situated at the corner of Regal Street and Brătianu Boulevard. 12 or 14 floors, according to different sources, 92 apartments, studio and offices, as well as a grand cinema hall in the underground. 200 inhabitants were mentioned; several were saved from the underground, where they managed to get in touch with the police.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Petrovicescu, along with General Hansen, command of the German Military Mission, mayor of the capital, G.Vântu, prefect of police, Colonel Zăvoianu, command of the firemen were all present at the place of the disaster. *Universul* published the list of wounded

people that were in the hospitals of the city: Colțea, Filantropia, Urgențe, Regina Elisabeta, Colentina, IOV, Spitalul Gardienilor Publici.

According to the newspaper *Avântul* from the Valea Jiului since the interwar period, a team of miners left for Bucharest to help the victims of the earthquake. The engineers Ovidiu Ștefănescu, Radu Ștefănescu, Radu Doroftei, Eugen Suciu and Șerban Duma were mentioned as part of their team who entered the underground of the Carlton building (Lungulescu, 1940, 1-2, Boboc, 2020, 2017).

### **The Carlton building collapse**

The drama of the saving mission of the Carlton inhabitants was more obvious after a fire started in the underground because of the fuel oil tank, while the break of the water pipes flooded the space. 1.600 legionaries in 8 teams formed of 200 people each and changed every 2 hours were involved in ground clearance, whereas German and Romanian soldiers were also working on saving the inhabitants.

The Carlton building was designed by the most fashionable architect of interwar Romania, Prince G.M. Cantacuzino; the stress calculations were done by engineer G.Schneider and the builders were Schindll brothers from Bucharest.

The building covered a surface of 7.930 sq. m. with two facets – toward the Regală Street and the Brătianu Boulevard, with a height of 24.3 and 25 m, while the corner had a 44.2 m tower supported by a pillar that could not face horizontal terrestrial movements. Although there were some troubles pointed out by experts, the city hall gave its approval for the building on the 27 of July 1935. The works were speedy, including the winter season, some technical norms were disrespected and flagrant deficiencies were masked, especially the supporting pillars that were molded defective. In addition to that, the showroom did not have the building permit. The investigative report stated that out of 1.000 buildings in Bucharest, only the most recent construction collapsed given the flawed construction details. Schindll brothers and foremen were imprisoned at Văcărești with the architect Cantacuzino on the 12 of November 1940.

It was difficult to believe that Prince George Matei Cantacuzino (1899-1960) made a mistake when designing the building. A representative of tempered modernism and the greatest professor of architecture, Cantacuzino wasn't necessarily and admirer of the urban development of Bucharest. Thus, in his correspondence with Marcel Iancu in 1931, he refers to Bucharest as "our chaotic Balkan and mediocre city of small pettiness, as Tudor Arghezi was saying." On another occasion, he complained of "this capital that seems mostly improvised" (Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 48, Pippidi, 2011).

Nevertheless, the architect was arrested by Ion Antonescu and imprisoned at Văcărești, being under a long trial along with others involved in the construction process. He was released in 1944 when it was proved that the builder had not respected the architectural plans.

The topic has remained a nebulous one to our days, but back then, when the fright after the earthquake passed, many inhabitants of the capital remembered another disaster on a smaller scale that took place on the celebration of Carol II enthronement, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1935.

A festivity dedicated to the Restauration Day led to 4 deaths and 383 wounded. 5.000 guardsmen came to Cotroceni Palace where they built tribunes for the demonstrations organized by the city hall. The first tribune to collapse was the one near the border guards' regiments, then one of the two pillars of another tribune fell – frightened people went to the tribune and it fell on them. The saving units came quickly, as did King Carol II and Prince Nicolae. The investigation established the following: the calculation notes were missing from the project, the dimension of beams was smaller than necessary, the drawings were unclear. On top of that, the designer was a graduate of Electronics Faculty, not Construction Faculty, while the entrepreneurs had no qualifications and there was no General Technical Department within the city hall.

Later the file of the entrepreneur Druțu disappeared from the city hall. The press followed the case, engineers organized conferences on the topic at the Societatea Politehnică. And then silence. We may conclude that the lack of knowledge and responsibility, as

well as corruption transformed a celebration into tragedy (Ipate, 2002, 124-126).

M. Dragomir, a journalist at *Gazeta Municipală* of Bucharest, was also sad and disappointed by the events:

*We are subject to a period of great and difficult trials. After the territorial sacrifices, we had to face a harsh earthquake with our newly built neighborhoods and the most damaged is Cotroceni set in the past meadow of Dâmbovița. Because of the rubble spread on an ample surface, Brătianu Boulevard was blocked for several days. The traffic became a nightmare; the blockage of the center was felt till the periphery. The ones from the Carlton observed the poor quality of the concrete and the building permit was broken. Why do we wonder? That is yet another proof that great misfortunes do not teach us anything. After a lengthy trial, the guilt for the Carlton building disaster is attributed to the builder only (Apostu, 2019, Dragomir, 1940).*

After the November 10 earthquake of 1940, a religious procession took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November led by the patriarch Nicodim who asked grace and read an impressive prayer to remove the earthquakes. It was a noble calling for humanity when the lack of humanity covered the country. The prayer was broadcast in the entire country and it was not published in the press, as it was forbidden by the legionaries (Costache, Costache, Costache, 2010, 13-22; Ciotoran, 2012, 28-29).

The earthquake became a character in the novel *Carlton* written by Cezar Petrescu. The novel was part of a cycle of novels, among which *Calea Victoriei*, *Greta Garbo*, *Duminica orbului* and *Oraș patriarchal*. According to the aforementioned novel of a great psychological profundity about the unpredictability of human destiny, the city was far from the certain environment required for the aspirations of the Romanian society. Seen as a building following the American model, the character of the novel is described as getting higher and higher till the fateful day of the earthquake, watching in the

night with its gloomy wry face with countless black orbits. The scene of the earthquake is described realistically:

*The Carlton building was no more. In the place of the white gigantic building, there was an absurd emptiness. Just a pile of rubber, cement, stones, twisted wire and pipes... The crowd was silent, everyone was silent, not a wail, a weeping or a cry. Everyone was silent, broken down by dismay more than the frightening of the show. (Petrescu, 2018, 129, 472)*

Irina Procopiu shared the image of the earthquake in the middle of which was the Carlton disaster, along with the bodies in the morgue and the efforts undertaken to save the organ from the Athenaeum and the destruction of her own house (Procopiu, 2016, 250).

### **The Panciu disaster**

The situation in southern Moldova was tragic as well. After the Carlton disaster, the news of the Panciu town almost entirely destroyed had a huge impact, according to the meeting of the Council of Ministries held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1940. The mayor A.Căpățână wrote a memo concerning the devastating effects of the earthquake in Panciu:

*On the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1940, at 3.40 a.m., several powerful horizontal shattering and a vertical one gave us the impression that we fell into a pit of 10-12 meters depth. The earthquake of 1894 was nothing compared to this one, we became more of a refugee than in 1917 when we took refuge in Moldova. We have all had a sad winter, our souls filled with the pains, lack and sorrows combined with the hardships of our Homeland.*

Elefterie Negel, journalist of the *Universul* newspaper published on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 a description of the devastated towns of Focșani and Panciu. The latter was an enormous ruin, while the only statue that resisted was in the center of the town. Soldiers and legionaries tried to save those caught between the walls of the buildings. They were

guided by dogs who lied above the shops, the coffin of the owners who were buried alive. The schools were destroyed, while the children were miraculously saved, sliding with the avalanche of the roofs and walls. Many of them remained in the voids and covered with rubble; some of them got out during the night, covered in blood, and frightened to death.

At the church of St. Paraschiva, the priest searches desperately for the Holy Gospel and icons in the ruins of the church alongside soldiers and legionaries... Hundreds of souls wailed their sorrow in the cemetery that received so many victims.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1940, the Community of Jews from Focșani showed that they suffered huge losses and need at least 1.500.000 lei for the synagogues and schools. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1940, another memo is addressed to the Putna prefecture, highlighting that a great number of Jews were on the streets. A series of historical monuments were also damaged: the cemetery Poiana lui Frunză, the mausoleum at Soveja, big rifts in the dome of Mărășești, the German cemetery at Soveja.

According to an official report of the Focșani police, required by the Police inspectorate of Galați, the most affected towns were Focșani, Panciu, Mărășești, Adjud, Odobești, with 53 deaths, 166 wounded, 1.072 damaged buildings and damages over 150.517.000 million lei. The city hall of Focșani announced on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 that they needed at least 10 million lei from the Ministry of Public Instruction and Cults to rebuild the churches and the schools. A committee of architects was established from legionary organizations *Arhitectura* and *Răsleți* from Bucharest.

However, there was a great interest in studying the causes of the disaster so that experts from Bucharest and Germany came to study the phenomenon. The city hall of Focșani spread a questionnaire to help the research. One perspective that was widely popularized was the fact that cellars of the Panciu houses were too large, spread underneath entire streets had created voids during the earthquake and aggravated the collapse of the buildings.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs organized on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1940 a

detachment formed of 310 workers to help reconstruct the town of Panciu. Earlier, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 the Citizens' Committee for the rebuilding of the Panciu was founded, Ion Antonescu was its honorary president.

On Marshal's orders, a detachment of 240 Jews was sent to Panciu. Ion Antonescu paid a visit to Putna county on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1941. Some decisions were taken: forming a team of Jewish craftsmen, woodshops, brickyards, local limestone producers to reconstruct Soveja, Dragosloveni with larger streets and sidewalks, houses facing the road, an administrative center, cultural house, market, and so on, along with the reconstruction of the road Focșani-Soveja and Soveja monastery. Thereafter, the activity was continued by the Special Service of the Reconstruction of Panciu, but the war stopped everything (Miron, 2011, 193-234).

Aid was sent from Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Egypt, Japan, Germany, and the U.S.A., as well as messages from President Roosevelt (Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 56).

What was the behavior of those who played a political role during and after the earthquake of November 1940? Let us uncover if that event influenced their life from that moment on.

### **The Royal family**

The legionary ceremony at Iași on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 was not enough for the young king to be attracted by the Legionary movement, while his antipathy for Ion Antonescu did not convince him to become a sympathizer of Horia Sima. Held away from the state affairs, he knew how to keep a balance between the political forces that wanted to seize him. He was certainly enjoying some popularity, a fact that was not easy to accept by the new leading forces of the country. After they left Iași, they started a tour in the southern Transylvania from Hunedoara county, in Deva. They were generally received enthusiastically in towns and villages. At the dawn of the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, they are awakened by the sound of a great earthquake and they head home. The area they were at that moment was not affected, but disturbing news came from Bucharest. After they cross the Carpathians, as they approach the

capital, they see collapsed houses, destroyed villages, desperate people. Mihai and the queen-mother Elena visit the hospitals and the places of first aid. The royal palace was slightly damaged, unlike Cotroceni where there are a lot of rifts and cracks. They moved to the New House within the Royal Palace, but after a few weeks, they decide to move to Sinaia, a decision approved by the head of the state.

In the press of that period, we find in *Universul* of 12 November 1940 images of King Mihai's visit and of the mother-queen Elena where the Carlton building stood, then at the emergency hospital, Mihai's visit in Panciu, where he handed over aid to the victims.

The royal family was involved in supporting the victims of the earthquake, especially those from Bucharest and the counties of Moldova. They founded social canteens, while on 16-17 of November 1940, King Mihai visited the very damaged area of Buzău, Focșani, Putna, offering aid to the victims (Niculescu Bran, 2016, 148, Lungulescu, 1940, 1-2, *Colecția Apocaliptica*, 2018, 45, Miron, 2011, 209).

### **Ion Antonescu**

He was without a shadow of a doubt the most important person involved in the consequences of the earthquake of the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1940. After the legionary ceremony of November 10, 1940, where the royal family participated, Ion Antonescu headed toward Bucharest, then Sibiu to inaugurate the courses of the Cluj university that took refuge in Sibiu. On the night of the earthquake, he was sleeping in the stationed train in Ocna-Sibiului; after the news of the earthquake he left for Bucharest.

From the very first day, Antonescu declared the intervention of the army, the government coordinated the aid, especially with the help of the Ministry of Public Works and Communications, conducted by the General Petrovicescu. The legionary movement was mobilized to remove the rubble. A cordon of legionaries, gendarmes and German soldiers was formed in the places where the works were intensive.

Ion Antonescu considered it vital to encourage the population; to that end, he broadcast a message *Appeal to Romanians* that

was adequate for the moment and expectations of the victims.

*The fate put us at a new trial; only those who give up are defeated. The man falls when he believes he fell. The man dies when he lets himself die. Everybody's work will lead us slowly, but certainly to the end of this.*

The earthquake was the main theme of the session of November 11, 1940 of the Council of Ministries. According to the transcript, the General Petrovicescu shared information about the death of 267 people, 476 wounded in the country, but the focus was the capital. Mihai Antonescu, ministry of justice, who paid a visit to the Medico-Legal Institute where the bodies of the Carlton building were transported, talked of a dreadful image.

The head prosecutor of the Ilfov court started the legal pursuit, as it was established that the builders knew about the flawed pillar of the Carlton building. Traian Brăileanu, the Minister of National Education, Cults and Arts declared that buildings of universities were damaged, proposing to suspend the courses for three days. Moreover, the buildings of the following museums were damaged: Aman, Kalinderu, National Pinacoteca.

V. Iasinachi, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Protection indicated severe damages at the hospitals Pantelimon, Colțea, Colentina, Brâncovenesc, but the number of doctors and sanitary materials was enough. Concerning the railways, the damages were urgently remedied, but many buildings of the army were evacuated. It was very clear that everyone followed the orders given by Antonescu.

The first objective that was settled was the well-functioning of the state; the school courses had to continue, while any attempts of robbery and theft were to be stopped, the damaged buildings were to be demolished. To fulfill those directions, the main roles were attributed to the army and legionary movement. The poor families were helped to bury their deceased, to rebuild their homes and then great loans were granted. The national-legionary state declared that they wanted to recover the sum of 2 billion lei from the former king Carol II, while

some of the great industrialists of the country made donations: Malaxa – 500.000.000 lei, Auschnitt allowed the usage of their facilities Titanul and Nădrag.

In Bucharest, according to the data from the reports of the police inspectors, 1.268 buildings were greatly damaged, among which houses of grand personalities, including the one where I. Antonescu lived. Concerning the victims, an overview was established on counties: 136 dead and 121 wounded in Bucharest, 100 dead and 250 wounded in Prahova, 85 dead and 276 wounded in Putna, 41 dead and 81 wounded in Covurlui. Total: 429 dead and 1.092 wounded. Nevertheless, other numbers circulated: 1.000 dead and 4.000 wounded (Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 45, Ciotoran, 2012, 28-29, 50-53).

Ion Antonescu remained the general coordinator of the rescue operations and rebuilding process; the militarization of the administrative apparatus gave results regarding the consequences of the nefarious event.

### **The Legionary movement**

According to the style imposed by the legionary press, the case of the well-known publication, *Bunavestire*, “the legionary movement stepped manly, immediately after the earthquake to the work of rescue and reconstruction. The units came out at the first call, maintaining a complete order in all the affected places.” The pictures published in the press on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1940 presented legionaries working at rescuing the victims under the ruins of the Carlton building and searching for clothing remaining under the rubble for the relatives to recognize them. The painting of A.Dragoș, *The Earthquake*, was also reproduced in the pages of the newspapers.

After the publication of the *Appeal to the Legionary Movement*, the mobilized legionaries contributed to saving the sick at the hospital of dr. Nasta and students at Theology from the Seminar Radu Vodă. According to *Curentul*, a newspaper close to the legionary movement, legionaries and state institutions completed their duty. The article *Un înspăimântător cutremur a adus jale în căminele românilor [A Frightening Earthquake Has Brought Sorrow in Romanians' Homes]*

indicated that 500 inhabitants buried under the Carlton rubble, contributing to an indescribable panic among the citizens.

It was also evident that, although legionaries' contribution was important in rescuing efforts and helping the victims, their presence had to be visible. The nefarious event was used to win the population's sympathy in the political fight between Ion Antonescu and Horia Sima. The leader of the Iron Guard tried to impose in the meetings of the Council of Ministers whenever Antonescu was missing, as it was the case of the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1940, when he was away in Italy.

Helping the victims of the earthquake was coordinated by the Legionary Movement and their involvement was real despite some exaggerations. Starting on 11 November 1940 at the Carlton building alone, there were 1.600 legionaries in 8 teams of 200 people, which worked in shifts of 2 hours. Legionaries from all over the country came to help, the most popular being 14 legionaries from Avrig, Sibiu county, who walked 400 km. They had their command Sandu Valeriu and the army was under the command of the Colonels Sever Slătineanu and Dimitrie Vasiliu. Horia Sima asked for 3 reports per day and came often to supervise the works; Mihai Antonescu was impressed by their activity.

The legionaries were involved in all the areas affected by the earthquake. Ilie Gârneață, head of the institution, covered 1.000 km so that everything necessary was at their disposal in Iași, Mărășești, Panciu, Focșani, Bârlad, Tecuci, Râmnicu Sărat, Ploiești, sharing the first help of 4 million lei. The victims received clothing, food and money, along with the families of the fallen legionaries, refugees from all the lost territories and poor people. The most spectacular action was the reconstruction of the Panciu town, but in the spring of 1941 when it had to start, legionaries were no longer governing (Lungulescu, 1940, 3; Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 47, 54-55; Marcu, 1940, 595).

### **German Military Mission**

With the help of General Hansen, command of the German Military Mission in Romania, Germans were the first to come at the place of the Carlton ruins, with military



engineering and ambulances. They were requested by the German military men who lived at the Ambassador Hotel. New images of the Carlton building were photographed by a German soldier. Hundreds of Italians who were visiting Bucharest from Fornesina Academy and Germans from Hitlerjugend participated in the rescuing efforts.

In Panciu, the help of German troops was visible, starting with the traffic on the main street – German soldiers used the cars' headlights to work during the night. Furthermore, with the help of German technicians the communication with the capital was established, as well as the electricity supply. Moreover, they brought medicine, bread and bandages.

Supply from Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, and the U.S.A. reached Panciu, while 12 wagons of construction materials came from Transylvania, along with materials from the German Red Cross, cement from the government and supply from the Legionary Movement and Romanian Red Cross.

Ion Antonescu proposed to decorate 59 officers, warrant officers and German soldiers with the Medal for Bravery and Faith, approved by the King Mihai on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1941. The German government donated through the German Red Cross 5 billion lei and Wilhelm Fabritius, the German minister in Bucharest donated from his personal funds.

The Americans wrote about the difficult conditions of German soldiers to establish their military base, given the fact that they worked at rescuing and reconstruction after the disaster. The reports about the affected oil fields showed that there was enough oil for the German war machine. Some noticed that Germans were confronted with agricultural issues on the Romanian territory, as peasants were to be involved in the reconstruction process, hence, the necessary cereals could have been less than expected (Golmeanu, 2018; Miron, 2011, 202, 203, 224; Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 55-56; American press, 2014).

### **The Communist movement**

The earthquake of November 1940 had unexpected consequences for a future leader of the Romanian communists - Gheorghe

Gheorghiu-Dej, who was then imprisoned at Doftana. By the end of the '30s, he was already a veteran of prisons and he was called *The Old Man* though he recently turned 40. In the autumn of 1940, when Dimităr Ganev left for Moscow, he was one of the candidates to be the leader of the communist movement. On the night of 9/10 November 1940, the earthquake broke down a part of the Doftana prison and 14 prisoners were killed under the rubble. The episode remains an enigma in Dej's biography although the myth goes that he conducted heroically the rescuing process of the survivors. Among the dead, there were two communists - Șmil Marcovici (who was part of the Romanian revolutionary battalion in Odessa and involved in the underground Bolshevik networks lead by Alecu Constantinescu-Iași in 1919-1920) and Ilie Pintilie, general secretary of the Communist Party in Romania. Dej and the latter knew each other since the period when they were part of the Red Syndicates, in Iași, at the Niculina Workshops, where they were arrested in 1931. However, their relationship was rather a rivalry than a comradeship.

There was a story that circulated among the other communists that Dej deliberately came later to the rubble where Ilie Pintilie was supposed to be to ensure his leadership of the Communist movement. According to others, his rise to that position was facilitated by the fact that other Communist leaders left - Dimităr Ganev, Petre Constantinescu-Iași and Vasile Luca.

A photograph of Dej and Bodnăraș near a pit with the lying victims after the earthquake remained. It was published on the first page in the '50s in *Scânteia*. After 1965, it was not reproduced anymore, being considered a forgery, a fragment from the Doftana puzzle.

Subsequently, in an interview with Marius Oprea, one of Dej's close people, the advocate Ion Gheorghe-Maurer told about the period after the earthquake:

*After the earthquake, I went to see him. The director of the prison let him go with me to Câmpina. I brought him back to prison and the director was surprised that instead of running away, he came back. Dej did not*

*want to escape, as he was afraid that those who conducted the party would kill him.*

Ion Antonescu was also interested in the consequences of the earthquake at Doftana. He asked about Doftana and Mărgineni prisons in the very first meeting of the Council of Ministers, as Communists and prisoners must have been kept in prison. Displeased with the general state of hospitals in the capital, Ion Antonescu also inspected unexpectedly Câmpina and Doftana social assistance and hospitals where there were poor conditions (Tănase, 2016, 401-402; Oprea, 2019; Colecția Apocaliptica, 2018, 51, 57).

All those who aimed at building something in the Romania of that period, especially after the November 1940 earthquake had a different path. The King Mihai had to abdicate in 1947, while legionaries were defeated by General Ion Antonescu, preferred by Hitler who needed the Romanian Army. The German Military Mission proved to have come not only for cereals and oil in Romania but to prepare the invasion in Soviet Russia with the help of General Antonescu, self-proclaimed Marshall. On the other hand, the survival of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was a somber premonition for the political fate of Romania after the war.

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**Oprea 2019**

Marius Oprea, în dialog cu Ion Gheorghe-Maurer, <https://www.mediafax.ro/revolutie-30/omeneste-vorbind-eu-am-iubit-trei-lucruri-femeile-vanatoarea-si-vinurile-bune-un-interviu-inedit-cu-ion-gheorghe-maurer-realizat-de-istoricul-marius-oprea-audio-18467951>

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

**Fig. 1.** Carlton building before the earthquake of 1940

<https://www.muzeuldefotografie.ro/2010/01/ramasitele-blocului-carlton/>

**Fig. 2.** Carlton building after the earthquake of 1940

<https://www.muzeuldefotografie.ro/2015/07/imagini-noi-cutremurul-din-1940-blocul-carlton/>

**Fig. 3.** Earthquake of 1940 in Panciu

<https://www.ziaruldevrancea.ro/actualitatea/ultimele-stiri/1588810198-stiati-ca-in-urma-cutremurului-din-1940-panciul-a-fost-distrus-in-intregime.html>

**Fig. 4.** King Mihai visiting Panciu after the earthquake

<https://mabee.infp.ro/despre-cutremurele-din-romania/cutremurul-din-10-noiembrie-1940>



**Fig. 1.** Carlton building before the earthquake of 1940

<https://www.muzeuldefotografie.ro/2010/01/ramasitele-blocului-carlton/>



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<https://www.muzeuldefotografie.ro/2015/07/imagini-noi-cutremurul-din-1940-blocul-carlton/>



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<https://mabee.infp.ro/despre-cutremurele-din-romania/cutremurul-din-10-noiembrie-1940>

## THE IMAGE OF DEATH IN THE CASE OF ROMA DEPORTED TO TRANSNISTRIA (1942-1944)

Florinela GIURGEA

PhD.

“George Emil Palade” University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology from Târgu Mureș

Email: elagiurcea@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *In spite of some euphemistic terms used by the authorities - the same that launched the slogan “(Come) to beautiful Transnistria / to receive home and land” - such as “evacuation”, “transfer” or “colonization”, the deportation of the 25.000 of Roma people to Transnistria revealed briefly to everyone what it really was: a destinations to death. The deportation of Roma followed the deportation of the Jews, which took place in the previous year in the same territory – temporary under Romanian administration - and resulted in short time in a high rate of deaths from typhus, cold weather, starvation, and in some cases by shooting. The fate of Roma and Jews in Romania as a satellite state of The Third Reich has some similarities in the 1940s: both members of minorities were depicted as “foreigners”, in a biological view of the state, by the official propaganda and neither of them doesn’t have, at that time, a state of “origin”, to defend them. This paper tries to expose the image of death of Roma people deported in Transnistria from two perspective: fictional (the popular novel “Șatra” / “The Tent” and some films) and realistic. In the latter case, the acknowledge / image of the imminent death in the eyes of victims, authorities, and depositions of the witnesses of the events is studied. /*

**Keywords:** *Roma deportation, Transnistria, image of death, fictional, realistic*

**Rezumat:** *În ciuda unor termeni eufemistici folosiți de autorități (aceleași care au lansat sloganul „În Transnistria frumoasă / să vă dăm pământ și casă”) precum „evacuare”, „transfer” sau „colonizare”, deportarea a circa 25.000 de romi în Transnistria s-a dezvăluit tuturor în scurt timp drept ceea ce era cu adevărat: o destinație spre moarte. Deportarea romilor a urmat deportării evreilor din anul precedent în același teritoriu intrat temporar sub administrație românească și, care înregistrase deja o rată mare de decese – din cauza tifosului, frigului, înfometării și, în unele cazuri, în urma împușcării. Destinul romilor și evreilor din România ca stat satelit al celui de Al Treilea Reich în anii ‘40 are câteva asemănări: membrii ambelor minorități au fost înfățișați ca “străini”, într-o viziune biologică a statului, de către propaganda oficială și niciunul dintre ei nu nu aveam, la acel moment, un stat de „origine”, care să îi apere. Această lucrare încearcă să arate imaginea morții romilor deportați în Transnistria din două perspective: una ficțională (popularul roman „Șatra” și unele filme) și una realistă. În ultimul caz, este studiată recunoașterea / imaginea morții iminente în ochii victimelor, autorităților și din declarațiile martorilor oculari ai evenimentelor.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *deportarea romilor, Transnistria, imaginea morții, ficțiune, realitate*

### Introduction

Starting of June 1942, approximately 25,000 of Roma were deported to Transnistria by the Romanian authorities, “at Bug”, in colonies, in some Ukrainian villages and farms, guarded by gendarmes. The documents refer to the Nomadic ones, in the first phase, and to those sedentary but with a criminal record or without jobs, presumably living from theft or begging, in the second phase, since September 1942, with their families; but many others were deported even if they did not fall into these categories and even after October 1942, when the Council of Ministers decided to suspend and eventually stop the deportation of Jews and Roma people. The deportation of Roma was motivated by reasons such as public order and hygiene, and none of

those who decided (Romanian ruler of that time, Ion Antonescu) or implemented it (Gendarmerie and Police) ever recognized the racial motivation. But at a time where the deportation of Nomadic Roma was a fact, and sedentary ones was expected (September 7, 1942), in a report addressed to the Council of Ministers they were depicted as a “racial danger” by Sabin Mănuilă, director of the Central Institute of Statistic and the main collaborator of the head of the State, Marshall Ion Antonescu, in so-called “population policies”:

*Gypsies remain worthless from social and national point of view and represent a racial danger, in a future in which our nation seeks*



*and guards a purer biological substance and consciously tends towards a higher Romanian ideal of humanity. (Achim, 2004, 172)*

In less than two years, 11.000 from the total of 25.000 deported Roma – half of them children – did not survive. The dead were victims of starvation, cold, and some severe illness such as typhus. The deportation of the Roma is recognized by law as part of the Romanian Holocaust (Friling *et al*, 2004, 230-240).

### **The first approaches: fiction and testimonies**

One of the first approaches of the subject of deportation of Roma from Romania to Transnistria in 1942-1944 was fictional – the popular novel “Șatra” / “The Tent”, written by Zaharia Stancu, which appeared in 1968, after more than 20 years from the events. Roma is not explicitly mentioned in this paper, although the title and the subject make obvious the subject – they appear in the novel as “black people” and “nomads” and they were deported “to the East” (Transnistria), which means their death. The death is omnipresent in the book, is a motive which appears almost in every page, as the critic Eugen Simion put it:

*<The Tent> is the history of a deportation to the East and degrading of an ancestral laws of existence. Is a long lamentation and a meditation about death, even in an indirect form. (...) <The Tent> is not only a forced initiation in the death, but also a meditation about life and death, a long interrogation. (Simion, 1978, 397)*

In fact, the actions from “The Tent” are happening between life and death, in the plan of love and life, but also in the plan of the war and deportation and the perspective of death. The events of the book in which are involved the nomadic members of the tent (Roma) are announced in the beginning by the bell ring, which signals the death of a person – even these are not related with the tent, as said the leader, Him Bașa, is a premonition of what is going to happen. Is the same idea in the gendarme’s visit who communicates the order of deportation – that, even the tent has nothing to do with the war, the war has something to do with the tent. The premonition is doubled by the sensation of the leader of the tent, which appears numerous times in text, that everyone – starting with the gendarmes – is looking at them as they are already dead. Is a great wonder, but the tent obeys, as being part of the faith – the war is happening, and the men can’t oppose:

*He (Him bașa) became silent. He thinks: <But what do I have to do with the war? Why should I be worry about the course of war? None of my men and neither do I have nothing to do with the war.> But he sees suddenly the chick of the gendarme who commanded him the night before to go to the town. And it seems to hear him saying: You have nothing to do with the war, but maybe the war has something to do with you. (Stancu, 2017, 78)*

The novel is built with two plans: a general one, of the war, and a particular one, of the tent, in which men die, as well as love, but life continues. Each death is accounted – not by the gendarmes, but the leader of the tent, who sees how from the initial 99 members of the tent they fail to reach the 100 and remain 98, as a result of the childbirth both mother and the baby die. In short time, the death continues the counting, with an accident in which another child, Baru, suffer severe injure while bathing and also dies, after some days. The women of the tent become pregnant and give birth, but some of the newborns die; in the course of the action, die children, elders, bears of the tent and also some horses and dogs, by hunger and cold. In spite of all that, life continues:

*The tent was followed by cold, hunger, and death. Quite often, the death took souls from the cabins. In spite of this, all the men of the tent, from the oldest till the youngest, loves their wives in the cabins, in the dark and quiet, or outside, in the snowdrifts. Ones of the babies live, some other not survive. The men clean the snow in a corner of the cabin, break with the pickax the frozen ground, dig a hole, and burry there the newborn who sometimes haven't even time to babble; after that, they came back to cabin and in short time the women become pregnant again. Sometimes limping, sometimes crawling, the life goes on. (Stancu, 2017, 422)*

The tent resists with the provisions bought by Him, and half of the members survive. The death of Him bașa signify the death of custom and ancestral order: the members of the tent are fighting, and in one of these circumstances He’s nephew, Bus, who means the future, dies. At a symbolical level, the hope in a new life is also present: some old black man gives, on the deathbed, the last coin of gold to his son, in order to marry – is a coin given not to death, but life.

In the war plan, death is also present. Some soldiers and deserters visit tent and some of them fight each other and die. The theme is a deep

one: the humans became beasts in the warlike dogs become beast after they eat human flesh. The Roma killed even the bears, the totem animal of the tent, both source of making money and joy. The price of life becomes low in the war, as one soldier said. In the end, only the decision to turn back means the turn back from the certain death and the salvation of the remains members of the tent.

It is remarkable how accurate is this story of “black people” who were deported “to the East”, at a time when the subject was forbidden in official Romanian history, and one single testimony - from Romanian Roma Petre Rădiță - was published abroad. The only element who lack in the novel but appears in all film materials from the post-communist period, and in the documents revealed to the public after 1990 is the typhus epidemic (in the novel appears just the generic term of “diseases”). The typhus also means deaths of many Roma deported in Transnistria (see Michelle Kelso’s “Hidden Sorrows” film from 2005, “Adevărul despre Holocaust” / “The Truth about Holocaust”, realized by the former leader of Romanian Roma Florin Cioabă, presented in Sibiu in 2012, who compiles testimonies of the Roma survivors of the deportation in Transnistria, documentary “Valea Plângerii” / “Valley of Sighs” realized by Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, ISPMN, in 2016), and also “În numele statului. Holocaustul romilor” / “In the name of the State. Roma Holocaust”, realized by National Center for Roma Culture, CNCR, in 2019). According to Jean Ancel, in the winter of 1943/1944, the mortality of Roma was bigger than the Jews who survived from the massacres from Golta in the precedent year. (Ancel, 1998, 245)

### The image of death in testimonies

“The Tent” was preceded by the testimony of Romanian Roma Petre Rădiță, published in 1966 in “Lacio Drom” (“Bon Voyage” in Romani language, a journal from Italy which militates for recognition of Roma Holocaust and compensation for the victims) in which he described the deportation such as:

*We have been sent from Bucharest in caravans, and it was allowed to take only what we could carry. We traveled some weeks, with frequent stops. The nights were cold, the blankets few as well as the food. As a result, many died from hunger and cold before to arrive to the river Dniester (Nistru). (Rădiță, 1966, 9-12)*

The next testimony, from a sedentary Roma, was signed by Romanian Roma leader Ion Cioabă - his testimony appears also in “Lacio Drom” in 1984 - who was also deported in Transnistria during World War II. In his story, we rediscover the movement to the East, the interdiction to escape from the fixed place, the lack of food, the hunger, the cold, and finally the death of those deported:

*In 1941, the Gypsies from Romania were raised and escorted to the (river) Prut (...) and from there were sent to Russia. Near the town Trei Duble they told us to step down from the caravans, children included. There, the German soldiers took the caravans with all their content. Those who fight back were shot without mercy. We lacked food and water for two days. After that, the German soldiers came and said that they send us to one camp. But in this camp were admitted only the powerful one, children and women. The old people and the sick ones were shot. Just before we arrive at the camp, the soldiers said that those who run faster in order to occupy a house, will receive it. The run was dramatic. They hurt each other, fight each other, they were trampling on their feet. The houses were nothing but some huts hollowed into the ground, without chimney, and with a roof made from woods and leaves, clay and straws. There were not enough, and the majority of people remain outside. After the first night, many of those who sleep in those huts died of asphyxiation. The cold made victims too. From that camp, the Roma weren't allowed to go anywhere. They were lacked of any food, but if they were caught in the village where they go after food, they were shot. The cold of imminent winter and the hunger made many victims. (Cioabă, 1984, 54-56)*

In Ion Cioabă’s testimony, the death is present even in the final stage of deportation, when, simultaneously with the withdraw of the front, Romani people became to escape, in order to return to Romania. The perspective of being shot by the German troops and die was permanent, every step of the way. In the end, many of them died, in spite of successfully returning to Romania, this time from diseases:

*At first, they escape one or two, but in time they start to escape in groups. If they were seen by the German, they were shot without mercy or crushed by tanks. My parents escaped with a very large group and some others joined on the way. In one night, Gypsies decided to stay near a hill until the next day and they lit fire, to warm themselves.*

*The American aviation thought that the fire was from the blast furnace and start to bomb. There died many Gypsies. (...) In another day they were tricked by the nature. The sun started to warm and they sleep near the fires. But, in the next day, they were completely covered by the snow. The cold and the snow made many victims. (...) After all those pains, Gypsies have been suffered from the lack of money to pay for cross the Prut river. Who have money crossed, the other ones... In Romania, they found their villages empty. When they thought they finally escaped, appeared a typhus epidemic and other diseases, and very few escaped. (Cioabă, 1984, 54-56)*

The theme of corruption of authorities is present, in fictional and in documents too, resumed in a testimony such as: “Whoever had money, lived” (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 636), which relates death and corruption.

The collection edited by Andrea Varga and Lucian Nastasă-Kovacs, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Țigani din România (1919-1944) / Ethnocultural Minorities. Documentary Evidence. Gypsies from Romania (1919-1944)* from 2001 gives us testimonies of Roma victims, this time sedentary ones, deported in Transnistria starting September 1942.

Ioan Marin, a Roma from Alexandria, was deported in Transnistria at Oceacov. For two and a half years, he was in Tiraspol camp, worked at Suha Balta farm, and after that was transferred to Alexandrudar, being permanently exposed to illness and death. He recollects two episodes – in the first one, which took place before the deportation, her father was beaten till death by a gendarme, being wrongfully accused of theft: the death is related with corruption and jealousy of the representative of authority and, according to him, was cover-up; the second episode concerns his deportation. Ioan Marin said that he was deported after a workday. In his story, there were dead during transportation in cattle car (this aspect is absent in known official papers) (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 593). In these cases, the train stops to permit the family to bury the dead, without any religious service, but not in the train station, to not been seen by the others. In the camp they were aware of the intention of extermination, which was until then just guessed, because it was said that Antonescu wants to get rid of them, which is ambivalent, and could possibly mean only a transfer:

*At Tiraspol, in a courtyard fenced with wire, like a camp, like a cattle market, we realized*

*that we are the majority of Gypsies. They started to say, in Romanian and Romani: <Brothers, Antonescu brought us here to exterminate us, to burry us, to kill us, to cleanse us from the face of the earth>. (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 607)*

He also said that the food was almost inedible – the bread was dirty, moldy, broken, earthy, seemed to have sand in it - but they eat it anyway, because of the fear of death. The spirit of self-help degenerates in a short time in the struggle for survival. He himself was lucky to have a cousin who helped him with some food when he got sick, in the first winter (1942/1943) and in the spring of 1943, when he suffered from malaria and also severe fever, and he said to his cousin to take care of his burry, to dig a deep hole so that the dogs don't pull of his body (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 608-610). Ioan Marin said that Roma ate dogs, stolen horses, but he only hears about some cases of cannibalism, in other groups. The Roma who were caught stolen were beaten, imprisoned, and even killed. He runs away in 1946 with his cousin (they stayed more in Transnistria because of his illness – another episode of malaria and after that typhus), with the help of some military and a Russian doctor. When they finally return to Romania, their neighbors looked at them as they were ghost, because they heard that the Roma had been killed, shot, or set on fire in Transnistria (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 613-615).

In a second interview, Brânzan Anuța Androneta, born in Roșiorii de Vede in 1934, said that she was sent in Transnistria, in Vladimirovka, with her entire family because her father had a criminal record – 5 years for murder, which she claims was in self-defense (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 616). In her story, a policeman came to her house and communicated the order to raise all the “corrupt”, although it was no law to do so. The police took many Roma from Alexandria, not the assimilated ones, “românizați”, i.e. possessed houses and jobs, Brânzan said. She recollected the moment when her father was shot by the German, altogether with many other men – she said that she doesn't know the motivation - and after that they were buried in a mass grave:

*From this winter till the spring, there was not even 100 Gypsies left: we were hungry, we stayed in cold, with no water, no warm, no electrical light, affected by the typhus and lice. So, they died. The Russian (i.e. Ukrainian people) was obliged to dig mass graves, in which entered hundreds of men. They were pulling them with the hook. Every morning, they knock on the window, asking if we have*

*dead people in the house. (...) When they knocked in the window, you knew why – if you have a dead in the house, to carry him outside. But if there were nobody in the house beside dead people, they stayed there in the house days, even weeks. (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 618, 623)*

Her mother has also died from typhus, contracted from others, and one sister, who has 5 years at that time, sleeps into her arms all night because she didn't realize that the woman was dead (Nastasă. Varga, 2001, 622). All the children of these families (4 girls) become sick from typhus, but the "Russian" who housed them give them some food and shredded horseradish, to save them. He was the mercy of them and helped, being a real savior from the specter of starvation death:

*In the first month, they gave us polenta. After that, we received horse-like wheat, oats, barley, as we were cattle, because there was no fire. Because of that, in 2-3 months, until the spring, died hundreds of men. We were lucky to have the old Russian who brought us corn, potatoes, milk, from his garden, in the shelter of the night. Without him, we were dying too. (...) He saved us, he and the power of God. (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 619)*

One sister, Marieta, died at the return to Romania, in March 1944, in some stables that were bombed, and another, Marga, fell into the water, but some "Russian women" saved her from drowning. According to Brânzan, there were cases when some parents left their dying children behind, running out from the soviet Russian:

*They abandoned their dying children and left, because they don't know how to save them. If the children were dying, they left. If the child was sick of typhus and in agony, that he could not get up, they left him and they were leaving, fleeing from the Russian. What could you do? How could you take them and how to take them? (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 623)*

Brânzan said one other story, of a woman with five children, deported from Bucharest in Transnistria during her husband was at the front (this was quite a frequently story at that time):

*She writes to him, announcing him that all his family were in Transnistria. He goes crying to his superior, saying <Look, I fight here for the country and the country took my family to murder them>. He received permit to go and take his family from there; but they were full of lice, sick of typhus, the wife and all five*

*children, I don't know if he arrived in Romania with them. (Nastasă, Varga., 2001, 619)*

In the third and final interview, Gongoroiu Florica, from Palazu Mare, Constanța county, said that she was deported with his grandparents, parents, and three brothers (another one was born in Transnistria) in Karinika. She recollects the hunger and the diseases – typhus and scab:

*4 years, in which they give us nothing but corn and a handful of potatoes. What hunger we endured, my God, what hunger! When my grandmother died, we buried her in the yard where we stayed, because others took out the dead and ate them. And I heard that they want to make a big, big hole, because there were about five thousand people there, to put us in that pit and kill us with lime, to put chalk on us and water, to burn us. We were picking up the lice from us with our fists, and what more can I tell you about the clothes... We had nothing to eat, but poor Russians brought us food. (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 624)*

This is the only testimony with cases of cannibalism, many others appear later – see, for example, "Valley of sighs" documentary from 2016. Gongoroiu said that she saw with her own eyes how "they took out the dead man and ate them. They took out the dead man, then fried them and ate them" (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 625). She reminds that on the way back they run day and night through the forests, exposed to the risk of being shot by the German patrols; some Roma died on the way, from exhaustion. In Transnistria, many died from hunger and thirsty:

*When we ran away from that village, we went day and night through the forest. We couldn't get out on the road, because the German will kill us. The men went with their children on their back, who fall, died; who was older and failed to escape, died. He fell on the road and you couldn't do anything to help him, you couldn't stay beside him, remain with him there. And we went, we were dying of thirst – let alone hunger – thirsty kill us and we drank water from the horses' hooves, where they walked and it rained, and there remained water in the ground, where horse trampled. We took it in hand and drank; if it was muddy, if it was bloody, it didn't matter. (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 624)*

In her story appears 3,000 men shot by the German in a mass grave - the Jews were killed in a similar manner (Dumitru, 2011):

*The Germans put 3,000 men in a pit and they shot them – children, the oldest, the youngest, all of them... Only two from below survived - one was a nephew of my grandmother and the man cried, full of blood, with his boy of 11 years: <There is no one left from our convoy, only me and my boy>. And the man came home crazy. (Nastasă, Varga, 2001, 627)*

The same stories (the hunger, the cold, the death from typhus) are told, more or less, in the papers published later on this subject – most of them by Roma activists: Luminița Mihai Cioabă, *Lacrimi române / Romane asva / Roma tears* (2006), Radu Ioanid, Michelle Kelso, Luminița Cioabă, *Tragedia romilor deportați în Transnistria 1942-1945. Mărturii și documente / The Tragedy of the Roma Deported to Transnistria 1942-1945. Testimonies and Documents* (2009), Vasile Ionescu and others, *O Samudaripen. Holocaustul romilor. România. Deportarea romilor în Transnistria. Mărturii - Documente / O Samudaripen. The Roma Holocaust. Romania. The Deportation of the Roma to Transnistria. Testimonies - Documents* (National Center for Roma Culture, 2016).

### Death in documents

In documents of that time, the complaints of deported Roma or their families' are the most impressive in describing the specter of death. Margareta Dodan, a deported woman in Covașna, war widow, wrote in December 1942 to the governor of Transnistria, Gheorghe Alexianu, and asked him to approve the return in Romania for her and her five children, who were exposed to die:

*A year and 6 months ago, my husband died on the front wounded by a shrapnel and we remained helpless. At some point we were sent to Transnistria and we sold everything we had and we remained starving and cold here in Covașna village, county of Ociacov. We went on our foot 140 kilometers to ask You, with tears in our eyes, not being able to suffer from cold and hunger anymore, to give us an authorization so I can return in the country with my kids, at my little house. We kiss your hands and feet and we are expecting an answer from Your Highness, mister Governor. (Achim, 2004, 47-48)*

The miserable conditions, hunger, and death are omnipresent in the documents from the deported Roma, some of them very dramatic. As an example, on October 4, 1943, a group of Roma people asked to go on the front, to die heroic,

instead of “dying like dogs on the coast of the Bug” (Achim, 2004, 331-332). A report from a secret service at that time (November-December 1942) reveals that some Roma said that they prefer to be machine-gunned, because “they can't stand conditions of the deportation, especially the hunger” (ANIC, 1942a, 131). The deportation affected a large number of Roma who was on the front when their families were sent to Transnistria. In one of the many requests from the soldiers, dated June 1943, one of them asked the Governor of Transnistria to approve his wife's return – she was deported with their three children, who died there (Achim, 2004, 213).

### Death in official documents

The reality of Transnistria was well-known by the Roma and also the authorities<sup>1</sup> (Ancel, 1998, 240): the documents speak of two women who were re-evacuated and tried to kill themselves. In the first case, the Roma succeeded:

*At one point the escorted gypsy Dondoczi Rozalia, taking advantage of the large crowd near line, threw herself in front of the train locomotive, which, mutilating her, she died without the gendarme sergeant have the opportunity to save her. (ANIC, 1942, 88-89)*

In the second one, the Legion of Gendarmes (Turda) reported that a Roma woman cut her throat when she learned that she would be re-evacuated, and therefore she could not be sent, because she was hospitalized (ANIC, 1942, 186).

The deportation of Roma people – especially sedentary ones – was accompanied by many complaints from many people, addressed to all levels of political power of Romania. There were also complaints from the authorities who were supposed to implement the measure. One of the most important was a telegram sent by the prefect of Oceacov county, Vasile Gorsky<sup>2</sup>, to the

<sup>1</sup> In one of the first reports, dated September 1942, the prefect of Berezovca, Leonid Popp, asked Romanian authorities to collect clothes for the Roma (Nomadic) deported in his region, saying that they sold everything and are completely naked, “and in the coming winter they will die like flies”

<sup>2</sup> Gorsky is the author of a deposition in the dossier against sub-secretary of State from Minister of Internal Affairs, General Constantin Z. Vasiliu, who was convicted and shot in May 1946, along with Ion Antonescu and other members of his regime. In his statement, Gorsky spoke about many cases of abuse - dying Roma who were sent to Transnistria, a woman whose son died on the front, and also about the miserable conditions in which the Roma were received,

Presidency of Council of Ministers on November 20, 1942, in which he reported that many of the people sent in his region were not Nomadic, nor criminal (ANIC, 1943, 77): some of them were disabled, war widows, fighter in the war, decorated, elders, women and children with relatives on the front, homeowners, skilled craftsmen, merchants with good material situations in cities:

*I am honored to report that amongst the nearly 14,000 Roma evacuated in this county there are many who had not been foreseen in the evacuation plans, who are neither Nomadic nor with criminal records. Because of the cold weather and lack of warming resources, 10 to 20 Gypsies die daily.*

Gorsky also reported that he cannot ensure food for all of these people, and he asked for a “sorting commission” to investigate all the cases (ANIC, 1943a, 77). His request was approved. As such, three commission of investigation were sent in Transnistria in December 1942. All of them confirmed that abuses had been committed in sending people – one of them not even Roma, but Romanians or Turks – fully verifying the complaints, which also proved to be well-founded.

The commission who worked at Alexandrovca, county Oceacov (headed by colonel Lucian Ivaşcu, who contracted their typhus and died in a short time) recorded that:

*Roma adults received only 400 grams of barley or corn flour, and 200 grams for children, no grams of salt, and that they had no vessels in which to prepare food.* (ANIC, 1943b, 29-31)

More than 80% of them were sick of bronchitis and pneumonia, and 20% of the total suffered from stomach upset. The report concluded that, if there will be no improvement, almost all Roma will die soon. At that time (middle of December 1942) there were already 388 dead Roma (almost half of them died in December), and the commission said that when the frost will come, the mortality will be very high (ANIC, 1943b, 31).

The commission from Balşoia Carinica, Oceacov county, where 3.881 Roma were sent, accommodated in 333 houses, reported that they demolished 129 of them, a school building and 119 stalls, in order to make fire with the wood and

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lived and died, of hunger, cold, typhus and sometimes shot by the Germans.

prepare food (ANIC, 1943b, 11). At the time of the report (December 19, 1942) 150 Roma died from hunger and 35 were shot by the Germans in Steimberg. They also received only 400 grams (per adult) and 200 grams (per child) of flour, but in some places, like Varvaroca, they received nothing to eat from 10 days, and they had begun to steal from the locals, who were, obviously, unhappy (ANIC, 1943b, 11). The commission warns about deaths from typhus, due to lack of medical staff and medicines, reporting that: “Roma dies worst than animals and are buried without a priest” and propose to return 1.834 people, abusively sent to Transnistria, in which were even 101 Romanians (ANIC, 1943b, 12).

The commission sent to Berezovca explained the large number of people abusive evacuated, in a report dated December 21, 1942, saying that the Gendarmerie didn’t respect the order of “evacuation” and:

*they did not sort of gypsies, according to the provisions of the Order of the Ministry of Interior (...) but they picked up and evacuated whoever got in their way and only wanted to have the number of gypsies whom he had reported falling into the category of the above-mentioned order, without checking whether they are those who need to be evacuated.* (ANIC, 1943b, 64-65)

The commission also reported all sort of complaints and appreciated that “if the Roma are to be believed” in their claims – that they were sent in Transnistria as revenge in some cases, and because they refused to give money to the gendarme, police or local authorities, in others - it is mandatory to investigate further, and the culprits to be sent in jail. The commission argued that “it is not allowed to evacuate invalids, soldiers on leave, from those who they fought the current war and have a diploma of gratitude, Romanian children, etc.” instead of others, who were targeted by the Order and were not evacuated (ANIC, 1943b, 47-50). The commission confirmed the precarious condition of the deported - “The houses that accommodate them have no beds and the majority of Gypsies have no bedsheets, and some have no clothes either; and because of the lack of firewood, even for warming or cooking, some of them have frozen with cold” – noting that in Covaliovca the Roma didn’t receive any food from 4-8 days and warning about the imminence of epidemic typhus: “When the epidemic breaks out it will hardly be extinct and will extend to the population” (ANIC, 1943b, 49).

In the previous year, in Golta –were sent the Nomadic Roma – the typhus decimated Jews deported there, as the primary doctor of the county, M Burnuz, feared in an address dated August 10, 1942, addressed to the Sanitary Direction Odessa, in which he mentioned the existing camps of Jews and Roma (Achim, 2004, 97-100). The Legion of Gendarmes from Golta communicate also, in the latest days of November 1942, in an informative note, 10 cases of typhus in the raion Vradievca, warning that there were conditions for the outbreak of an epidemic, due to conditions:

*Typhoid is spread by gypsies walking from house to house after begging and stealing. No deworming measures have been taken in connection with these gypsies and, if they are left like this, the typhus will spread throughout the county. Hospitals are lacking of medicines and have nothing to treat those with exanthemous typhus.* (Achim, 2004, 346-347)

In January 12, 1943, an informative note of the Legion of Gendarme of Oceacov stated that:

*Amongst the Gypsies deported across our region, 20 people die daily from the lack of fuel and food. Lately, from December 26, 1942 to January 10, 1943, a number of 293 people lost their lives, amongst which: 76 men, 90 woman and 127 children. A typhus epidemic is also present amongst them, which also endangers the gendarmes who make frequent patrols in these regions and transfers. With all the measures taken so far, we have 9 cases of exanthemous typhus among the gendarmes.* (Achim, 2004, 85-86)

As a result, the sub secretary of the Minister of Interior, general Constantin Z. Vasiliu, asked the subordinated bodies – Police and Gendarmerie – to draw another reports, with mistakenly deported Roma, to be brought back. But the result displeased him: the Police approved almost all repatriation requests. He wrote on February 1, 1943, that he will deny all of them because otherwise it would be “cancel the intention of rendering the cities, as decided by State leadership” (Achim, 2004, 103-104). (“Rendering” involves the idea of death and dehumanization, meaning skinning of dead animals.) He maintained this position in a discussion of Council of Ministers related to the subject of abusive deported Roma, claiming that he doesn’t want to receive the thieves back (Ciucă, Ignat, 2004, 228-229). The epidemic typhus determined the authorities to interdict any repatriation, and the approved request – proposed

by the commissions of investigation sent to Transnistria in December 1942 - had to wait the month of May 1943. But the Roma returned illicit, despite all risks. The sanitary authorities from Sibiu reported in May 1943 that in town’s station arrived clandestine 67 Roma, from whom 8 were sick of typhus and 2 were dead:

*They were brought into a terrible state of promiscuity and all together in a wagon, having in addition to those suffering from typhoid fever and 2 dead with them, which left only in Sibiu station.* (ANIC, 1942, 145-146)

The problems continued in Transnistria even after the commissions’ reports. As chief of Police post of Kovaliovka, Police Legion of Berezovka, sergeant Paul Jilă reported in May 18, 1943:

*The Gypsies in the village across our area are starving to death, as they do not receive any food from the kolkhoz. There is 18 days today since the Gypsies in Kovaliovka last receive food. The Gypsies have sold everything they had to buy food; they are left with nothing else to sell and have come to eat fruits buds from trees. Because of hunger, many Gypsies leave daily to the country; all day long, our post receives police with groups of Gypsies who have escaped and who leave even at the cost of their lives and of being shot, as they are already condemned to die of starvation. (...) Many Gypsies have been shot thus far.* (Achim, 2004, 197-198)

In September 1943, foreseeing the next winter in Transnistria, the Suha Balca farm asked Prefecture of Berezovca to intervene, in order to ensure materials for huts in the ground for Roma, warning that otherwise “will enter typhus again in the farm, and gypsies will die of cold and typhus” (Achim, 2004, 316). In December 1943, head of the forest district from Sluserevo asked Prefecture of Golta county to take urgent measures against “Roma camp” who destroyed wood material, but also “threatened to kill forest workers, who refuse to go to the forest, being afraid of being stripped and mutilated by gypsies” (Achim, 2004, 405-406).

Roma was permitted to return in Romania only in March 1944, when the Romanian authorities were put in the position of evacuating, because of the counteroffensive of the Soviet army. The Sub-Inspectorate of Gendarmes from Odessa reported that in Transnistria were at that time 59.916 Jews and 12.083 Roma (ANIC, 1944, 310). The return of the Roma was also dramatic,

as we have seen, some of those interviewed in “Valley of Sighs” talking about people shot by the Germans or died under bombed-out bridges.



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## EROSION OF MEMORY AND MUSEALISATION OF DEATH IN BHOPAL

Constantin CANAVAS

Professor PhD.

Hamburg University of Applied Sciences,

Faculty of Life Sciences

E-mail: constantin.canavas@haw-hamburg.de

**Abstract:** *In the night 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 the release of large amounts of toxic gases over Bhopal, the capital of the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, induced a disaster with thousands of casualties and an enormous number of heavily affected persons. The politically effectuated lock-out of a “conventional” juridical trial, the decreasing number of the social group of “survivors”, and the increasing importance of the soil and water contamination due to plant operation before the major accident, are only some of the parameters framing the cultures of collective memory and the eroding influence of history.*

*The focus of the present study lies on the development lines of the political and historical boundary conditions that re-adjust focality of collective memories in the local and broader Indian context. The prevailing concepts of musealising memory – conflicting concepts of museums and memorials – create a phantasmatic focus upon the deserted site of the former pesticide plant, an anti-landscape with past connotations of the Congress-Party visions of Green Revolution and national industrial and economic development, a plant site deprived of most of the old equipment that was dismantled and sold shortly after the disaster.*

*The study follows the diverging memory processes inside and outside India. Whereas in the Western media the framed images of the suffering and death of the (Indian) Other became soon an iconic symbol of a remote disaster, and faded away later or were covered by the flooding images of death and suffering from subsequent disasters, the local debates were dominated by the focus on the locality of Bhopal memorial concepts. Whereas in West the name of Bhopal became a symbol for introducing and legitimizing guidelines of industrial plant safety on transnational (e.g. European) level, the Indian discourses depict moreover the developments in the perception of societal representation functions of museums and memorials as tangible elements and products of the turbulent processes and conflicts that accompany the construction of collective memory in the Subcontinent. In this sense, the Indian controversies on representing death and suffering associated with the Bhopal disaster can be seen as local and temporal links in a multitude of processes embedded in the construction as well as the revision of the plural versions of the history of Indian societies since the independence.*

**Keywords:** *Bhopal, chemical disaster, industrial heritage, memorial, musealisation, social negotiation.*

**Rezumat:** *În noaptea de 2 spre 3 decembrie 1984, eliberarea în atmosferă a unor mari cantități de gaze toxice deasupra orașului Bhopal, capitala statului indian Madhya Pradesh, a provocat un dezastru cu mii de victime și un număr enorm de persoane grav afectate. Blocarea, efectuată politic, a unui proces juridic „convențional”, numărul în scădere al grupului social al „supraviețuitorilor” și importanța crescândă a contaminării solului și a apei, datorată funcționării uzinei Union Carbide, sunt doar câțiva dintre parametrii care încadrează culturile memoriei colective și influența erodantă a istoriei. Studiul de față pune accent pe liniile de dezvoltare ale condițiilor politice și istorice de frontieră ce reajustează focalizarea amintirilor colective în contextul local și mai larg indian. Conceptele dominante de muzealizare/memorializare – concepte conflictuale cu privire la muzee și memoriale – generează un accent fantasmatic asupra sitului pustiit al fostei uzine de pesticide, un anti-peisaj cu conotații trecute ale viziunilor Partidului-Congres despre Revoluția Verde și dezvoltarea industrială și economică națională, un sit al uzinei privat de majoritatea echipamentelor vechi, demontate și vândute la scurt timp după dezastru. Studiul urmărește procesele divergente ale memoriei în interiorul și în exteriorul Indiei. În timp ce în mass-media occidentală imaginile încadrate ale suferinței și morții Celuilalt (indian) au devenit curând un simbol iconic al unui dezastru îndepărtat și ulterior au dispărut sau au fost acoperite de cascada de imagini ale morții și suferinței unor dezaastre posterioare, dezbaterile locale au fost dominate de concentrarea pe poziționarea unor concepte de memorial al catastrofei de la Bhopal. În timp ce în Vest numele Bhopal a devenit un simbol pentru introducerea și legitimarea unor principii directe privind securitatea uzinelor industriale la nivel transnațional (de exemplu, european), discursurile indiene descriu în plus modul în care a evoluat percepția funcțiilor de reprezentare societală a muzeelor și memorialelor, ca elemente tangibile și produse ale*

*proceselor și conflictelor turbulente ce însoțesc construirea memoriei colective în subcontinentul indian. În acest sens, controversele indiene cu referire la reprezentarea morții și suferinței asociate cu dezastrul de la Bhopal pot fi văzute ca legături locale și temporale într-o multitudine de procese încorporate în construcția, precum și revizuirea versiunilor plurale ale istoriei societăților indiene de după obținerea independenței.*  
**Cuvinte cheie:** Bhopal, dezastru chimic, moștenire industrială, memorial, muzealizare, negocieri socială.

### **The permeability between technological and natural disasters**

It has become a sad historical commonplace: In an environment conditioned by human activities and sensitive technological infrastructures, natural disasters induce more or less destructive chains of events related to the interdependence between the human-made technological systems affected. The earthquake, the following tsunami, and the subsequent nuclear disaster of Fukushima in March 2011 is a tragic emblem of this catastrophic permeability. Similar cases of interdependency can be observed in the inverse causal chain: Human-caused technological accidents – more or less catastrophic themselves – may have a complex, severe, and persistent impact on the natural environment inducing phenomena that are perceived themselves as natural disasters (e.g. polluted water horizon, “forest death”).

In most cases, event chains are more complicated including mutual dependencies of natural phenomena (e.g. wind, rain, earthquake) and (human-made) technical failures (e.g. release of energy or toxic substances). The perceptions of the impact of such disastrous events on humans are framed by several factors that depend on the historical conditions for a given society.

A crucial factor of this framing is the specific vulnerability of the various communities affected by the chain of disastrous events. Social stratifications, already existing social conflicts, or conflict potentials enhance in different ways the impact modes on humans. Such differentiations often modify the reference to technology or natural environment, especially when (and this is very often the case) the reception of the past disaster is transmitted by conflicting (dominant or subordinated) narratives concerning dead humans or (more or less) seriously affected survivors. It is precisely the narrative distinction between the natural and technological disaster that raises the question of moral responsibility for the latter, whereas the former could only induce quasi-theological reflections on supernatural justice (*Theodizee*).

The relation between technology and nature in the aftermath of the disaster is often reshaped by claims of erecting memorials for the dead and the injured victims, the event, the post-disaster

struggles of the survivors in the given society – an issue that re-arranges post-disaster negotiations with a focus on the local or global memory of the disaster (Uekötter 2014, 7-10).

The present study focuses on such procedures induced by the major industrial accident that occurred on the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 in the pesticide plant of Union Carbide in Bhopal.

### **The local reference: the pesticide plant of Union Carbide in Bhopal**

Bhopal, the capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh in Central India, has obtained tragic worldwide fame through the chemical disaster which occurred during the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 in the chemical plant of Union Carbide India Ltd (UCIL), a subsidiary company belonging to the US corporation Union Carbide (UC). The plant was built in 1968 with the aim to produce pesticides for the South Asian subcontinent – mainly Sevin<sup>TM</sup>. It constituted a strategic decision not only for the American company but also for the Indian government. In the official Indian discourse, the plant was intended for the Indian demand; however, the plant of UCIL was dimensioned far larger than that in order to meet a demand supposed to increase not only in India but also in the whole Southeast Asian market (Pillai 2014, 1). The decision fell into the euphoric era of the proclaimed “Green Revolution”, one of the programmatic issues of the Indian government since the late 1960s with the goal to intensify agricultural production by increasingly introducing fertilizers and pesticides produced industrially (Mann 2005: 188-189). Indeed, the large-scale production of pesticides in India became a major political issue in an agenda including not only fighting against hunger through chemically enhanced agriculture but also the trade expansion in the Southeast Asian space.

During the first years of plant's operation chemicals considered critical for safety reasons (e.g. toxic substances or basic chemicals whose production demanded higher safety standards) were imported from the USA, where they were produced in UC plants. Since 1980 some toxic initial products – such as methyl isocyanate (MIC) – were produced in Bhopal.

The plant was erected at the northern border of the city near the location where the new railway station was constructed. Both projects, the private (plant) and the public one (railway station), became soon attractors for people seeking work from all over India. They brought their families, and many of them just settled down in the space between the station and the industrial plant. A shantytown of informal housings (*slum*) appeared adjacent to the UC plant. The plant areal grew from 25,000 m<sup>2</sup> in 1968 to 60,000 m<sup>2</sup> in 1980, when the production of toxic initial products began on site.

The safety concept of the Bhopal plant was based on the one implemented in a similar UC plant in West Virginia – however, with some deviations (e.g. larger storing capacity for MIC in Bhopal), which would become crucial factors for the 1984 accident. From the very beginning of the plant operation, there were complaints regarding missing medical infrastructure and insufficient training of the personnel.

Numerous accidents during plant operation were reported since 1981; some of them demanded the evacuation of the plant, and some even caused fatal casualties. Accusations against the management of the plant and warnings in the press on several occasions of accidents did not have any serious consequences regarding the revision and completion of safety measures in the plant units (Lapierre/Moro 2001).

### **The industrial accident: what happened in the night 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 in Bhopal?**

A summary of the chain of events before and in the night 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 in the UC plant in Bhopal is given in form of a time table by Ballal and af Geijerstam (2012, XXII-XXVII). A detailed reconstruction with much background information presented in a narrative form between investigative journalism and documentary fiction has been published by Lapierre/Moro (2001). Official *technical* reports on the accident have been commissioned by Indian authorities, as well as by UC. A scientific analysis of the accident based on a comparison and annotation of both technical reports can be found in several later documentation, e.g. that of the German Federal Environment Authority (Umweltbundesamt 1987). The reconstruction of the event chain, generally common in all reports and including some necessary background information on the situation of the plant, reads as follows:

Several weeks before the accident, the Bhopal plant, apparently over-dimensioned and struggling with low demand for the end products

(pesticides), had been put out of production activities. The rumors went around, that the plant would soon be dismantled and sold. Only inspection and maintenance works were conducted. During such works in the night 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 several tonnes of poisonous substances (MIC, hydrochloric acid) were released to the environment for ca. 2 hours. The release was due to the increase of pressure in the underground MIC storing vessel 610 and the subsequent response of the safety valve. At the time of the accident, the tank contained 43 tonnes of MIC. The unexpected pressure increase was presumably due to water introduced into the MIC storing vessel, followed by chain reactions with highly toxic by-products. There followed a chain of errors related to non-functional critical components (apparently due to bad maintenance of a plant out of production), disconnected alarm systems, & operator errors (including the suppression of alarm signals, so that the people living around the plant would not be alerted).

After the accident, UC/UCIL attributed it to an operator error – a typical response pattern in cases of major industrial accidents, according to the sociologist Ch. Perrow (Perrow 1984/1992, 5-8); in fact, the company concretized later (1985) the human error by claiming the version of possible sabotage by an Indian engineer. This narrative is presented in Union Carbide's still existing web site (<http://www.bhopal.com/incident-response-and-settlement>). Interestingly, this engineer continued to live in the area after the accident and was not accused or persecuted by the local authorities or the families of the victims.

The industrial accident of 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 in Bhopal (technically a gas leaking – not the first in the history of plant's operation) became a multi-layer disaster not only because of the tremendous number of victims, but also because of the explosive juridical controversies, the significant impact on vulnerable groups of the local society, the persisting environmental impact, and the long-time axis that stretches and distorts the above perspectives.

### **Assessing immediate and long-term impact: patterns of death image between chemistry and physiology**

Wind, the bad orientation of the fleeing victims, informal dwellings (*slums*; *bastis* in Hindi) around the areal (ca. 100,000 people might have lived in a radius of one km around the insecticide plant). Because of the wind direction in relation to the location of a nearby hospital, numerous people trying to flee away from the

released gas practically ran into the poisonous cloud. Others were trapped and subjected to the impact of the poisonous gas in the nearby railway station. Many train passengers arriving at Bhopal on the occasion of festivities during that night were among the first victims.

It is now assumed that the released toxic gas mixture mainly contained methyl isocyanate ( $\text{CH}_3\text{-N=C=O}$ ). The toxic cloud that evaded the city contained more compounds formed through side and chain reactions, e.g. mono methylamine, hydrogen chloride (HCl), and probably hydrogen cyanide (HCN). The conflicting assumptions on the cloud composition (intensified by controversial and self-negating information – rather disinformation – by UC) was essential for the death images created in the first days by the news agencies. On a concentration basis, MIC is much more toxic than HCN,<sup>1</sup> although death from MIC intoxication (mostly through pulmonary edema) takes much longer (hours and days) than after cyanide poisoning (usually in minutes) (Varma, Varma 2005, 39). Lists of the clinical symptoms observed during the acute phase (first days) and sub-acute phase (1–6 months), as well as chronic phase (6 months onwards) following methyl isocyanate exposure, have been documented in numerous publications (e.g. Broughton 2005, Mishra 2009).

At the time of the gas release in Bhopal, all these details were not known. The HCN issue had the tragic background that the patterns of HCN-caused death were better understood, and therefore yielded a familiar description pattern for the unprecedented mortal cases during the first hours of the Bhopal disaster. Cyanide ( $-\text{CN}$ ) has a very high affinity for cellular cytochrome oxidase, and inactivation of this enzyme shuts off oxygen utilization by cells; death results from absolute asphyxiation.” (Varma, Varma 2005, 39). Indeed, the Bhopal disaster was the first large-scale study on the clinical symptoms observed after methyl isocyanate exposure (Varma, Varma 2005, 43).

The accident impact was enhanced by several factors, as has been indicated in numerous studies (e.g. Varma, Varma 2005; Basha *et al* 2009; Kok *et al* 2019). The unprecedented great number of victims desperately seeking help, missing experience of the health system and the authorities with similar cases, and insufficient information by the company regarding the

substances released rendered an immediate and effective medical treatment of the victims extremely difficult. Furthermore, the survey of the long-term impact conducted by the Indian state was terminated in 1994 (Jasanoff 2007, 347).

The narratives claiming an overview of suffering and death due to the toxic cloud of Bhopal are structured along with statistics, comprehensive scientific reports, engaged pamphlets, and personal testimonies. The latter forms will be treated later inside the frame of musealisation.

A huge amount of reports and other publications exist already with diverging estimates of the total fatal casualties – immediate, in short, as well as in the long term.<sup>2</sup> Since the debates extend on several overlapping layers and engage numerous groups of actors expressing opposing views and conflicting motivations or interests, it is practically impossible to give an allegedly “objective” or “neutral” overview. In the several sources mentioned above (i.e. 20-30 years after the gas leak) the fatal casualties over a few weeks following the accident are estimated between 2,500 and 25,000 persons. More than 550,000 persons were directly injured or indirectly affected in their health (including the estimated long-term impact, e.g. on children born by parents exposed to the toxic gases).<sup>3</sup> At the time of the accident, the population of Bhopal was 500,000-700,000 persons; in 2001 this figure had already become 1,460,000. It should be noted that Bhopal has traditionally a high Muslim population percentage (ca. 40%). Because the areas adjacent to the plant were typical Muslim quarters, the percentage of Muslims among the victims was much larger than the population average. Detailed annotated figures on dead and injured persons according to different sources and documentation

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<sup>2</sup> Among the Indian institutions engaged in studies and collecting of data on health and environmental impact after the chemical disaster one should mention the TATA Institute, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Centre for Rehabilitation Studies (CRS), the India Toxicology Research Centre (ITRC), the Defence Research Development Organ (DRDO), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the National Environment Engine Research Institute (NEERI), the Bhopal Cancer Register, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). Further, several hospitals and clinics, as well as other national and international institutions have been active in cohort studies.

<sup>3</sup> In 2004 the officially registered number of deaths was fixed at 15,248 and that of directly or indirectly affected at 572,173 (Raina 2009, 90; 2010, 1).

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<sup>1</sup> The Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the United States has set exposure limits to MIC as 0.02 ppm (or 0.05 mg/m<sup>3</sup>) during an 8-hour period, compared with 10.0 ppm for HCN (Varma, Varma 2005, 39-40).

are presented by The Bhopal Medical Appeal (2014).

The topography of the disaster became increasingly important as the official statistics of the state were used to differentiate between affected and non-affected municipal areas (wards) and to distribute financial compensatory help to the affected wards. Eventually, 36 wards were classified as affected by the toxic gas cloud, whereas 20 wards were declared non-affected. The demarcation of the region was based on the number of deaths in these localities between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December 1984 (Pillai 2014). The gas-leak death became the ordering principle of a new topography of Bhopal.

### **Why do people not visit Bhopal? Juridical images of suffering and death**

In his reportage in 2010 Georg Blume indicated that there is no “dark” tourism in Bhopal. Comparing with the cases of Hiroshima or Chernobyl – sites with strong disaster tourism attraction – he proposes as an explanation the fact that in the case of Bhopal legal process and juridical verdict are still pending, while compensations managed through the Indian state are considered by the survivors and their representatives (but also by scholar analysts) as arbitrarily low. Indeed, certain institutionalized types of help for the victims were of limited time – e.g. the services provided by the Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre, financed by the shares sold by UC. In fact, the Hospital gave free health care to gas victims until 1992 (Eckerman 2004).<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the gas tragedy, American lawyers swapped over Bhopal offering representation services for claims against UC in the USA (Varma, Varma 2009, 43). In response to that, the Indian central government took over the exclusive representation of all claims arising from the disaster through the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster Act and tried to move the legal process to the validity field of American tort law. After long negotiations, on February 14, 1989, the Indian government agreed with UC on an out-of-court settlement according to which UC would pay to the Indian government compensation of 470-490 Mio US\$. The agreement excluded any further claim against UC regarding the disaster of 1984 (Jasanoff 2007, 346; Baxi 2010).

Characteristic in this settlement is the role of lethal casualties. In May 1989, shortly after the settlement and as reference for the compensation,

the Indian government assumed that ca. 3000 persons had died and about 102,000 had sustained injuries due to the poisonous gases that leaked in the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 from the UCIL pesticide plant (Raina 2009, 90; 2010, 1). In this legal *representation*, a gas death could have occurred during a possibly long period *after* the gas release, but it should be attributed to the *impact of* the 1984 accident. Five years later, the number of deaths was officially fixed at 15,248 and that of directly or indirectly affected at 572,173 (Raina 2009, 90; 2010, 1). It was not the atrocity of each tragic singular event that counted. Moreover, death was considered as statistically registered, “officially” counted juridical issue.

UC, since 2001 a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dow Chemicals, rejects till today any legal responsibility or guilt. The new owning company, Dow Chemicals, follows the same strategy. The victims of the disaster, their representatives, as well as the various activist groups underline through several actions forms the still pending moral and legal compensation (Mathur, Morehouse 2002). The case of Warren Anderson, former chairman of Union Carbide Corporation, is quite representative because it illustrates both tensions and strategies. Anderson had visited India once, just after the disastrous accident, and was briefly detained, but then let go. Later, he was charged with culpable homicide in an Indian court and declared a fugitive from justice, however, the Indian government did not press for his extradition (Jasanoff 2007, 349). The trials against three Indian employees of UCIL in 2012 – the first persecutions in the context of the 1984 disaster – might have a symbolic character concerning the demand for filling the lack of justice (Butalia 2012); however, they do not resolve the responsibility of UC/UCIL management. Moreover, they trigger further conflicts, e.g. between the state government of Madhya Pradesh and the Indian federal government (Sarangi 2012).

In fact, some authors go so far as to consider this settlement as veiling a criminal issue: “Both legally and morally there is a strong case that crimes were perpetrated on account of the preventable social harms caused, the neglect for occupational safety, the reckless approach to handling toxic chemicals, the failure of the company to act responsibly, putting workers to work with harmful substances for which they were neither trained to handle nor had knowledge about, etc” (Izarali 2013, 106).

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<sup>4</sup>Ingrid Eckerman was a member of the International Medical Commission on Bhopal.

### **The haunted areal today**

The UCIL plant in Bhopal was designed to serve pesticide demands in the Southeast Asian space. Eventually, the actual demand proved far below the expected level; the production level was consequently lowered. By the time of the accident which resulted in the disaster, the plant was not in the production scheme. Shortly after the fatal night the plant was dismantled and sold. The only equipment which remained as haunted ruins on-site includes the units relevant to the accident, such as the macabre MIC storage vessel 610 lying on the ground and several units involved in the production line from the MIC to the final pesticide – in case there is a legal process, or inspection for reasons of insurance.

The field has been taken over by the uncontrolled vegetation. The only striking exception is an area used by the company as a deposit. According to the testimonies of former employees, this area is highly contaminated through the chemicals deposited there during the 16 years of plant operation<sup>5</sup> – no records of UCIL concerning quality and quantity of the deposited substances are available.

### **Environmental issues: soil contamination and water pollution**

Soil contamination is mainly due to the operation and the subsequent disassembling of the chemical plant. Because of poor documentation, it is difficult to assess the contamination impact of these procedures on the soil.<sup>6</sup>

Some traces of the environmental impact of the years of plant operation before the gas release of 1984 are still visible in the area. During a visit at the remaining plant units in February 2011 the author could still see mercury drops – presumably used informally in suppressing overpressure. A large part of the contaminants is deposited on-site, but presumably large amounts have penetrated the soil – perhaps even the groundwater horizon, as complaints of citizens in the neighborhood of the pant areal imply (Perrow 2007/2011, 178). Besides, outside of the factory walls lie the remains of three enormous solar evaporation

ponds to which toxic waste was pumped as liquid effluent. The specific impact of this liquid deposit on the soil is still unclear (<http://www.bhopal.org/disposal-of-union-carbides-toxic-waste-why-is-this-a-problem/>).

Even if the spatial distribution levels of soil contamination were known, the controversies about the future use of the areal render the decontamination debate problematic. Since any rational decontamination planning depends on the specific plans concerning future use, the notion of “cleaning up the ground first” sounds like a more or less utopian wish to radically cut as much material binds to the disaster as possible. From a technical point of view, different decontamination options are depending on whether the areal is going to be used as an industrial area, as a public memorial of the Bhopal disaster, or as a mixture of public and private uses, as it will be discussed below.

However, the decontamination debate and the question about the party who should undertake the immense costs relaunch the controversy concerning legal as well as a moral responsibility for the environmental damage from today's point of view and under the actual assessment categories, thus readdressing the issue of the post-disaster dystopia.

Soil contamination is inevitably associated – even with a certain time delay – with water pollution. In fact, the level of water pollution due to the soil contamination and the penetration of deposited toxic chemicals around the UCIL plant has reached aquifers under much more municipal areas than those affected by the gas leak of 1984 as has been indicated through long-term monitoring (<http://www.bhopal.org/disposal-of-union-carbides-toxic-waste-why-is-this-a-problem/>). The latter is an issue that has obtained a dominant position in the post-accident debates. Because of their severe health impact on a particularly vulnerable part of Bhopal's population, water pollution and soil contamination are considered themselves as the third Bhopal disaster – after the first attributed to the gas release, and the second associated with the juridical controversies. This slow and veiled threat is a major issue in the claims of the Bhopal survivors and the activists who criticize the settlement agreed by the Indian government and UC for not covering damages caused by the plant operation *before* the accident in December 1984 (Jasanoff 2007, 349). Decades after the gas leak, abandoned (both physically and juridically) by the industrial actor who induced it, the water pollution develops its own dynamics and appears as a disaster in the natural environment with a high

<sup>5</sup> Personal communications to the author during a visit at the remaining plant units in February 2011.

<sup>6</sup> An actualised image of the soil and water contamination due to the operation of the UCIL plant is provided in the web site of the U.K.-based Bhopal Medical Appeal (<https://www.bhopal.org/second-poisoning/>, <http://www.bhopal.org/disposal-of-union-carbides-toxic-waste-why-is-this-a-problem/>, <https://www.bhopal.org/contamination-spreads-even-further-in-bhopal/>).

harmful potential of affecting the health of communities both inside and beyond the topography of the lethal gas leak.

### **Negotiating actors**

The representation of the past is dominated (in images and narratives) by the topic of thousands of persons who died in Bhopal through the 1984 gas leak and the appeal for justice for all victims – dead and survivors, as well as by the design of the future setting of this representation. Numerous actors are engaged in the post-accident debates, the public demonstrations, and the various negotiations. These actors constitute a quite wide and rather heterogeneous spectrum. First, there are the surviving victims of the 1984 accident, their families (including the families of the victims who have already died), as well as their legal representatives. Many survivors have left Bhopal – a part of them immediately after the accident so that they could not be fully identified. Another group of actors are the new inhabitants of the area adjacent to the former plant. Actually, an area of 2 km<sup>2</sup> around the former plant has been declared “Obnoxious Industrial Area”, i.e. officially there should be no residents in it; practically, however, the phenomenon of “informal dwelling” is taking over.

On the other side, there are the Indian authorities – mainly politicians and courts on local (town, land) and federal level. The group of public or private physicians engaged in the treatment of the victims, various national or international NGOs, as well as activist groups inspired by different priorities constitute a further horizon.

Finally, there is UC Corporation (till 1990), thereafter Dow Chemicals. After the 1989 settlement, the company rejects any demand for engagement into the post-disaster affair and shows no intention of getting involved in any decontamination activity.

### **Negotiating the representation of the tragedy**

The above depictions concerning the historical frame and the entanglement of federal and local state governments, the debates on the failure event chain on 2-3 December 1984 (and their precedents), the conflicts induced in the post-accident era by soil contamination and water pollution, the handling of the juridical and moral issues, and – finally – the large and heterogeneous spectrum of the negotiating actors have revealed not only the major constituents of the Bhopal gas-leak disaster but also the conflict potentials for the issue of representing the disaster in its historicity. “Whose memory?” or “whose death?” (Lakshmi 2011) are just emblematic questions that unveil

the multitude of stages on which commemorating programmes are performed by different actors following divergent *libretti*, narratives, and images.

The debates on who is representing whom, whose perspectives and whose interests began in the after-math of the gas leak. Survivor groups and activists (from India and abroad) have been organising since 1984 several actions such as demonstrations, artistic installations and temporary exhibitions, or petitions to the government and political representatives. From 2008 to 2011 the Hamidia Hospital near the UCIL site displayed rows of twisted foetuses of unborn children aborted by pregnant women fleeing from the poisonous gas (Lakshmi 2011, 67; Sharma 2014, 10). The local government is engaged in several commemorative acts (e.g. naming of streets, annual public holiday on the commemorative day). However, the major issue is the memorial and museum project (Ballal, af Geijerstam 2012; Lakshmi 2011; Sharma 2014).

It is impossible to construct *one single* unbiased narrative regarding the history of the project. In fact, the project has been lunched and re-lunched by the Madhya Pradesh state, with the survivors sustaining diverging approaches. The plant site could only be used for such a project on the condition of previous decontamination – a pending issue, as has been discussed above. In 2005 the Madhya Pradesh state government awarded after a national competition the \$25 million grand to Space Matters, a New Delhi-based group of architects. The abandoned site stood again in the focus. Through the factual abandonment for many years and the memories of death and suffering, the areal has become – physically as well as virtually in the Indian public perception modes – an anti-landscape. Space Matters organised a Workshop-Conference in Bhopal in 2011. The Workshop followed various approaches reflecting the reception and assessment of the accident and its disastrous forms of impact as they are represented by the various stake holders of the debate mentioned above. The Conference focused upon comparative approaches, e.g. regarding other disaster areas such as the Tsunami Museum in Aceh Living Museum, Indonesia. Representing the societal impact of the disaster under the keywords “Justice through Architecture” was indeed a leading thread of certain contributions in the 2011 Conference. The role of death and the dead persons in the representation concept remained, however, vague (Ballal, af Geijerstam 2012).

The initiative of the government was contested by some survivor groups who claim that



the government does not have the right to build a memorial because it is complicit in the injustice that has been done to them. They claim that only the survivors possess that right as the moral witnesses (Lakshmi 2011, 66). Moreover, they consider the abandoned plant as an important historic artifact that should be conserved as a living memorial of the disaster (Lakshmi 2011, 68).

By delegitimising any governmental initiative these claims proposed by survivor groups implied in 2011 “that there will eventually be more than one museum about the Bhopal tragedy. When there are competing narratives about an event, fragmented, multiple commemorations abound.” (Lakshmi 2011, 70)

### Remember Bhopal Museum

After long debates and splitting of the groups engaged in the Bhopal Memorial cause, the Remember Bhopal Museum with the first “permanent” exhibition on the disaster opened its doors on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014. The location, Senior HIG 22, Housing Board Colony, Berasia Road, is a rented flat in a residential area of Bhopal – with no visible connection to the plant areal. The exhibition mainly consists of pictorial (photographic) material of victims of the disastrous chemical accident accompanied by texts representing versions of the *oral history* concerning the 1984 disaster. Some 50 oral testimonies, as well as personal objects of victims are on display. “The museum showcases to the government the kind of memorial that many survivors wish to have in Bhopal” (Sharma 2015), thus proposing a representation strategy against the inertia and the alleged plans of the local government.

“The Remember Bhopal Museum is a survivor-led effort at collecting, archiving and exhibiting memories, artifacts and oral histories of the experience of the communities affected by the aftermath of what has come to be known as the world’s worst industrial disaster.” In fact, the Museum is the materialisation of a long struggle between competing narratives, actors, and representations of the Bhopal disaster in its multiple-layer character: “First Indian Social Movement in a museum. [...] The central goal of the Remember Bhopal Museum is to resist any attempt by anybody — government or industry — to rob the survivors of their active voice in museum or memorial projects.”<sup>7</sup> In the words of

Rama Lakshmi, one of the curators of the Remember Bhopal Museum, during the 2011 Conference, the survivors who joined the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal “want to take back the narrative control”.<sup>8</sup> “They want to use the Museum as a strategic tool to advance the goal of the movement, [...] to tell the story of the injustice meted out to them over the years”. (Lakshmi 2012, 120)

### Diverging memory processes

The exhibition concept of the Remember Bhopal Museum<sup>9</sup> with a major focus on the memory of the dead can be seen as one of the two distinct outcomes of divergent memory processes inside and outside India. In the Western media, the framed images of the suffering and death of people in the Bhopal (featuring photographs by the Magnum photographer Raghu Rai, e.g. burial of an unknown child)<sup>10</sup> became soon iconic symbols of a remote industrial disaster, and faded -later away, or were covered by the flooding images of death and suffering from subsequent disasters – natural or industrial. Thus, the name of Bhopal became internationally symbol and motivation for introducing and legitimizing guidelines of industrial plant safety on the transnational level. It is precisely this reception that inspired proposals such as that by ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) which regards the areal as a site of industrial heritage with special features related both to the production scheme as well as to the final accident, or a presentation at the 2011 Conference arguing for a Museum of Industrial Disaster(s) on the site of the former UCIL plant.

In opposition to this approach, Indian discourses – especially in the manifestations of the survivors and the texts of both curators

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permanent exhibition can be found in the Museum’s site <https://rememberbhopal.net>; further in the Getty collection of photographs: <https://www.gettyimages.de/fotos/remember-bhopal-museum/>.

<sup>8</sup> Lakshmi 2011, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Rama Lakshmi and Shalini Sharma are both curators of the permanent exhibition. They were both presenting participants of the 2011 Conference.

<sup>10</sup> The Bhopal photos of Raghu Rai can be found in the web site of the Magnum group: [https://pro.magnumphotos.com/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2TYRYDDG70XJ&FRM=SubHeaderFrame%3aMAGO31\\_12](https://pro.magnumphotos.com/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2TYRYDDG70XJ&FRM=SubHeaderFrame%3aMAGO31_12). Further Bhopal photographs relevant for the Western reception of the Bhopal tragedy are accessible in the web site of the Getty Foundation: <https://www.gettyimages.de/fotos/bhopal-gas-tragedy/>.

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<sup>7</sup> The quotations are taken from the Museum’s site <https://rememberbhopal.net/overview> accessed on 27 July 2020. Photographs of the Museum and its

mentioned above – depict rather a museum concept that materializes the dynamic of developments in the perception of societal representation of the relations between survivors and the death of the accident. The objects of the exhibition in the Remember Bhopal Museum, mostly belongings of the persons who lost their lives through the gas leak, are “the last tangible link of the survivors to the dead persons”. By adopting these concepts “the survivors’ movement contests openly the state-dictated ritualistic homage of the Bhopal dead and the state’s intention of healing through commemoration” (Sharma 2012, 190; 2014).

The photographic material exhibited in the Museum focusing on both survivors and dead reflects a direct relationship to the natural and human environment such as in the case of the photographs diffused in the Indian media that covered the impact of the 1984 gas leak. An emblematic figure for the perceived injustice was, of course, the portrait of Warren Anderson.<sup>11</sup>

The studies with explicitly anthropological objectives and methodologies focus mainly on the behavior patterns of the survivors (Khare 1987) and on memorial initiatives and projects. The issue of the dead remains a reference and functions as a source of legitimation for the survivors’ movement.

*Representing* death and/or dead persons as *imago* is an issue that brings *formally* together both memory processes described above – in spite of their divergent approach and goal. Rather than *imago mortis*, the no-name death, it is the *imago mortuorum*, the image of the numerous deaths that prevails. In the industrial heritage approach this is performed in the form of statistics (e.g. as a basis for comparison with other disastrous events, or for legitimizing the weight of claims, lessons learned etc.). In the approach of *community stories*, it reveals the multitude of individual stories of the dead victims to enact the community memory and protect it from erosion – erosion e.g. through a decrease of the empathy potential in the encounter with the new public (new community members, new participants of commemorative celebrations, new Museum visitors).

Precisely this last aspect brings the concept close to “current paradigm shifts in exhibiting practices associated with the transformation of traditional history museums, exhibitions and heritage sites into ‘spaces of memory’ over the last 30 years.” Silke Arnold-de-Simine explains

further this transformation process: This shift “probes the political and ethical claims of new museums and maps the relevance of key concepts such as ‘secondary witnessing’ and ‘empathic unsettlement’. [...] Visitors are asked to identify with other people’s pain, adopt their memories, empathize with their suffering, re-enact, and work through their traumas.” (Arnold-de-Simine 2013, 1) This empathic participation of the visitor in the enacting of the individual images of the gas-leak dead –induced imaginary participation in a traumatic experience – coincides practically with the major explicit goal of the Remember Bhopal Museum. Moreover, the exhibition concept regarding the representation of the dead victims fits remarkably to the expectations as postulated by Alexandre Dessingué and Jay Winter in the introduction of a volume concerned with the intricate connections between silence, acts of remembrance and acts of forgetting in cases of memorials and exhibitions dealing with (remote or recent traumatic experiences: the concept enacts an intriguing “interweaving of remembering and forgetting” inducing “a ‘collective act of remembrance’, [...] with the focus on the intuitive or even the imagined experience of the remembering, not on the individual’s remembering of a lived experience” (Dessingué, Winter 2016, 1-3). Let aside debates and criticism on the instrumentalizing of the Bhopal exhibition in using “the Museum as a strategic tool to advance the goal of the [survivors’] movement” (Lakshmi 2012, 120), the concept and the realization of the exhibition of the Remember Bhopal Museum can be perceived as a bench example for novel approaches of the exhibition practice in coping with “‘difficult’ objects and narratives that disturb and affect”, as described on other examples by Eva Silvén in her contribution to the volume *Difficult matters: Museums, Materiality, Multivocality* (Silvén 2010, 136). The overwhelming remembrance of the Bhopal dead and the stories of the Bhopal survivors would constitute examples of such disturbing and affecting narratives. The combination of the image of a dead person, the “difficult” object such as the watch of a person who perished in the night of the gas leak, and the recorded-voice narrative that is intended to disturb and affect the visitor – such a linkage would be a challenging example for forming and enacting the image of the death of a specific person in the multitude of the persons and the multivocality of the testimonies.

### Death as uncanny memory in the present

The remembrance of the gas-leak horror of Bhopal renders the image of the gas death a

<sup>11</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/india/photo/bhopal-gas-tragedy-30th-anniversary-warren-anderson-374007-2014-12-02>.

recurrent reflex beyond the regional confinement of Madhya Pradesh. In the three months May to July 2020, the period following the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown during which the plants were off-operation, four severe chemical accidents occurred in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, accidents that were covered in the mass media with the reflex of the deadly gas leak tragically familiar from Bhopal.

On May 7, 2020, a gas leak (styrene) at LG Polymers Pvt Ltd's Visakhapatnam plant (Andhra Pradesh) caused the death of 12 people and injury of 585; thousands were more or less seriously affected

(<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/LG-Polymers-unit>). The ammonia gas-leak incident at SPY Agro Industries in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh on Saturday, 27 June 2020 caused the death of one worker; three workers were hospitalized. Three days later, on Monday, 30 June 2020, again in Visakhapatnam a toxic gas (benzimidazole) leakage accident at the pharmaceutical plant of Sainor Life Sciences caused the death of two and left critically injured four more persons

(<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/vizag-gas-leak-news>). Finally, on Monday, 14 July 2020 a chemical reactor blast occurred at the solvents' recovery unit of Visakha Solvents Ltd, which recovers waste solvents from pharmaceutical units, located in Ramky Pharma City of Paravada on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam; 6 workers were injured (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/fire-breaks-out-at-pharmaceutical-unit-near-visakhapatnam/story-6YXKD4RMNtZbsbXj7P1cDK.html>) The tragic image of Bhopal gas death was the established pattern of mediatic communication and pictorial representation of the accidents and their possible impact – even in cases in which the technical background was different (e.g. in the accident of 14 July).

Another recurrent pattern linked to the image of gas death is the specific vulnerability of the survivors regarding respiratory hazards. A report from survivor organizations on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020 revealed that more than 75% of COVID 19 pandemic victims in the city of Bhopal were gas-leak survivors. As well as receiving extensive coverage in the Indian national press, the story was covered in an article in the *Telegraph* on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 entitled 'Bhopal Survivors Succumb to COVID 19, 35 Years After Chemical Disaster'. (<https://www.bhopal.org/covid-19-update-bhopal-in-the-press/>; [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/bhopal-coronavirus-survivors-worlds-worst-industrial-disaster/)

[health/science-and-disease/bhopal-coronavirus-survivors-worlds-worst-industrial-disaster/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/bhopal-coronavirus-survivors-worlds-worst-industrial-disaster/))

Beyond questions of pending justice and erosion of the memory of individual deaths, it seems once again that the collective tragedy has established a discourse kernel on the Bhopal gas death that recurs on several occasions demonstrating the persistent reference to the traumatic memory and its connectivity both locally and globally.

## Conclusions

The considerations of this study regarded the memory of the Bhopal tragedy with a special focus on the remembrance of the dead victims and the survivors. Three ways of representing death due to the UCIL accident in Bhopal were traced – mainly in the Indian, some of them also in a global frame. The features of these representations can be summarised as follows:

a) The deaths registered in the statistics (see e.g. NDTV 2017) are figures negotiated or contested among the authorities, UC, activists and survivors

b) Personalised dead persons are addressed in commemorative rituals as well as in exhibitions. In the exhibition concept of the Remember Bhopal Museum, they are attributed “living features” (face, voice, history) on the condition that the visitors are willing and able to identify with the pain of the victims (dead and survivors), adopt their memories, empathize with their suffering, re-enact and work through their traumata.

c) A third category constitutes the images of toxic-gas death that are recurrent in the discourses of industrial accidents, as well as in social movements in the Indian frame.

A major goal of the present study was to demonstrate how these representations are historically entangled with each other and how they constitute – at least at certain moments – societal acts that circumvent the erosion of memory. An important form of these representations, the visual fixation of the tragedy, deserves its own space and further analysis – it was only mentioned above in the comment on the Magnum photographer Raghu Rai.

Similar limitations apply also regarding influence factors from the broader political development since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in India, e.g. in respect to trans-confessional alliances between the victims and the socio-political groups. Bhopal had traditionally (and still has) a strong presence of Muslim population – an aspect that became symbolic of the solidarity actions which followed the

disastrous accident of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 (e.g. the demonstrating women with the black head-scarfs). The recent revival of Hindu nationalism threatens the trans-confessional representation of the victims – especially bearing in mind that the Muslim quarters were much more affected by the 1984 disaster. Thus, in recent social debates, distinguishing between Hindu and Muslim dead persons, Hindu and Muslim survivors has become an issue – “the Hindu-Muslim trap” (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/when-1984-gas-tragedy-victims-fell-into-hindu-muslim-trap/articleshow/66357297.cms>).

In December 2017, in a march near the abandoned UCIL plant on the occasion of the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy, the protestors demanding proper rehabilitation of children born with deformities post the toxic leak

made following statement: "The reason for the increased official apathy towards the Bhopal victims in the last years is because half of them are Muslims while an overwhelming majority of affected Hindus are from lower castes." (NDTV 2017)

The long-lasting debates have revealed the necessity for new versions of social contract. During the 2011 Conference an activist formulated this demand in a direct and, perhaps, provoking way: „We have come here to discuss what we choose to remember and to forget.“ (Ballal, af Geijerstam, 2012, XIII) The great challenge for the Bhopal debates consists in coping with the memory of the disaster and the dead in a way in which also strategies of “forgetting” are engaged (Connerton 2008).

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## DEATH, REMEMBRANCE AND TRANSIENCE IN ALI SMITH'S *AUTUMN*

Dana PERCEC

Associate Professor, PhD.

West University of Timișoara

Faculty of Letters, History and Theology

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

E-mail: dana.percec@e-uvt.ro

**Abstract:** *The paper discusses Ali Smith's 2016 novel "Autumn", the first installment in the "Seasons' Quartet", an extended poem in prose which focuses on the friendship between a 101-year-old man who was born during the Great War, and a woman who was born in the year of George Orwell's fictional dystopia "Nineteen Eighty-Four", a book about the abuses of totalitarianism and extreme repression. While built as a multi-voiced interior monologue, Ali Smith's novel, which can be regarded as an extension of the modernist techniques of stream of consciousness, is a meditation about the subjective perception of time as a swollen bubble, when the individual is faced with the certainty of physical death and other symbolic forms of separation and exitus, with overlappings between fictional worlds and reality. Separation is interpreted both in an abstract manner and literally, with a focus on the year 2016 and the Brexit process, while death is presented at the individual level and at the collective level, with flashbacks from the year 1943 in France and the deportation of the Jews. Similarities in scope, style, and emotional response to historical events can be drawn between "Autumn" and T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" other modernist poems.*

**Keywords:** *individual and collective death, disillusionment, interior monologue, separation, time*

**Rezumat:** *Lucrarea se apleacă asupra romanului „Toamna“, de Ali Smith, primul în „Cvartetul anotimpurilor“, un amplu poem în proză despre prietenia dintre un bărbat de 101 ani, născut în timpul Marelui Război, și o femeie născută în anul distopiei fictive a lui George Orwell, „1984“, o scriere despre abuzurile totalitarismului și forme extreme de represiune. Construit ca un monolog interior polifonic, romanul lui Ali Smith, ce poate fi privit ca o extensie a tehnicilor moderniste ale fluxului conștiinței, este o meditație despre percepția subiectivă a timpului, ca o paranteză supradimensionată, atunci când individul se află înaintea certitudinii morții sau a unor forme simbolice de separare și închidere, cu suprapuneri între lumile ficționale și realitate. Separarea este privită în sens abstract dar și propriu, cu accent pe anul 2016 al Brexitului, pe când moartea capătă o dimensiune individuală și colectivă deopotrivă, cu întoarceri în timp, în Franța anului 1943 și deportarea evreilor. Există numeroase similitudini tematice, stilistice și în sensul unui răspuns emoțional față de evenimente istorice contemporane între acest roman și poemul lui T.S. Eliot „Țara pustie“.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *deziluzie, moarte individuală și colectivă, monolog interior, meditație, separare, timp.*

### Introduction. The turning point

Robert Eaglestone, chair of the judging panel of the 2017 Man Booker Prize in Britain, starts the first edited collection of thoughts about post-Brexit literature, already dubbed BrexLit, by declaring his surprise at how quick writers were to incorporate this experience in their novels, with a usually gloomy or even apocalyptic mood, writing as follows:

*"Books like Brave New World and Nineteen Eighty-Four were meant to alert us to the dangers of the authoritarian, totalitarian state, but it turns out they've been adopted as the playbook of both elected and unelected*

*dictatorships across the globe. ... We noted the similarities between these twentieth-century, ugly dystopian visions but didn't act with sufficient robustness to address the situation. There's a role for literature, so adept at humanizing big questions and creating emotional and cultural landscapes, in metaphorically poking us all in the ribs and urging us to start thinking critically and becoming politically active again."* (2018, xvii-xviii)

The writers' and the readers' quick response to the events of the summer of 2016 shows what cultural studies have demonstrated throughout the late twentieth century, that the relevance of literature, beyond its aesthetic value, grows in



consonance with major events taking place during the year of its publication, re-publication or reception. A case in point is provided by Oliver Tearle in a book about the connection between the Great War and the rise of modernist poetry (2019, 10). The critic recounts the posthumous success of a late Victorian writer, Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose complete poems were only published in December 1918, one month after the Armistice, after more than thirty years of oblivion. Upon publication, English readers embraced his poetry with great pathos, especially because the editor, Poet laureate Robert Graves, decided to open the volume with a poem entitled *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, written in 1876 and rejected by publishers at that time. The text was about the tragic sinking of a ship called *The Deutschland*, but, in the aftermath of the Great War, with the dissolution of no fewer than four European empires, including especially Germany, after the abdication of the Kaiser, the poem reached out to its readers with an entirely different message. It must be said, though, that apart from this wordplay between ship and country, Hopkins' name rang a certain bell in the minds of the recently demobbed soldiers, whose years in the trenches had been soothed with published anthologies of poetry. These anthologies, apart from an avalanche of poems written by the soldiers themselves, an entire generation who came to be known as the War Poets in Britain, also featured older texts – like Hopkins' – that were deemed relevant, encouraging or in other ways revealing to the military readership. Robert Graves knew all this very well, since he was himself a veteran, his war memoirs, published in 1929 as *Good-Bye to All That*, being still one of the most famous autobiographical books about the Great War. In this book, Graves focuses extensively on how patriotism, as a form of discourse and as a state of spirit, was annihilated by the reality of the then largest scale massacre in modern history.

I do not argue that the confusion and frustration generated by the 2016 Referendum compares in any way to the huge tragedy of 1914-1918, a war that boasted to end all wars but which, eventually, only managed to end peace, as Margaret MacMillan cogently points out in the title of her historical account of the year 1914 (2014). However, “the political and existential mire”, as Robert Eaglestone calls the post-2016 mood, is the result of a far more dramatic geopolitical situation worldwide, with terrorism, the tragedy of Syria, the migrants' crisis, climate

change, or the recrudescence of nationalism both in Western Europe and in America, after the Trump elections. More than that, if we take our cue from the above arguments, about the relevance of literary texts not (only) upon their publication but (also) upon their subsequent reception, the year when the present study is written entails that our reading of all these events and texts incorporates the extreme experience of the medical and economic crisis we are currently traversing.

### **BrexLit, or the small Apocalypse**

In presenting the British novels that were written immediately after the 2016 Referendum, Robert Eaglestone laments their apocalyptic mood, which he finds to be conveyed in a not subtle enough manner. What they succeed in capturing, though, is the ultimate identity crisis this event unleashed, a confusion of identity and individual roles in the contemporary world which overlaps the national dilemmas with the cultural crisis. The fears attached to the post-Referendum world are a tangible part of all BrexLit, a sense of doom whose intensity is increased by yet another quagmire. In Robert Eaglestone's words, again: “Assuming we haven't yet reached the end of history and the writing of it really is still shaped by the victors, then what kind of historical narrative will eventually emerge from our current and future predicaments as exposed by Brexit?” (2018, xviii)

This must remain a rhetorical question, since it would be far-fetched to assume there were any real winners after the Referendum or that a fair reflection of these recent events will emerge very soon in written form.

These dead ends do not prevent, as previously mentioned, a great variety of fictional as well as non-fictional works to address the year 2016 from various perspectives. Zadie Smith, well known for her novels in which she addresses the multicultural issues the British metropolis is facing nowadays, responds to Brexit in her 2016 study *Fences: A Brexit Diary*, meditating about the dangers of seeing a multi-coloured universe, with nearly infinite possibilities, only in black and white. When voters were faced with only two radical options, Leave or Stay, no wonder the result was so frustrating for so many (52 to 48% in favour of leaving). The title is inspired from an actual fence Smith witnessed being erected on the grounds of the primary school where her daughter used to learn, symbolic of a far more menacing wall, “as together we watched England fence

itself off from the rest of Europe.”Almost 30 years after the collapse of the Berlin wall, instead of vast open spaces, ever more open, Europe in 2016 only promised to offer newer, higher and stronger walls and fences.

Jonathan Coe’s *Middle England* (2018), like Julian Barnes’ *England England*, written in the 1990s, is a book about how the concept of Englishness has evolved (or, rather, devolved) in the past several decades. When the protagonist, a writer, is invited to write a response to the Referendum in a newspaper, he is reserved and declines in a polite, self-ironic manner. In a way, readers may conclude, this is the position the majority should adopt to emerge sanely out of this crisis: moderation and understatement, which are commonly regarded, after all, as staple characteristics of Englishness.

*Perfidious Albion* (2018) by Sam Byers is the most apocalyptic (to paraphrase Eaglestone) novel of all so far, a dystopia in the spirit of Orwellian fiction. Britain is a dramatically polarized country, where the social media and the Internet have taken control of the people’s minds and manipulate them like Big Brother, Newspeak, and the Ministry of Truth did in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this dystopian universe, the insularity of Britain, so often regarded as a source of pride and an engine of exceptionalism, is seen for what it really is, post-Brexit, the cause of isolationism, the reason why the country grows fragile and vulnerable, a parochial, mean project in stark contrast with the imperial grandeur of the past.

Ian McEwan’s *The Cockroach* (2019) is, as the title suggests, a reference to Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, where the giant bug and its inadequacy in the human world were symptomatic of the absurdity of modern urban life. In McEwan’s novella, the metamorphosis is reversed, the bug waking up in a human body and not an ordinary human body, but that of the main inhabitant of 10 Downing Street. Most of the other members of the newly formed cabinet turn out to be other cockroaches transformed into humans, who, with the logic of their original, entomological potential, can only imagine the most absurd measures to pull the country out of crisis. Such a measure is Reversalism, a strategy which reverses the flow of money, so that employees pay their employers, shop keepers pay their customers for the products they buy, exporters pay Britain to take their merchandise, etc. The uselessness of these projects is reminiscent of Jonathan Swift’s eighteenth-

century sharp political satire. We all remember that, in *Gulliver’s Travels*, an admired academy of science invests all its potential in making pillows out of marble, while the most respected social organization is that in which families swap children, so that nobody gets too attached to anybody. However, while Swift, joining the rational and strongly optimistic project of the Enlightenment, truly believed his satire would eventually change the course of political actions, McEwan’s writing arrives long after such ambitions have been proved impossible to pursue in reality.

Last but not least, Ali Smith’s *Autumn* (2016) is considered the first novel to have responded to Brexit in terms of an emotionally trying moment in recent history. Intended as the first book in a seasonal quartet, *Autumn* goes back to the interests and priorities of modernist literature, written in Britain mainly in the aftermath of the Great War, exploring the way in which we individuals perceive time and its passage. Like the modernist writers in the first decades of the twentieth century, Ali Smith rediscovers the fact that time – as history – is impatient and can be counteracted only with another time, a subjective, individualized one, the duration. In order to convey this complex idea, Ali Smith makes this short novel a veritable poem in prose, reinventing the interior monologue as a way to reflect upon the most fundamental problems, of love, death, hope, transience and solitude.

### *Annus mirabilis*

The parallel drawn in the Introduction between the writing and the reception of literature after the Great War and after Brexit was no coincidence, evidence being the above paragraph in which I argue that Ali Smith’s style and emotional response to contemporary social and political events is, in many ways, similar to the experimental but also profoundly introspective modernism practiced by British writers in the 1920s. Even if the overwhelming and justifiable pessimism that usually characterizes post-World War I literature is understandably absent from contemporary fiction, there is, in style and thematic choice, an affinity between Ali Smith’s *Autumn*, as the first sample of BrexLit, and one of the most symptomatic literary responses to the desolation and alienation rising in the wake of the Great War, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, but also other poems written in the early twenties.

Published in 1922, the 434-line long poem *The Waste Land* brings together trench warfare

imagery, ancient or medieval myths, and snapshots of twentieth-century London. The various “I”s that reflect these images and vignettes are different characters, but united under one consciousness. Choosing post-war England as a backdrop, Eliot meditates about individual and collective despair and the difficulty to cope with loss – whether it is the loss of human lives, the loss of hope, of faith, of art and artistic inspiration, or, more generally, the loss of the old order, a world that disappeared in the massacres on the battlefields of France and many other places in Europe.

Oliver Tearle, in his book about the connection between the Great War and the modernist poem, writes that the poetry before the events of 1914-1918, brief, imagistic, with “concrete miniature representations” of everyday life, was inadequate to deal with the “social, political and psychological fallout” after the Armistice, the despondent *Weltanschauung* requiring “a larger canvas,” “a broader framework” (2019, 3) than the single-page poems – which, we must add, were still popular and convenient as reading material during the war, both for the soldiers and for the civilians on the home front. After the professional soldiers of the British Army, the Expeditionary Force, were rapidly decimated in the early days of the war, it came as no surprise that many of the civilians who enrolled were professional writers or intellectuals who wrote for a hobby, this statistical fact resulting in an impressive amount of literature, especially poetry, being written, the War Poets becoming a category which applies especially to the English-speaking soldiers who wrote during World War I. If, in the first years, the tone was optimistic, meant to boost the morale and to stir patriotic feelings, the repeated failures of the decision-makers to either put an end to the massacre or at least to make the huge sacrifice more worthwhile transformed war poetry radically, making it bitter, sarcastic and sometimes brutally shocking, full of grim realism. Thus, Rupert Brooke’s poems of 1914 (*The Soldier*) are idealistic sonnets, imagining that a soldier’s death, far away from home, on a beautiful plain, under a tree, is heroic, abstract and beautiful, following the tradition of chivalric literature. Wilfred Owen’s 1917 famous *Dulce et decorum est* mocks at this ancient Latin adage, describing how a soldier actually dies on the battlefield, drenched in mud, choking with chlorine gas, crying in pain. His conclusion echoes, even if less explicitly, a famous line from

T.S. Eliot’s *The Hollow Men*, which states that “the world ends not with a bang but a whimper,” meaning that the bombastic discourse propaganda and mainstream literature used to attach to an individual death is in sheer contrast with the ugly reality and anonymity of all individual deaths. Brooke died in 1915, at Gallipoli, aged 27, while Owen died only a week before the Armistice, in France, aged 25. Ironically, something written by Owen decorates Brooke’s monument at Westminster Abbey: “My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity” (Aldington *et al.*, 1998).

However, had it not been for the tragism of their lives and deaths, many of the War Poets would have been soon forgotten. Instead, the innovative style of other poets who sought inspiration in the very tragism of these lives and deaths remained representative for post-World War I poetry. These are the modernist long poems of T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound especially, joined, in reality, by a plethora of other English poets, including women. In referring to his own work, Eliot could be considered to be speaking for all these fellow poets, when he declares that *The Waste Land* could not have been written at any other moment. Possibly a biographical comment, this statement actually demonstrates how sensitive and responsive modernist literature was to the geopolitical situation after 1918 and the collective subconscious of the age – an age dominated, in Western Europe, by the sense that this civilization had finally come to an end and by the historic doom which was attached to all discussions about the future. Indeed, this pessimism dominated in the period between 1920-1926, which happens to be also the time when all the great modernist poetry and prose was published in Britain.

Despite some differences, what most of these modernist long poems have in common is, in Oliver Tearle’s words, “the scope and evocation of the mood” that dominated the post-Armistice period (2019, 5). Female poets like Nancy Cunard or Hope Mirrlees seem to end their poems more optimistically, militating for a reconciliation between past and present, old and new orders, while Eliot’s or Ezra Pound’s poems are utterly pessimistic, the fragmentation in style mirroring the fragmented states of consciousness and the final rupture of the individual from the surrounding universe. All the poems present distorted images of the metropolis, the demobbed soldiers filling the streets in a chaotic manner, crowds crossing bridges, funerals and memorial services attended by many people, human death

doubled by other forms of decay, in plants or animals.

The vast majority of these works, like other important modernist pieces, were published in one of the two high points of this cultural trend, which, as I mentioned above, coincided with the years of utter disillusionment in the wake of the war. These two *anni mirabiles* are 1922 and 1925, perhaps 1922 even more than 1925 – the year of *The Waste Land*, of Joyce's *Ulysses*, of, give or take, Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and Hope Mirrlees' *Paris*. All these writings denounce the modern age as ugly and self-centered, its materialism being not only unimaginative and opposed to natural creativity, but also the actual source of the carnage on the battlefields of the Great War. It was progress and the unlimited trust in the power of the machine that brought about the vanishing of an entire generation of young men, in Ezra Pound's sarcastic words, which mock a patriotic line written in 1912 and set to music in 1921 (still interpreted on all Remembrance Days in Britain, *I Vow to Thee, My Country*, a song about the love for King and Country that "lays upon the altar the dearest and the best"): "There died a myriad,/And of the best, among them,/For an old bitch gone in the teeth,/For a botched civilization..." (Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, 2003)

*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is haunted by death: in the first part, falsely autobiographical, the poet claims to offer a retrospective of his life as if "*pour son sépulchre*"; in the second part, he wonders if there is still a place for art and poetry in the disenchanted, sad, post-war world, even if he is convinced that "literature is news that stays news," a remark which brings us back to the observation that literature can respond with great sensitivity to contemporary events but also helps readers respond with equal sensitivity to events contemporary to them rather than to the literary work they read.

Similarly, *The Waste Land* announces, from the very title, a literal and metaphorical wreck, a landscape of desolation, sterility and decay. Inspired from the photographs of the rat-infested trenches and the scarred, leafless stumps of trees, Eliot's "waste land" meditates about a generalized paralysis and barrenness of his world. To enhance this impression, he evokes heroic figures which he places in unheroic circumstances, annulling the aura they were attributed by conventional readings. An example is the Fisher King, who, according to the Arthurian legends, is the last in a glorious bloodline of kings protecting the Holy

Grail. However, he is incapacitated by a wound in his groin, which prevents him from moving. All he can do is sit in a boat and fish, waiting for a brave knight to come and save him, so as to take over the responsibility of protecting the Holy Grail. The mission of this noble, but tragic character is presented by Eliot as futile, hopeless and meaningless, his wound signifying his impotence, therefore his impossibility to secure a future for either his kingdom or for the Holy Grail.

### A state-of-the-nation novel

Ali Smith's *Autumn* features characters who stand, each and one of them, for an important moment in the twentieth and twenty-first century history of Britain (and Europe), thus becoming an unambiguously state-of-the-nation novel. A bow to the Great War was inevitable in the year when the novel was published, so the male protagonist is 101, meaning he was born in 1915, the year when the initial enthusiasm about the war that would end all wars began to die. 1915 was the year of the Gallipoli campaign, the year when poison gas was used for the first time, both by the Germans and by the Allies, when Britain was bombed by the Zeppelins, when The Lusitania ship sank after it was torpedoed by German U-Boats, when the German sea blockade on Britain began, *etc.* (<https://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/firstworldwar/index-1915.html>)

Daniel Glück is separated from his younger sister, who, as a Jewish-French citizen, lives during the Nazi occupation of France and is deported to a concentration camp in 1943, where she dies. Daniel's hobby is to collect "arty art," like the works of the real artist Pauline Boty, the first and one of the few British pop artists, who died prematurely in 1966, but whose biography mirrors the cultural transformations of the sixth decade, the Beatlemania, the final collapse of the old order and mentalities with the rise of the new fashions and the vinyl discs. The female protagonist of the novel, Elisabeth Demand, was born in 1984, the year in the title of Orwell's dystopia, a warning that, even if the (Second) War was over, the world was not heading in the right direction. 1984 was, in real-life Britain, the year when the great miners' strikes paralyzed Britain and brought domestic affairs to an impasse, as the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady, did not yield to the unions' demands, planning in fact to reduce their power and influence. At that time, it was an unparalleled crisis, as no other strike had lasted

for so long and had had such a devastating effect on the economy and on ordinary people's everyday lives. Reflecting on her strategy, Thatcher famously commented:

*"they [people who made complaints that the government was not helping them enough] are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first."* (Thatcher, 1987)

Since then, "no such thing as society" has become the summary of the British (Conservative) history of segregation, alienation, individualism, the platform against which Tony Blair's New Labour won several elections after Thatcher had resigned in the early 1990s.

Finally, the year when the novel was written as well as when the action takes place is 2016, the year of the Referendum, of David Cameron's resignation and his replacement by another lady, made of a softer metal than iron, Theresa May. Ali Smith (who is Scottish by origin, a nation which famously voted overwhelmingly in favour of Staying at the Referendum) describes this year as one of confusion, a blurred state which widens the gap between the two new battling camps of the Leavers and the Stayers: "every morning she wakes up feeling cheated of something. The next thing she thinks about, when she does, is the number of people waking up feeling cheated of something all over the country, no matter what they voted" (2016, 197). The nation emerging from the Referendum is far from "ruling" as nationalists shout in the streets, singing the anthem *Rule, Britannia!*; it is literally falling apart:

*"All across the country, there was misery and rejoicing. ... All across the country, people felt it was the wrong thing. All across the country, people felt it was the right thing. All across the country, people felt they'd really lost. All across the country, people felt they'd really won. ... All across the country, people looked up Google: what is EU?" ... All across the country, the country split in pieces. All across the country, the countries cut adrift. All across the country, the country was divided, a fence here, a wall there, a line drawn here, a lone crossed there."* (2016, 59-61)

The mantric repetitiveness of this description suggests the high degree of insecurity and panic

that gradually takes over in both camps. Leavers are no longer so sure about the prospect of being an isolated island again, while Stayers deplore the nationalistic sideslips that sadly become part of everyday life. This sense of loss, of the absurdity of the entire project and its paradoxical consequences is captured in the scene in which Elisabeth fails to obtain a new passport. Waiting for her turn for hours even if the post office is empty, she leaves empty-handed when the clerk informs her she cannot have a new passport because her "eyes are wrong," meaning the picture she took for this purpose is not in accordance with new passport regulations. While meditating on the absurdity of the situation, Elisabeth notices that the clock in the office has stalled.

Stasis is a coin with two sides in this novel, in fact. On the one hand, like in the modernist poems previously discussed, it has a negative connotation, meaning that the individual's perception of the large-scale catastrophes gives them the impression that history has halted, or even ended. On the other hand, time is subjective, it dilates or contracts along with the individual's state of mind and also along the rhythms of their biological clock. The complicated interior monologue generated by Daniel's vegetative state, combined with his own and Elisabeth's flashbacks, successfully illustrates this relationship. The novel opens with Daniel "in the increased sleep period that happens when people are close to death" (2016, 19) imagining himself in a surreal landscape, with a body that is young again and feels "what it feels like to feel" (2016, 5). While Elisabeth lives through the turmoil of Brexit, Daniel "sleeps through [it], like Rip Van Winkle, dreaming of life and youth" (Kavenna, 2016). Life may be a dream, in the perception of Renaissance thinkers like Shakespeare or Calderón de la Barca, but for modernist poets and for a metamodernist like Ali Smith, dream is death. Eliot's 1925 *The Hollow Men*, where humans suffer from another form of impotence than *The Waste Land's* Fisher King, unable to transform their motions into actions, presents three perspectives of death, or three phases of the soul's passage towards death: "death's other kingdom," "death's twilight kingdom," and "death's dream kingdom." While, for the nurse in the caring home and for Elisabeth who visits Daniel in *Autumn*, every breath he takes is one breath closer to the last one ("There's a long time between each breath in and out. In that long time there's no breathing at all, so that every time he

breathes out there's the possibility that he might not breathe in again.")(2016, 12), for Daniel himself, this comatose state enables him to go into a no man's land of no-time, a phase of indeterminacy which is liberating, assuaging the physical pain and the fatigue, but also the moral pain caused by the survivor's guilt. When Daniel meets 8-year-old Elisabeth for the first time, he explains that his surname means "lucky", but then he immediately remembers his little sister, how protective he was towards her, the implied revelation being that he failed to protect her when it was really important. This is suggested by a scene showing the girl climbing, together with other women, in a German truck, stopped in Nice, France, to collect all the remaining Jews, while Daniel escaped this fate when he was sent to study in an English boarding school.

Reading and responding to literary works that have historical and cultural relevance in the contemporary period is a recurrent motif in Ali Smith's *Autumn*. One of the questions Daniel is remembered to have frequently asked during their unusual friendship is "What you reading?", Elisabeth always doing her best to give a satisfactory answer. Since Daniel encouraged her to read as a child until she visits him in the care home, Elisabeth has been displaying one book or another with great premeditation. This reading list is carefully selected by Ali Smith, and the books are meant as side comments on the political and emotional crisis of Britain in 2016. A novel Eaglestone presents, in his Introduction to BrexLit, as meant to warn readers in all historical periods against the dangers lurking in the future is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, published in 1932. A dystopia about a world state dominated by technology and the impersonal, emotionally sterile social fabric, the book satirizes the optimism of previous generations of writers and philosophers, who believed humanity was slowly but surely advancing towards the best of all possible worlds. The title takes its cue from Miranda's exclamation, full of admiration, about the beauty of the human universe, in Shakespeare's last play *The Tempest*, while the phrase has come to be regarded as a flattering nickname of the American continent. When Elisabeth re-reads the novel, neither the old, nor the new world, brave as they may have once been, look in the best of shapes. The rise of nationalism that led to Britain's separation from the EU and to the "make America great again" campaign that repositioned the United States, the global political

player, in an isolationist context, is symptomatic of what this famous quote has come to signify.

The peculiar representation of time as being fluid, of fragmentation, the permanent oscillation between reality and fiction which creates a genuine hyperspace, are all signatures of Ali Smith, displayed even in her early works. She alternates first and third person voices which embark on a stream of consciousness narrative indicative of the modernist sensibility Smith chooses to revisit regularly. Talking about the genesis of *Autumn*, Ali Smith confesses having started work on it in 2015, pre-Referendum days, when the novel might have emerged as "pastoral evocations, rather traditional stories about the richness of the seasons, the workings of time in our lives etc." But then the word Brexit occurred and an entirely new perception of division, separation, and transformation came alongside, which prompted Smith to ponder on the repetitiveness of history and its mistakes and on how, when we look back at fundamental literary works, we should see the warnings, or the skepticism, or the shrinking away:

*"Brexit's divisions? They aren't new. Brexit has just made them properly visible to us all. Is blatant political roguery new? Don't be daft, and neither is the handshake between propagandist persuasion and whatever the latest technologies happen to be. And one of the things that has been most interesting about writing books pressed so consciously against the contemporaneous is that nothing is really new in what's happening to us now. It's all there in classical myth, in 'Gilgamesh', in Homer; Dickens's 'Hard Times'." (Smith, 2019)*

Smith then reaches a conclusion which looks very much like what Robert Eaglestone wrote about literature's capacity to capture and respond to events better than any other medium or form of discourse:

*"'In the dark times, will there also be singing?' Brecht wrote in the 1930s. Yes, there will still be singing, about the dark times. ...But beyond and above all this, in the end what survives of us are the stories of people's lives, how we live through the history we call the present, through the cycles of another year and another, renewing themselves and us again and again, bringing around the darker days, and the light."*

We have come, as it were, full circle.

**Ending and starting all over again**

What is time, after all, Ali Smith's novel makes us wonder, because, while being set clearly in Anno Domini 2016, it has, because of the narrative tempo and the stream of consciousness technique, a quality of timelessness. As Joanna Kavenna writes in the first review of the book, "If

time demolishes all things, then does the febrile, forlorn present matter anyway? Does anything matter?" (2016). Time, like life, is finite and infinite at the same time, filled with moments of extraordinary incandescence and with improbable states, transition and transience being only two flaps of the same dyptich.

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**PANDEMIC FICTION:  
INVESTIGATING THE PAST, PREFIGURING THE FUTURE  
IN PHILIP ROTH'S *NEMESIS***

**Cristina CHEVEREȘAN**

West University of Timișoara,  
E-mail: cristina.cheveresan@e-uvv.ro

**Abstract:** *In light of the COVID-19 global crisis, the aim of this paper is to focus on the perceptive ways in which Philip Roth's 2010 *Nemesis* presents institutional, communal, and personal responses to the collective tragedy of an imaginary poliomyelitis wave in Newark's Weequahic neighborhood. This applied interdisciplinary scrutiny is meant to emphasize the cautionary and cathartic role played by the scrupulously documented novel, its author's final questioning of the tragic essence of human existence.*

**Keywords:** *crisis; community; death; epidemic; morality; socio-historical circumstances.*

**Rezumat:** *În lumina crizei globale COVID-19, scopul acestei lucrări este de a se concentra pe modul perspicace în care romanul lui Philip Roth, *Nemesis*, din 2010, prezintă reacțiile instituționale, comunitare și personale la tragedia colectivă a unui val imaginar de poliomielită în cartierul Weequahic din Newark. Această analiză interdisciplinară intenționează să evidențieze rolul preventiv și terapeutic jucat de scrierea scrupulos documentată, interogație finală a autorului la adresa esenței tragice a existenței umane.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *criză; comunitate; moarte; epidemie; moralitate; circumstanțe socio-istorice.*

### **1. Introduction. Dystopia Turned Real**

When published, in 2010, Philip Roth's last novel, *Nemesis*, drew a considerable amount of public attention, notably due to the writer's confession (and warning) that this was to be his last - anthumously - published work. While newspaper reviews poured in, the book could not, however, rival the author's "major" writings in terms of the critical reception, which has been, until recently, relatively scarce by comparison with the book's public appeal. Nevertheless, the 2020 global confrontation with the coronavirus pandemic seems to have sparked new interest in this particular account of the ravages of poliomyelitis upon the fictional Newark community of 1944. In today's rather unexpected context, what initially seemed to be the well-crafted artistic testament of the retiree strikes a different chord, as the mere content and documentation of the text have inevitably come to the fore of a new wave of readings and analyses.

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, a plethora of websites, magazines, journals have decided to recommend 'Books about Pandemics to Read in the Times of the Coronavirus' (cf. Bancroft, 2020). In what fiction is concerned, such lists have almost inevitably included *Nemesis* in narrower or wider selections referencing, more

often than not, "classic" examples such as Katherine Ann Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (although, in this case, the origins of the overarching catastrophe remain unknown), Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Jose Saramago's *Blindness*,<sup>1</sup> to name but a few. To them, writings by Margaret Atwood, Stephen King, Michael Crichton, Emily St. John Mandel, Ling Ma, Namwali Serpell can and will easily be added, depending on the audience and its interests.

On April 2, 2020, *The Washington Post* featured a piece by Samuel G. Freedman, wherein the contributor aptly noted the parallelism between the (current) facts and the (past) fiction, separated by a mere decade, pointing, in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vulture.com/article/best-pandemic-books.html>

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/tip-sheet/article/82845-pw-staff-recommendations-pandemic-fiction.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/books/coronavirus-reading.html>

retrospect, to what he now believes to be a “prophetic perspicacity”: “As in *Plot*, Roth's imagined past foretold our lived present. *Nemesis* offers a psychic map of our current struggle with an invasive and ineradicable disease, one that leaves every individual wondering who else might be carrying it and passing it lethally along”. If, in *The Plot against America*, Roth did, indeed, play upon a counterfactual historical scenario that many have reinterpreted as ominously foreshadowing in recent years, *Nemesis* rather coincidentally focuses on a topic that had long had an echo in the writer's consciousness: polio in Weequahic, the neighborhood that has notoriously shaped the writer's experience and lies at the heart of his closely knit fictional universe.

As most frequently with Roth, the suspicion of an underlying auto-biographical streak has accompanied the critical response to novel. Once more, the inspiration from deeply familiar circumstances and atmosphere is as undeniable, as it is recognizable. In an interview on what prompted him to revisit the grim circumstances of an infectious outburst, Roth recollects his long-standing awareness of and preoccupation for epidemics and their social consequences.

*I was born in 1933, and polio became a menace in America really in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, strangely, and then it seemed to grow decade by decade. So by the time I was a kid, it was in full swing [...] So I do know that period very well, and I didn't have to think too much about the neighborhood because I went to that playground every day of my life and remembered it all. So what I wanted to see is - what would it have been like, could I imagine what it would have been like had the thing we all feared happened? (Gross, 2010)*

What the author does manage is, indeed, an exercise in dark imagination, which might have remained anchored in a dystopian, obsolete scenario had it not been for the 2020 large-scale resurgence of pandemic as both a painful reality, and a topic of worldwide meditation and conversation. In the renewed hermeneutical framework, *Nemesis* strikes as far more than an imaginative journey into collective suffering and a clever observation of the propagation of mass hysteria. It reveals Roth's sheer insight into the core of the matter, alongside his real-life experience with and careful documentation of a disease which plagues the community from within. As such, it distinguishes itself as less programmatically controversial and more suffused in humanity than much of Roth's earlier writing: a

moving testament to greatness under pressure and to the seminal nature of individual values.

Considering this framework of philosophical musings, Peter Kemp, *The Sunday Times Reviewer*, rightfully dwells on the ineffable quality of Roth's short novels of the 2000s, now collectively referred to as *The Nemeses*. They function monolithically, as concise, yet pervasive morality plays, which play upon the tragedy of mortality in a creative variety of ways.

*Occasionally, as in Bucky's prowess with the javelin, reminders of the work's classic antecedents flicker into view. The most famous of these antecedents, Sophocles's Oedipus Rex, was set in plague-ridden Thebes. Other places stricken with pestilence have inspired great fiction, too: Thomas Mann's cholera-infected city in Death in Venice, Oran terrorised by a rat-borne epidemic in Albert Camus's The Plague. Heart-wrenchingly powerful, Roth's story of his home city convulsed by a dreaded disease is a fine addition to those masterworks (Kemp, 2010)*

In the light of such considerations, it is the aim of the present article to dissect Roth's last grand literary adventure along the lines of its fine description of the key elements of a pandemic, viewed in terms of their public perception and social effects. The idea that “Roth's imagined past foretold our lived present”<sup>vi</sup> is recurrent in recent (re)readings of the novel, as the counterfactual scenario replicates and documents the writer's experienced trauma of growing up in an early 20<sup>th</sup> century, polio-ridden American environment. Therefore, my cultural investigation of his fictional(ized) account of pestilence and its inherent discontents (ranging from the ubiquitous threat and terrifying realities of disability and death to feelings of anxiety, depression, fear, guilt, panic) will not solely rely on the traditional literary tools of close-reading and interpretation.

Relevant excerpts will be examined closely, comparatively, and filtered through the conjoint lenses of academic articles and reviews of the novel itself, as well as works devoted to the clinical dimension of epidemics in general. The larger context, necessary for the comprehension of Roth's deep humanitarian concern with the implications, significance, challenges and guiding principles of human existence, will also be established via an extensive comparative study, based on specialized works devoted to the clinical dimension of epidemics. Thus, my intention is to foreground the novel's scrupulous documentation, its minute observation of and recognizable rooting in the history and evolution of worldwide

pandemics, its faithful, yet creatively moving exploration of the social effects, psychological reactions, moral dilemmas, private and public perceptions triggered by individual and collective trauma.

## 2. Viral Transmission and Social Divides

*Nemesis* opens on a note that invites such an approach, mixing the personal views of a narrator whose identity will be revealed remarkably late, with the type of statistics that a growing health threat triggers and weaves into communal awareness. “The first case of polio that summer came early in June, right after Memorial Day, in a poor Italian neighborhood crosstown from where we lived. Over in the city’s southwestern corner, in the Jewish Weequahic section, we heard nothing about it” (Roth, 2010, 1). The novel’s first paragraph foreshadows some of the major concerns that dominate the public discourse of the pandemic: its presupposed connectedness to class and ethnicity, which become alleged markers of a potential infection, and the general ignorance of such matters, to be gradually, or even abruptly shattered by the outburst.

As Mark Shell specifies in the Introduction to *Polio and Its Aftermath. The Paralysis of Culture*, “polio was a crisis not only for the individual but also for the group – both the family and the polis” (2005:7). This is, specifically, the double burden that Bucky Cantor, the protagonist, is forced to carry throughout his own confrontation with the virus: the weight of the widening gaps between the family and the community, individual choices and the common good, the well-being of the unit and the interest of the whole. Caught within successive circles of crisis, he acts in a story of difficult decision-making, while the observer-narrator places his struggle in the larger context of the times and their dominant narratives.

Shell’s afore-quoted analysis of the relationship between disease and culture goes on to emphasize the fact that a proper historiography of polio must be intertwined with a study of sociopathology, including “various theories about the causes of polio in the first place. Flies? White bread? Pasteurization of milk? Poor diet in general? Lack of religious faith? Filthy Italian immigrants? Did dirty water cause polio? Alternatively, did clean water cause polio?” (2005:9). While it would clearly be a matter of speculation to directly connect Roth’s writing to this comprehensive study published by Harvard University Press in 2005, the background against

which Bucky’s story unfolds is carefully constructed to match such assumptions, proving Roth’s close acquaintance with the medical literature.

Accordingly, the very first pages of *Nemesis* patiently outline the Newark community’s confrontation with the usual suspects: “there were swarms of mosquitoes to be swatted and slapped away” (Roth, 2010, 4), the mayor “launched a citywide ‘Swat the Fly’ campaign” (Roth, 2010, 5), “we were warned not to use public toilets or public drinking fountains” (Roth, 2010, 6). Later on, as the disease take hold of the neighborhood, complaints pour in in similar terms: “They don’t sterilize those milk bottles right.” “Why don’t they fumigate?” another voice said. “Why don’t they use disinfectant. Disinfect *everything*” (Roth, 2010, 36). Apart from such abrupt revelations as to the state of public health, one of the famous Bucky Cantor scenes regards precisely the aforementioned “filthy Italian immigrants”.

The 23-year-old playground director and mentor to the neighborhood’s children finds himself in the position to stand up to “two cars of Italians from East Side Highs, boys anywhere from fifteen to eighteen” (Roth, 2010, 12). In an act of retaliation against fate, rather than specific circumstances, the reckless teenagers defiantly inform the man that “We’re spreadin’ polio [...] We got it and you don’t, so we thought we’d drive up and spread a little around” (Roth, 2010, 14). When warned that the situation is hardly a laughing matter, “the leader of the pack, who was easily half a foot taller than Mr. Cantor, took a step forward and spat on the pavement. He left a gob of viscous sputum splattered there” (Roth, 2010, 14). The shock of the witnesses to this revolting episode is all the greater as spit is suspected to be amongst the acknowledged methods of transmission of the fatal disease. The power of the scene and of Bucky’s subsequent resilience and self-possession is confirmed by multiple recurrences and interpretations in the community’s string of polio-related narratives.

One of the most disquieting aspects of the epidemic in Newark is the mere fact that the exact sources and means of propagation remain largely unknown, which fuels speculation, resentment, fear and prejudice. “What the people did know was that the disease was highly contagious and might be passed to the healthy by mere physical proximity to those already infected” (Roth, 2010, 6): in the clear-cut, clinical terms that all of a sudden enter everybody’s vocabulary, Roth captures the terrifying truth of viral transmission turned everyday reality, as well as the mental and

social divides that it creates and widens. In doing so, he opts not to stray significantly from the easily accessible and verifiable information about infectious diseases, inserting it into the text just as insidiously as polio itself has invaded people's private and public space.

Thus, the growing communal fears that *Nemesis* captures in detail prove far from being mere figments of the literary imagination. They are directly connected to the practical kinds of information to be found in specialized sources. For instance, Georgina Casey's article on "Viruses and Pandemics" in *Kai Tiaki Nursing New Zealand* (vol 19 no. 4, May 2013) briefly outlines the basics of contamination via direct, vehicle or vector transmission. Apart from touch, kissing and sexual intercourse, she mentions "contamination with saliva, urine or faeces", adding that

*Transmission via airborne droplets is considered to be contact transmission, if the victim is less than one metre from source. If the contaminated droplet travels a greater distance, or then subsequently contaminates another surface (such as a used handkerchief or furniture), is it known as vehicle transmission. Transmission then occurs when the victim touches that surface and the virus is transferred to a suitable entry portal in the body, eg mucous membranes for respiratory illnesses. Faecal contamination of waterways or soil is a major source of transmission of viruses causing diarrhoeal infections (eg norovirus), as well as polio and hepatitis" (Casey, 2013, 22).*

Such minute descriptions of the clinical process make it, therefore, quite evident that the novel's aura of verisimilitude is based on commonly known medical advice in what infectious diseases are concerned (poliomyelitis included, but not exclusively). *Nemesis* features a set of early Board of Health and sanitation department measures, which appear as institutionalized attempts to contain the spread of the disease. In terms of the plot, this is directly connected to the people's adherence or resistance to "the mainstream", i.e. the authorities' take on the dire circumstances they find themselves in. Quite predictably, the responses to the increasing trauma are diverse and intriguing. If the major concern of the health institutions is to follow the symptomatology and find appropriate prevention and cure strategies, the writer's interest clearly resides in observing the impact of the entire situation upon the individual and collective psyche: the mental issues that it inflicts, the

coping and denial mechanisms, the moral, ethical, religious dilemmas that stem from an extraordinary context, which pushes the boundaries of the predictable and admissible.

In a review focusing on how a 'Less-angry Roth looks back at 1940s', Dale Singer of *The St. Louis Post* largely captures the essence of the questioning frenzy that envelops Newark, Weequahic and Bucky Cantor's own inner and outer premises, as the tragedy grows and lingers:

*What caused polio anyway? The characters in "Nemesis" have no shortage of theories: Was it the Italian toughs who appeared one day and brazenly spat on the playground where Cantor supervised young Jewish boys? Was it the boiled hot dogs at the local lunch stand, or the cool breezes that gave momentary respite from the stifling heat, or the public drinking fountain, or paper money, or Horace, the dimwitted man who liked to shake everyone's hand but fell far short in the personal hygiene department? To these speculations, Cantor added one more theory after attending the funeral of one of his young boys who succumbed to the disease: God. Since God created everything, he reasoned, polio must be attributed to him as well (Singer, 2010).*

### 3. Physical and Mental Contagion

What sets *Nemesis* apart from previous writings by Roth seems to be precisely the open questioning of the nature of God and the essence of faith that Bucky cannot but indulge in, which appears after the disease has made its first victims and the initial anxiety is replaced by revolt. Beforehand, however, Roth proves meticulous in describing a society in search for answers, whose efforts and rants range from the presumably efficient to the hysterically outrageous. Focusing on the epidemic in his far more technical, non-fictional *Writing about Polio. An American Story*, David M. Oshinsky provides a chronological report on the ways in which action was taken at various points in time, starting from the disquieting mystery that surrounded the exact causes and circumstances of the disease.

He points out that, over the centuries, it was associated, by default, with impoverished immigrants, overcrowding, lack of proper housing and sanitation facilities, which are all integral part of the historical account that Roth takes over and discretely inserts into his fictional version. He reflects upon polio in a predominantly Jewish community, bullied by the Italian neighbors and scapegoated by the American majority. Not surprisingly, the infectious explosion triggers not only awareness, but also heavy bias, and the

*Nemesis* illustration constitutes, in fact, an ominous reflection of notable social reflexes throughout the ages: “In the 1840s, the Irish were accused of bringing cholera to New York City; fifty years later, the Jews were suspected of spreading tuberculosis, also known as “the tailor’s disease.” Each time an epidemic appeared, native New Yorkers looked reflexively toward the immigrant slums” (Oshinsky, 2005, 20).

While the reader looking for a well-constructed plot might remain opaque to the precision and socio-historical grounding of many of the novel’s predominantly psychological elements of setting and character construction, whoever decides to take on Roth’s challenge and place his fictional Weequahic on a non-fictional map of events will be rewarded by the discovery of a subtle, nuanced, perceptive and, above all, true-to-life and thoroughly documented narrative, resembling the complexity and depth of Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha in a 20<sup>th</sup> century, Newark nutshell. Critics such as Robert Fulford of *The National Post* have, in fact, dwelt upon this similarity before, noting that “Newark now lives within Roth as Dublin lives within Joyce, Yoknapatawpha County within Faulkner, St. Urbain Street within Richler, or Connecticut within Cheever. – 2010).

Matter-of-fact and non-spectacular as Weequahic may appear to be, the background description occupies the center-stage of many passages that contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of mounting tension, irritating impositions and oftentimes offensive accusations. While Roth is, undeniably, a master of both suspense and psychological inquiry, a study of the existing sources indicates the scrupulous research behind his imaginative effort. Let us take, for instance, Oshinsky’s minute outline of early public precautions:

*Other epidemic diseases like cholera and typhoid fever had been tamed by better sanitation, attacking the filth that spread their deadly germs. In most places, this involved the regulation of sewage, the purification of water, and the pasteurization of milk. It included public health campaigns to educate people about quarantining the sick and keeping their dwellings clean. Implicit in these reforms, of course, was the assumption that immigrants were the primary carriers of infectious disease.*

*For Pigtown residents, this bias was both a blessing and a curse. Street cleaners suddenly appeared in their neighborhood, trash was picked up, windows were screened, and stray animals carted away. “72,000 Cats Killed in*

*Paralysis Fear,” read one of that summer’s more remarkable headlines. At the same time, however, a selective quarantine was enforced. Assuming that germs traveled only in one direction - from the slum areas outward - health officers scoured the city’s Italian neighborhoods, posting signs on “contaminated” buildings, closing theaters to minors, hospitalizing sick children, and canceling the three-day festival of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, a hugely popular event. According to press reports, local resistance to these measures included “death threats” from the much-feared Italian Black Hand: “If you report any more of our babies to the Board of Health, we will kill you... Keep off our streets and don’t report our homes and we will do you no harm.” The note, said one newspaper, was written in blood. (Oshinsky, 2005, 21)*

If Roth’s scene of the Italian gang of defiant teenagers might have seemed exaggerated or utterly demonstrative to the suspicious reader, such accounts of early 20<sup>th</sup> century occurrences rival and, evidently, precede fiction. Although the writer’s scope and purpose in *Nemesis* seem to go beyond the analysis of petty everyday nuisances, into the realm of essential and most necessary redefinitions of the self and its relationships to others, such instances do not appear accidentally: they capture the decaying moral and cultural mood, as a result of the pandemic assault. As panic spreads through the Newark community, prejudice grows deeper and segregation along ethnic and racial lines becomes highly tempting and readily practiced. Bucky’s conversations with students and parents are utterly relevant: “Our Jewish children are our riches,” someone said. “Why is it attacking our beautiful Jewish children?” (Roth, 2010, 37); “But what about the Italians? It had to be the Italians!” (Roth, 2010, 38)

Later on, after Cantor has decided to join his fiancée at the mountain camp, his grandmother’s reports from the polio warzone reveal how the racist tables have turned and how such a trying experience may bring out the worst in people, in terms of stereotyping and hate speech insurgences. After the disease preys heavily on the neighborhood’s children, it is not only death, despair and destruction that haunt the area. It is also monstrous dehumanization and selfishness that gradually occupy human minds and hearts.

*The Anti-Semites are saying that it’s because they’re Jews that polio spreads here. Because of all the Jews – that’s why Weequahic is the center of the paralysis and why Jews should*

*be isolated. Some of them sound as if they think the best way to get rid of the polio epidemic would be to burn down Weequahic with all the Jews in it. There is a lot of bad feeling because of the crazy things people are saying out of their fear. Out of their fear and out of their hatred.* (Roth, 2020, 193)

The thinly disguised reference to the Holocaust and its all-pervading ghost - in the sinister image of the burning of the Jews - marks a narrative of suffering that largely focuses on fear and hatred as accompanying sentiments of the deadly disease. They prove almost equally harmful and long-lived, as history insists on repeating itself under various forms and guises. As Tibor Fischer noted for *The Daily (Sunday) Telegraph*, Roth's polio epidemic is a shrewd pretext to address the generic issues that such moments of crisis make surface, which have to do with ingrained social and individual patterns of behavior and mentality. The root of all evil does not have to be polio, per se: "Those of us who remember the initial panic caused by the Aids virus in the mid-Eighties will find parallels in the hysterical effect of a disease whose transmission isn't understood and that will kill you in an unpleasant way. Just as people hoped to compartmentalise Aids to minorities (Haitians, homosexuals, junkies) so in Roth's New Jersey, the Jews are scapegoated and they in turn blame the Italians and a neighbourhood half-wit" (Fischer, 2010).

The relatability of the entire situation that Roth chooses to foreground, its verifiable connections to the remote historical and medical past and palpable recent, if not altogether current events alike, is one element that makes *Nemesis* a most compelling and engaging read. While Oshinsky's quote indicates the mass killing of cats as one of the notable examples of measures taken to assuage an increasingly disturbed public opinion, Roth focuses on the effects of practical ignorance of the genuine sources of contagion and, thus, emphasizes the possibility to "grow suspicious of almost anything, including the bony alley cats" (Roth, 2010, 5). The fictional solution, not surprisingly, coincides with the desperate cycles of the past, as "the sanitation department set about systematically to exterminate the city's huge population of alley cats, even though no one knew whether they had any more to do with polio than domesticated house cats" (Roth, 2010, 6).

#### **4. Extreme Circumstances, Extreme Reactions**

It seems that extreme circumstances call for extreme measures. What Roth is particularly interested in are the extreme responses these measures trigger, the mechanisms of denial and repression, escapism and scapegoating that are instantly set in motion. It is evident that the spreading and generalization of fear may lead to dehumanization, violence, aggression, intolerance of humans and animals alike. "The spectre of polio brings the abject to the surface, and Roth does a fine job of exploring the blurring of the lines between rational responses to the unknown and the panic caused by the epidemic." (Fulk, 2012). The irrational dimension of individual and collective responses to emergency and crisis is prevalent in the novel, while the generic circumstances make moral assessments and definitive judgments extremely hard to formulate. What emerges is a state of relativization, which Bucky, the hero-next-door, eventually finds himself questioning and rejecting to the best of his abilities.

Roth engages in a detailed and powerful illustration of the side-effects of the polio wave, from physical paralysis to mental hysteria. In doing so, he follows in the steps of clinicians who have spoken about 'Influenza Epidemics: Past, Present, and Future Challenges', such as Flahault and Zylberman (2010). Despite using the highly specialized *Public Health Reviews* as a vehicle for the dissemination of their research, they do not ignore the larger-than-medicine implication of the described phenomenon:

*Today, this is the quintessential image of the epidemic: a health crisis as well as a socioeconomic crisis, causing massive destruction and massive disorganisation. It is a persistent topic in literature: Lucretius, Boccaccio, Defoe, as well as nearer-to-home Artaud, Giono, Camus and many others have drawn on Thucydides and his famous description of the plague of Athens (possibly smallpox, an infectious respiratory disease). An epidemic not only results in suffering caused by the propagation of an infection, but also in the disintegration of power, social structures and customs which ensues: "human society in extremis". The Thucydides' paradigm, whether it is real or imaginary, forms the basis for all current anti-pandemic plans (Flahault, Zylberman, 2010, 326).*

It is upon such warnings and acute awareness of the underlying disasters of a health scare that *Nemesis* is, in fact, predicated, as foreshadowed by the very title. What falls apart in the novel is not solely – and temporarily – public



health, despite the multiple deaths and crippling that fill the pages. The grim core of Weequahic's transformation and Cantor's experience alongside it coagulates around the very idea of *human society in extremis*, following in the steps of the enumerated predecessors. The approach is, therefore, far from reduced to descriptiveness and mimetic replication of real-life situations. It resides in the author's ability to skillfully recreate or altogether construe a gloomy atmosphere of terror, and the toll it takes on the sense of human kindness, empathy, decency, loyalty, and altruism. While Bucky Cantor is obsessed with doing the right thing under any circumstances and at no matter what price, the communal sense of duty, sacrifice, involvement, togetherness seems to dissipate in the long-lost fringes of a forlorn and irrecoverable American Dream.

One of the first signs of mounting distress is an unknown woman's interrogation of Bucky, whom she believes to be a patrolman from the Sanitary Squad. Exasperated by the ill-fated proximity of the Michaels family, who has lost a son to polio, she is on the verge of a mental breakdown, looking for literal support from the part of the authorities. For lack of concrete representatives in the field, The Board of Health strikes her as an assembly of abstract deities, disengaged from the actual protection of the citizens. Powerlessness breeds despair, discouragement fuels hysteria, accusations flood the air:

*"Where are they?" she pleaded. "Where is someone who is in charge! People on the street won't even walk in front of our house – they walk deliberately on the other side. The child is already dead!" she added, incoherent now with desperation, "and still I'm waiting for a quarantine sign!" And here she let out a shriek. Mr. Cantor had never heard a shriek before, other than in a horror movie. It was different from a scream. It could have been generated by an electrical current. It was a high-pitched, protracted sound, unlike any human noise he knew, and the eerie shock of it caused his skin to crawl"* (Roth, 2010, 51-52).

By rendering the unearthly sound gradually and distinguishing it from anything remotely human, Roth manages to provide a soundtrack to the neighborhood's disconnection from routine and 'normality'. Everything that had previously appeared commonplace, recommendable, even healthy, such as the boys' daily practice at Bucky's playground, is now shrouded in mourning, and people's mental ability to cope with the pressure is pushed to the

unbearable maximum. Consequently, it is not at all surprising that the teacher should be accused of his pupils' fate: finding a culprit offers the grieving families the illusion of solace. When Mrs. Kopferman bluntly indicates him as responsible for her children's paralysis, Bucky attempts to block out the guilt and rationalize her reaction. Nevertheless, the circumstances are such that he will never be completely able to reassure and convince himself of his complete innocence, regardless of his honest efforts and full dedication to preserve order and dignity.

Once the disease is no longer a distant threat, but an undeniable killer waiting around the corner for its next, unpredictable victim, its psychological impact proves ravaging in and of itself. This is the part of the tragedy that *Nemesis* explores, in a universe that finds itself more closed-in than ever suspected before, as proved by Cantor's unsuccessful dislocation to the mountains. There is no effective escape, and physical distance is but a temporary deterrent in the face of the faceless enemy. Meanwhile, its echoes in the characters' minds become indelible, and Bucky realizes the seriousness of that the minute that he is unfairly blamed: "He knew that Mrs. Kopferman was hysterical; he knew that she was overcome with grief and crazily lashing out at him [...] This was his first confrontation with vile accusation and intemperate hatred, and it had unstrung him far more than dealing with the ten menacing Italians" (Roth, 2010, 81).

At Indian Hill Camp, Cantor will never be able to shake the feeling that he has betrayed his duty and abandoned his responsibility to the playground's dwindling crowd, despite the city's unrest and animosity. Roth makes the inspired choice of not making him the narrator, as he is overwhelmed to a degree that would have jeopardized the story itself. By delivering the story in retrospect, via a second degree narrator who is both within and without the story - having known many of the protagonists, suffered from the disease, but never been actively involved in the events that shaped Cantor's trajectory - , the author may be avoiding one of the shortcomings of trauma narratives in general, and pandemic ones in particular: the impossibility to fully recollect and gather elements together in a coherent whole.

In her study on 'Fiction and the Trauma of Pandemic Influenza in 1918', Catherina Belling points out some of the major obstacles to representing a pandemic, particularly in times of war (as it happens in *Nemesis* as well, although echoes of the war that is fought elsewhere in the world reach the community obliquely, in an

almost surreal manner, given its direct implications).

*The medium that carries and communicates the burdens and lessons of past suffering is narrative. Suffering must be reconstituted within a story told by a narrator who can inhabit and convey the experience of the sufferer. Without narration, our accounting of the past transmits suffering only abstractly, as inexpressible inference or as deceptively simple, abstract numerical data. The narration of suffering is demanding, for it requires both factual information—from personal or public historical records—and the particular, subjective embodiment of facts that produces the meaning we call memory. Narration falters*

*when multitudes of subjects are affected at once by painful events that disrupt the secure frameworks of normality against which individual suffering is usually measured, making the right stories, those thick with detailed, subjective specificity, hard to find. The silence that surrounds the 1918 pandemic may not only have been due to selective memory's normal erasure. There may also have been a refusal or inability to describe a trauma that might still have haunted its survivors. Perhaps the flu overwhelmed language in ways that war did not (Belling, 2009, 56-57).*

Taking into account such well-documented views, based upon archival research, one may quite safely assume that Roth's unparalleled choice of narrator represents the best option for the story in *Nemesis* to reach its audience in a complete, uninhibited manner. Arnie Mesnikoff used to be part of Bucky's playground boys and fell prey to polio himself: in 1971, almost three decades after the novel's core events, he remembers his accidental meeting and subsequent conversations with his former teacher, offering closure to the reader who has lost sight of the protagonist after his diagnosis. Arnie 'can inhabit and convey the experience of the sufferer' plausibly and he is attributed the task of filling in the blanks in the story that Bucky, having succumbed to guilt and despair, has failed to complete.

After realizing the cruel reality and immediacy of polio, reaping through his crowd of followers, Cantor suddenly loses hope and the formal control he had kept in order to inspire and motivate the children. "This was real war too, a war of slaughter, ruin, waste, and damnation, war with the ravages of war – war upon the children of Newark" (Roth, 2010, 132). Creating one of the

most resonant images of the book, Roth aligns, once more, with the clinical studies on epidemics, many of which indicate the painful competition between war and disease in terms of the numbers of casualties and socio-historical resonance. Geoffrey Rice, for instance, considers that "It is now a truism among historians that before the 20<sup>th</sup> century far more people died in wartime from disease than from combat. Down the centuries the so-called 'camp fevers' of typhus and typhoid had been the big killers of all large armies, along with smallpox, while scurvy had decimated the sailors." (2013: 1)

Roth's metaphor is, consequently, as powerful as it is true to the force of an epidemic that claims children above anyone else. Moreover, it is part and parcel of a narrative construction that, under the surface of descriptiveness and the guise of an uncanny journal of the Newark plague years, proves more challenging to the reader's ethical sense than it seems to aim for initially. As Richard Eder put it for the *Boston Globe*,

*Quite unlike the usual Roth pattern, everyone in it is uncomplicatedly good; none more so than its tough, devoted protagonist, Bucky Cantor, a physical education teacher and summer playground director who must cope with the spreading damage among his young charges and their families. It is only a seeming departure, though. The title is the key. That a polio epidemic was a heart-breaking tragedy is obvious - and with what force and intelligence Roth takes us through it. But nemesis? A punishment? For what, by whom? And by the end we are back, with a direly transformed Bucky, to the Rothian rebel launching his non serviam protest against his world, his fate, himself, God (Eder, 2010).*

## **5. A "Maniac of the Why": Dilemmas and Lessons (Un)Learnt**

One of the seminal aspects of Roth's novel is, in fact, the complicated web of inner and outer conflicts and dilemmas that the pandemic triggers at the level of the individual and the community alike. Indeed, in an almost surreal manner, the cast of main characters seems purged of ill-will and wretched intentions: they all fight a common battle in particular ways, confronting their anxieties and dramas in successive, concentric circles. Nevertheless, the punishment prevails, and the questions are as many as the absent valid answers. Rebels with and without cause complain, suffer, and rise against the doom that may well be the result of a natural assault against the human element, but that is equally a



by-product of limited horizons, selfish, short-term interests and a generalized lack of realistic, analytical and visionary management of interdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaborations to a common (and communal) end.

Thus, *Nemesis* surpasses a minute chronicle of everyday life in Newark's predominantly Jewish Weequahic section, in the polio-ridden summer of 1944. It recreates a far more complex world, wherein individuals are left to battle war and disease on their own terms, with insufficient knowledge and means of what the specifics of the enemy might, in fact, be. In between the unhealthy city atmosphere and the Pocono mountains of Pennsylvania, there seems to be a soothing, promising difference, which is why Bucky's existence unfolds against these two opposite backgrounds. However, revelations come too late for salvation in a country that seems to have learnt little from previous similar instances, despite its alleged modernization and scientific progress. In fact, the novel does plenty to support and illustrate the warnings of specialists such as Tom Koch who, in his 'Hubris: The Recurring Pandemic', reaches the conclusion that

*Modern public health protocols have neglected, in the main, the social focus and political oversight that once dominated traditional responses to public health threats. Put another way, when facing the potential of epidemic disease, social epidemiology is public health. Early interventions to prevent outbreaks require not merely containment but attention to the social realities that promote disease generally. Bacterial and viral evolutions are always encouraged by a well-understood set of conditions. These include urbanization in a context of accompanying deforestation that disturbs traditional ecologies. With urbanization typically comes poverty and income inequality, the result of which is the aggregation of vast groups of immune-suppressed persons in densely settled but poorly maintained cities. These in turn provide an ideal environment for the evolution of microbes displaced by urbanization, deforestation, and changes in traditional patterns of agricultural production. All of this occurs in the context of local, regional, and national travel and trade that ensure new vectors for evolving microbial strains (Koch, 2014, 55).*

While, evidently, not all of the aforementioned conditions are present in *Nemesis*, the novel provides a vivid illustration of how such an integrated system works, and of the oftentimes invisible, though indestructible bonds between its

(weak) links. Bucky Cantor is the product and the representative of a flawed social mechanism, which has long been oblivious to realities that make the spread of the disease hard to contain. He is part of a grand kaleidoscope of delusion, which misleads even himself into thinking escape might be possible via a mere change of scenery. Caught up in the mirage of gliding surfaces and moving images, he recreates a dreamlike postcard of American happiness as soon as he has left the grieving Newark behind. He convinces himself of his own ability to regain control of the situation and return to his – temporarily abandoned – duty.

Upon meeting the refreshingly energetic kids at Indian Hill, who seem spared the wrath of the merciless enemy, he fleetingly revels in the audacity to believe that fate can be challenged, and historical determinism might be counterbalanced by individual will. "Mercifully he was finished with impotently witnessing terror and death and was back in the midst of unworried children brimming with health. Here was work within his power to accomplish" (Roth, 2010, 150), he thinks to himself, in a moment of unjustified relief. Before, he had struggled "not to infect the children with the germ of fear" (Roth, 2010, 38), stay calm and keep the townspeople from overreacting, not faltering before the impending catastrophe. However, his confidence subsides once the true questioning begins and he finds himself unable to exert his role as an exemplary provider of comfort and knowledge: how and why does tragedy strike, what criteria need to be met, who decides and according to what rules? "What are the scales of justice?" (Roth, 2010, 49)

As a true "maniac of the why", Bucky is in many ways representative for the type of response a pandemic can elicit from the common individual in the desperate attempt to work through the dire stages of the viral aggression. A most relevant interview with Nancy L. Bristow on the 1918-1920 influenza pandemic in the USA and the subsequent public amnesia surrounding the topic provides insight into how the regular American citizen habitually positioned him/herself on such matters.

*During the pandemic Americans went to great lengths to understand what was happening to them, to make sense of it. For some Americans the epidemic remained something that was beyond imagination and remained inexplicable. Others conceded its unimaginable power but nevertheless sought to describe it, comparing it to nightmares, storms, cyclones, and forest fires to give a sense of its horror. For others, though, the*

*search for meaning played out in efforts to explain the scourge in terms that allowed them to regain a sense of control over their lives and to imbue the crisis with meaning, and even purpose. Some found meaning in what they imagined as the democratizing impact of the disease. In this narrative of the epidemic, Americans of all kinds had suffered and served alongside one another, bringing the nation to a different kind of national well-being. For others, the epidemic was best understood through a religious lens, either as a moment in which God's mercy was evident or, conversely, as a sign of God's anger at a sinful nation. In these narratives the epidemic begins to contain meaning rather than only senselessness (Yerxa, 2012, 27).*

Comparing such detailed accounts of the psychological impact of a pandemic that had (f)actually plundered through the very heart of the American nation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the narrative structure and character construction strategies in *Nemesis*, one may easily discern Roth's superior understanding of circumstances larger than the pathology of illness. To summarize the enumeration of reactions above, one will identify a need for comprehension that either led to despair and denial, or to a severe and metaphorical articulation of dread. However, some more positive spirits found solace in the commonality of shared grief, while others interpreted things in a religious key, justifying the wrath of nature as an act of divine will against a forgetful and unruly nation. *Nemesis* skillfully reunites all categories in its meditation upon myth and mortality in a recognizable American context.

On the one hand, there are the victims and their families, to whom nothing will ever make sense again and whose entire faith is irretrievably lost. They are the first to stop trying to find out what needs to be done, as they cannot grasp what it is that they did wrong to deserve the ultimate misfortune. Their plight is what draws Bucky's attention to the essential flaw in the allegedly fair and balanced reward-and-punishment design. Upon Alan Michaels' death, he feels at a loss for words when he is no longer capable of relying on the strength of certainties, fixed values and comfortable, predetermined patterns. Witnessing the father's monologue rather than engaging in a conversation for which he lacks any practical input, he is shaken by the realization that the war he was given to fight on his playground might be utterly futile: "You do the right thing, the right thing and the right thing and the right thing, going back all the way. You try to be a thoughtful person, a reasonable person, an accommodating

person, and then this happens. Where is the sense in life?" (Roth, 2010, 47).

While the seeds of doubt are already planted, Roth insists on the violence inflicted upon the psyche by the type of imagery that is unnaturally and revoltingly forced into connection with childhood: Alan's fragile body trapped inside the casket, the irreparability of the damage, the immutability of the boy's destiny are trenchantly evoked: "The box from which you cannot force your way out. That box in which a twelve-year-old was twelve years old forever. The rest of us live and grow older by the day, but he remains twelve. Millions of years go by, and he is still twelve" (Roth, 2010, 63). Echoing Holden Caulfield's recollections of the loss of his brother, Allie, this type of blunt, unforgiving, no-nonsense discourse appears meant to emphasize the impossibility of return and the uselessness of mourning as a formal, yet unhelpful, social code. Alan's uncle's eulogy at the funeral, however, seems to offer some kind of closure and wraps the departed child up in exemplariness: "He remained a happy child all of his life, and with everything the child did, he always gave it his all. There are fates far worse than that in this world" (Roth, 2010, 67).

## 6. Uncertainties, Interrogations

Bucky grows increasingly torn between his kind and gentle nature, doubled by a deeply-rooted sense of duty and responsibility, and his feelings of guilt, restlessness, mounting anger and frustration, which lead up to self-flagellation and sabotage of his chance to the potential tranquility of a loving home and family. Revered by his students, he feels the weight of an absurd universe upon his shoulders and his idealistic sense of decency and loyalty prevent him from preaching truths that he becomes unsure of. While Paul Auster's attachment to the versatility of chance as a notion that indelibly marks human existence is well-known (his description of a young colleague of his being struck by lightning while at camp seems almost ad litteram out of *Nemesis*), Roth joins the philosophers' club in this last novel, as pointed out by Robert Fulford:

*As in several recent books, Roth wraps his thoughts around the theme of contingency, the element of uncertainty that (his characters discover) rules all events in life, good or bad, whether we like it or not. Roth brings to this "tyranny of contingency," a wonderful clarity and simplicity. For Roth, as for many unbelievers, chance is a total mystery, impervious to theory yet all-powerful. We cannot explain it. We can only stand before it*

*in awe. But there's something else, equally significant, in Nemesis, a fascinating change in emphasis for Roth. He seems to have developed a late-in-life appreciation for what Wordsworth calls "the light of common day," the ordinary work of ordinary people - though neither the work nor the people turn out to be really ordinary (Fulford, 2010).*

Indeed, Bucky, the apparently insipid, insignificant guy next door proves essential to the community and to Roth's story alike. Heroic to the best of his ability, yet profoundly humane in his thoughts and actions, he starts questioning the nature of faith and Jewish belief in highly Rothian terms: "They all joined the rabbi in reciting the mourner's prayer, praising God's almightiness, praising extravagantly, unstintingly, the very God who allowed everything, including children, to be destroyed by death [...] How could there be forgiveness – let alone hallelujahs – in the face of such lunatic cruelty?" (Roth, 2010, 74/75). Faced with the implacability of a fate that seems divorced from any logical or theological reasoning, Bucky begins the quest for plausible explanations and a concrete, unquestionable, responsibility. The paths are manifold: on the one hand, the divinity appears increasingly detached from and indifferent to its earthly subjects' hasty and haphazard journey towards extinction. On the other hand, the human entity, distinguishably American, is incapable of either preventing or correcting the relentless series of events, which points to a different kind of practical guilt: at both social and individual levels.

Unable to join the war because of poor eyesight, Bucky shares the drama of several American literary greats (Ernest Hemingway, John dos Passos), and takes it upon himself to compensate his literal absence from the war with a full involvement in community life. Denied the chance of heroism on the battlefield, he cultivates resilience, determination, stamina and carves a place for himself in the collective existence and consciousness of Jewish Newark youth. His behavior can be realistically filtered through the lens proposed by Douglas Kennedy's reading, which emphasizes Bucky's representativeness for a frame of mind that proves larger than the contours of his life:

*In America, we are loath to accept tragedy as an implacable feature of temporal existence. We prefer to consider tragedy a form of failure - the failure being bound up in the inability of those involved to find a solution to the problem. This ongoing facet of the national psyche baffles more world-*

*weary Europeans -- who cannot understand why we believe that there must be some error of personal judgment, some desperate administrative mistake, underlying the worst that life can throw at us. Being a people wedded to the idea of optimism a tout prix, we frequently struggle against the profoundly existential notion that life is a random and habitually cruel business. [...] At the heart of this short, yet thematically dense novel is a large, disquieting question: are we the architects of our own misfortune? Why do we have this terrible over-arching need to answer to a larger authority -- and, in doing so, sidestep the possibility of love? In many ways this is the tragedy of Bucky Cantor. (Kennedy, 2010)*

Starting from the undeniable tragedy of an epidemic and its consequences, *Nemesis* is an elegant, yet extremely penetrating vehicle for essential ontological (and deontological, for that matter) dilemmas. When prompted by his girlfriend to leave the playground's summer program and take the waterfront director position at the mountain camp, he considers her enticing promises ("We could finally be alone" – Roth, 2010, 87), but he is even more tempted by the quite naïve prospect of being able to leave polio and trauma behind. Apart from dizzying thoughts of sexual intimacy, he fantasizes about freedom from the parents' hysterical charges and, more importantly, "he could stop hating God, which was confusing his emotions and making him feel very strange" (Roth, 2010, 87). Bucky's confusion is temporarily shattered by Dr. Stenberg, whose analytical, medical approach provides at least temporary relief to Bucky's American consciousness, which equates the doom of the disease with a personal and social failure to perform within an ideal, flawless framework.

"They're not angels, they're boys" (Roth, 2010, 105) may be the type of reminder Cantor needs in his frantic, utopian drive for absolute, immutable certainties to place on a pedestal. The voice of reason, embodied by the soon-to-be (turned never-to-be) father-in-law, teaches one of the novel's most discussed lessons: "A crippling disease that attacks mainly children and leaves some of them dead – that's difficult for any adult to accept. You have a conscience, and a conscience is a valuable attribute, but not if it begins to make you think you're to blame for what is far beyond the scope of your responsibility" (Roth, 2010, 104) This particular passage best captures the essence of Bucky's emotional turmoil: just like Lincoln's America, torn between rival mentalities and lifestyles in

mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Bucky's universe cannot stand under the burden of an overwhelming conscience, which crushes him with insecurity and self-doubt more than the disease itself.

Having given in to the siren's call of potential happiness, he cannot forgive himself for what he believes to have been a selfish, deplorable, undignified personal choice. His subconsciousness is boycotting his relationship and recovery, as he considers it a matter of personal integrity to avoid becoming a burden for the people he loves, whom he might encumber once he is condemned to a crippled existence. Inextricably connected to the mythical code of honor that has inspired so many great literary heroes, he opts for self-sacrifice, as a way of atonement and further damage control: "the only way to save a remnant of his honor was in denying himself everything he had ever wanted for himself – should he be weak enough to do otherwise, he would suffer his final defeat" (Roth, 2010, 162).

This is one of the major crossroads of the novel, where the reader gets insight into the way in which Roth masterfully strays from his descriptive and thoroughly documented account of polio into the realm of existential musings and psychological investigations. "A man divided against himself", as labeled by Edward Docx (2010), Bucky Cantor gains impressive stature and symbolic significance via his immersion into a narrative that stretches far beyond his own physical and spiritual confines, into that of America itself, in its quasi-powerless confrontation with and reactions to inevitable, insurmountable disaster.

*One of the things that makes a writer great rather than merely good is their ability to get the fully realised account of an individual to stand for something wider and deeper - a community, a nation, even (at rare best) humanity itself. Needless to say, this is much harder to achieve when the focus is inward-looking or concerned with a very particular and priapic desire - though Roth has, of course, managed even this feat before. In the context of his late work, Nemesis - if it's not too sinister to say so - is a breath of fresh air, because polio provides Roth with a new, outward-looking and substantial subject around which his writing can thrive. (Docx, 2010)*

## 7. Transfiguration and Meditation

In the aforementioned respects, *Nemesis* stands out as an exemplary work of transfiguration of the individual who, in an almost

surprising manner for a Rothian protagonist, is enveloped in a halo of heroic greatness by the solemn, almost ceremonial rite of passage encompassed in the book's intensely visual, and emotional, coda. Deciding to punish himself for his alleged mistakes, Bucky is, simultaneously and paradoxically, in full control of the direction of his own life, and a hopeless victim, who cannot work through the depression and mental paralysis induced by polio. Caught in the conundrum of his complicated relationship with (American) identity, history, and God, he offers Roth the opportunity to titillate the reader's awareness of the intricate interconnectedness between these instances. Moreover, as indicated by Ira Nadel, this last memorable protagonist is witness to and actor in Roth's first unobstructed engagement in a discussion of religion: "Few of his other works address the responsibility of God for the heartache and hardship of his characters [...] But for Bucky, it is an endless dialogue that remains unresolved" (193).

Starting from the dire reality of a polio infection and drawing the reader into the specifics of the disease and of the ways in which communities have dealt with such situations not just recently, but over the centuries, Roth drives the fictional conversation towards a point of deep meditation in the close proximity of death. By placing narrative emphasis on the ominous immediacy of expiration and the urgency of its understanding, the writer takes an almost surprising turn, putting personal restlessness, rebellion and inquisitiveness in the service of the greater good. Alone and estranged as he might turn out to be, Bucky is a most convenient filter for a lofty state of mind that suffuses the text, alongside its numerous, inherent acts of civic disobedience. A perfectionist in his battle to prove his social worth, he masochistically, self-destructively, yet nobly sets a standard of conduct that represents his own, personalized version of grace under pressure. Within his inevitably limited universe, he succumbs to what Roth calls "his exacerbated sense of duty" (Roth, 2010, 273).

*The guilt in someone like Bucky may seem absurd but, in fact, is unavoidable. Such a person is condemned. Nothing he does matches the ideal in him, he never knows where his responsibility ends. He never trusts his limits because, saddled with a stern natural goodness that will not permit him to resign himself to the suffering of others, he will never guiltlessly acknowledge that he has any limits. Such a person's greatest triumph is in sparing his beloved from having a crippled husband, and his*

*heroism consists of denying his deepest desire by relinquishing her* (Roth, 2010, 274).

The typical devoted lover-in-the-time-of-pandemic who, in the context of social distancing, chooses to protect his partner by isolating him/herself from the one s/he loves, Bucky stands by his beliefs. He is dearly remembered by his students as “the most exemplary and revered authority we knew, a young man of convictions, easygoing, kind, fair-minded, thoughtful, stable, gentle, vigorous, muscular – a comrade and leader both” (Roth, 2010, 275) Via this description of the protagonist in his yet unharmed boys’ eyes, given in a flashback to when the images and narrative of invincibility still seemed plausible, Roth makes the ultimate comment on the futility of human existence and expectation, clad, however, in the overlapping veils of nostalgia and admiration for the true believers in the possibility of the myth.

Against the already-known background of the coming doom, this ending in retrospect is equally touching and foreboding, confirming Robert Fulford’s quasi-clinical diagnosis of the novel:

*Roth writes about self-respect built on the innate beauty of a well-learned craft, the up-from-nowhere saga so familiar in American ideology, the triumph of pure grit over dark circumstance. All the good things that happen spring from individual initiative. This amounts, obviously, to a celebration of traditional values. After a lifetime of Rooseveltian liberalism, Roth reveals his belief in transmitting time-honoured principles to the young.* (2010)

However odd it may seem, Roth’s exploration of the medical and socio-historical circumstances of a pandemic, alongside its effects on the evolution of individuals, does seem to act like a protest against cultural and emotional paralysis. While none of the important books on polio fail to enumerate the VIPs among its victims (such as Mia Farrow, Francis Ford Coppola, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Weissmuller, Arthur C. Clarke, Alan Alda, President Franklin D. Roosevelt – to name but the few mentioned in Gareth Williams’ *Paralysed with Fear*, passim), *Nemesis* grapples with the unnamed, the unheard, the perpetual (dis)balance between the individual and the collective. In the already-quoted interview, Roth explained his choice of belatedly-identified narrator in this particular spirit: “I liked the we and the our and the us in the telling. The whole

community of boys is being represented rather than if I’d told the story from Bucky’s point of view alone and even from Bucky’s point of view mainly” (Gross, 2010).

More than any other Roth writing, *Nemesis* manages to be a novel of the all-encompassing *we*, which determines and undermines the singular self. Speaking of unity and division, fear and hope, altruism and decay, grandeur and derisiveness, eternity and momentariness in a matter-of-fact, yet fully melancholic tone, the novel explores life stories that blend within the larger American story, for better or worse, dream or nightmare. Himself plagued by old age (the massacre!), the writer appears to deliver a testament and testimonial to the candor and vulnerability of youth, while never ceasing to question the essence, meaning and guiding principles of human life and its finitude. Capturing a community in crisis and foregrounding a tragic figure whose predestination for the part becomes increasingly evident, Roth leaves behind his own legacy of fascination and primordial myth-making, in the universe in constant disarray he has never spared love and squalor, biting satire and bitter criticism.

In Arnie’s words, “Never were we in more awe of anyone. Through him, we boys had left the little story of the neighborhood and entered the historical saga of our ancient gender” (Roth, 2010, 279). Through Roth, we, readers, have witnesses the openings and closing of the American mind throughout the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now, in 2020, two years after his death, we are looking for guidance, solace and even outrage, to lead us through a global pandemic he appears to have fictionally experienced beforehand.

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## REFLECTIONS ON DEATH. THE WAKE IN COȘDENI VILLAGE

Ionuț Mihai HORADRON

PhD Candidate

“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

Faculty of History and Philosophy, The Doctoral School „Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură”

E-mail: ionuthoradron@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The article presents a case study of a traditional village in Bihor county, Romania, based on oral interviews conducted in 2017 and 2020. The main focus is the description of the wake customs and traditions, especially the wake games played by both children and elders as a sign of a defying attitude towards death. The article points out the fact that gradually the wake games disappeared and the wake customs changed as a result of the radical social transformations that expanded from the urban to the rural world. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a change in the attitude of the people who attend the wake – from a social cohesion to an obligation paid due to the social status.*

**Keywords:** *the wake, Coșdeni village, social cohesion, the wake games, oral history*

**Rezumat:** *Articolul prezintă un studiu de caz al unui sat tradițional din județul Bihor, România, bazat pe interviuri întreprinse în 2017 și 2020. Principalul obiectiv este descrierea obiceiurilor și tradițiilor de priveghi, în special jocurile de priveghi jucate atât de copii, cât și de bătrâni ca un semn al atitudinii sfidătoare față de moarte. Articolul evidențiază faptul că jocurile de priveghi au dispărut treptat, iar obiceiurile de priveghi s-au schimbat drept rezultat al mutațiilor sociale radicale ce s-au extins din mediul urban spre lumea satului. Începutul secolului 21 marchează o schimbare în atitudinea oamenilor ce vin la priveghi – de la coeziune socială la obligație legată de statutul social.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *priveghi, satul Coșdeni, coeziune socială, jocurile de priveghi, istorie orală*

The issue of death is the main theme for researchers of different domains, such as medicine, history and anthropology. The present study has its starting point in the preliminary question whether the wake is a moment of recollection and expression, transmitting condolences to the grieving family or rather a moment of social cohesion.

In order to offer a closer response to this question, we studied the moment of death, with all its aspects dealing with the ritual, in a few communities of the Bihor county. We were able to gather a lot of precious information that are nowadays only memories of how things were while resorting to instruments of oral history.

Our article discusses the wake and its components, based on a case study in Coșdeni village. We are to highlight aspects of social importance of this event and the “games” of the wake. We are also to point out the relationship between the people present at the wake and the deceased, the mutations the ritual of wake

underwent between the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We attempt at harnessing the information gathered during the field research, focusing on the importance of oral history as a source in constituting the historical writing.

### Preliminaries of the research

Contemporary society has created an edifying image about the wake and death in general, an image established among clear parametres and that has to take into account the feelings of the deceased family. We aimed at creating an image about the stages of a wake in traditional society and at describing the relationship between the world of the village and death. We are particularly interested in revealing the attitude of society towards the deceased during the wake, towards the family of the deceased.

In order to conduct a research regardless of the topic of the study and research area, the

researcher needs materials and in our case, sources. That is why we resorted to the help of oral history.

### Sources and methodology

The bibliography we have consulted to conduct our research was diverse and crucial in gathering information. The field research took place in two stages. The first one included conducting the interviews. The oral history tools contributed to the originality of our research. The questionnaire we used had open questions and specific ones to our area of interest. The field research facilitates the meeting point between the individual personality of the informer and collectivity. Only several inhabitants of the community were interviewed, but when more people are being interviewed and similar answers are received, we may conclude that the answers reflect the reality (Dorondel 2004, 44).

In order to be able to debate the points of interest, we created a group of informers searching for certain qualities. We oriented towards the women, but we made no attempt at feminizing the research. Our option for subjects of feminine gender may be supported by two arguments: the first one consists in women's availability to narrate and their capacity of remembering important details, and the second is women's preoccupation for the moment of death, with all its spiritual and material facets.

The second part of the field research consisted in participating in the wakes within the studied community, which offered the occasion of observing and taking notes. The research took place in two distinct periods, in 2017 and in the winter of 2020.

The spatial and chronological delineation: the Coșdeni village, in the Beiuș area is the community where we conducted the field activity and the village of our research. The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the period when our interpretations are valid. We are unable to set a stable date, given the fact that people's visions and customs are unchanged for a short period of time and the changes in collective mentality occur in a longer period of time. The research took into account only the Orthodox community of the Coșdeni village.

### The wake in the traditional society of Coșdeni

The wake played two roles for the Orthodox community of Coșdeni: the one of watching over the deceased and a social function, the moment of cohesion of the society.

After the discussions with the interviewed people, we could find that there has been a difference between the watching over the deceased and the moment of the wake, which means that essentially people gathering in the house of the deceased.

How was the deceased watched? Why was the deceased watched and who were those who performed that? These are the questions that we search to answer in our study.

Simon Florea Marian mentioned in his work about the "watching over the deceased" that takes place at dusk till dawn (Simion 147). In the Coșdeni village people talk about "not leaving the deceased alone." Watching the deceased is done continuously, day and night; the deceased is not to be left alone even for one minute. Watching over the lifeless body was done from the moment of death, when the body was prepared for being put in *coprâșeu* ("coffin") until the beginning of the burial service. The deceased was watched over by a member of the family. If the husband died, the wife had to watch over him during the last days his body spent among the living. Members of the family were also involved in watching over the deceased: sisters, aunts, nieces, cousins, but also uncles, brothers. During the day especially women watched over the body. There are three main explanations why the deceased was watched over mainly by women. In the past, women prepared bread, cake and the food for a handout so that the courtyard of the deceased was full of women helping out. Secondly, women are more vigilant than the men and pay attention to details or suspicious movements in the house. The last reason is the fact that the entire ritual of burial was done under the guidance of a woman and some details are known only by women.

Why was the deceased watched continuously? The lifeless body was watched over for two reasons. Firstly, a candle had to burn near his/her head till the body was carried to the cemetery; the person who watched was responsible for changing the candle with a new



one whenever it was necessary. It was important to pay attention so that the candle would not be the cause of a fire (Simion 147). Secondly, based on my informers' sayings, the deceased had to be watched over during the day so that he/she would not become a ghost (informers: Maria Horadron, Coşdeni, 78 years, Rada Eva, Coşdeni, 86 years) when an animal got into the house or by others' doings. That period is a propitious time for some magical practices that belong to dark magic; watching over the deceased is done because of that – to stop anyone who would like to perform a ritual to ruin the family's peace or other members' of the community or outside that community (informers: Floare Horadron, Coşdeni, 45 years, Vlădic Saveta, 69 years).

### Evenings of the wake

The wake accomplished two functions: the community paid condolences to the family by being part of the wake. The term of condolences is a new one; it was not used in the villages. The support offered by the community meant the presence of the people at the wake; no word was required, only the presence of the members of community. If relatives were present at the wake, then they would hold the hand or kiss the close people from the family of the deceased. From the 20th century till now people of the Coşdeni village do not use the term condolence. We reached this conclusion based on the fact that our informers did not mention it to express feelings of regret for the deceased person.

The second function was a social one, as the community gathered together when someone passed away. Our informers told about different types of wakes, as people related differently to the death of someone young or old. However, there was the same attitude of people during the wake – to laugh at death and trying to defy death through their behaviour.

How was the wake earlier? That was one of the questions addressed to our informers.

*“The wake was different back then. People were laughing, they were having fun. There were these women who are now older or died, they are peaceful now, but back then they were playing around with the men, they*

*were playing and laughing. And I was playing as well, even after I got married. If they called you, then you went for it. They called the older ones to laugh as well. There was joy so that in houses that were not so sturdy, they were close to dismantling them. When Flore Goli<sup>1</sup> died, they were about to take the coffin out the window. That's how things were done. My husband Mitra was there too. It was different back then – people went to stay for the wake; nowadays they wouldn't come and wouldn't stay” – tells us Marie Horadron.*

Rada Eva confessed that during the wake the young men threw ashes on girls and women:

*“Men were coming with ashes during the wake, they would have ashes in pots with drainage and when they pushed, ashes would spread on women and they disliked it, because they would be dirty. Women were running in the house and then outside not to get dirty. And that was during the wake.”*

*“When Flore Papi<sup>2</sup> died, they played the flea and then played around with each other. Only the older ones played, as the younger were ashamed of what they will say in the village. Those were great customs, we loved it to bits. Only the older people would play that, not the younger ones. That was played when our late mother died<sup>3</sup>. They played cards, the younger ones, and a girl prayed for some to win, but when another one won, he leaned over her and the bed broke. They would also play cards for money. Men would do that. When uncle Iosăve<sup>4</sup> died, Niocu, Doco and Ghiorza played the cards. And then their wives came and scolded them that they were not young to play cards for money. And Ghiorza tried to calm his wife, saying her that she was the finest of them all and that why he chose her, she would not calm down, but he would play cards with the others. She stayed at the wake then. The men*

<sup>1</sup> Ciurea Florian died in 1988, the registry of the deceased of the Orthodox parish of Coşdeni (1972-2020).

<sup>2</sup> Puşcaş Florian died in 1988, the registry of the deceased of the Orthodox parish of Coşdeni.

<sup>3</sup> Avram Elisabeta died in 1987, the registry of the deceased of the Orthodox parish of Coşdeni.

<sup>4</sup> Hodardon Iosif died in 1997, the registry of the deceased of the Orthodox parish of Coşdeni.

*came earlier and when their wives came, found them playing cards for money” (Informer: Hodardon Floare, Coşdeni, 45 years).*

*“There were two poorer sisters who lived at the edge of the village. We were younger women, but we were friends. When Sânza died, we went to help preparing the dead. After we put the deceased in the coffin, in the evening, when people started coming for the wake, Petre Zamfirei took the body out and put it in the doorway, with a cigarette in her mouth to greet us all. Petre said: Here, Sânza, have a cigarette, cause you like it as much as I do, and pass the cigarette from one another” (Informer: Saveta Vlădic, Coşdeni, 69 years).*

*“They met at a wake, at Săveta<sup>5</sup>, Petri Mihaiului, Petre Simioani and Florea Şchefani; one of them was a welder and Florea was a carpenter, he was also in a newspaper in Crişana. And Florea greeted Petre as foreman. Anuţa Găghii, Florea’s neighbour, heard them and scolded them, but Flore said: hear her, as she curses us, a peasant in her galoshes” (Informer: Vlădic Saveta, Coşdeni, 69 years).*

Analyzing the above quotes, we may conclude that the two wake evenings were moments when the members of the village gathered and socialized. People attempted to escape the daily life by telling jokes, playing games; the wake was a special occasion to forget their daily worries and responsibilities, when the status was faded away. The married women who played the flea could kiss or be kissed by other men. Moreover, people’s attitude, their joy and mood must be linked to their attempt of defying death. Aware of the ever-present death, villagers tried to show that they were not afraid of death and that it had no power over the lives of the others.

People’s behaviour during the wake differed from case to case. They were reserved in case of a young man who died before benefiting of every stage of life. Some were not married, others did not have the chance to see their children grow and did not grow old. In

these cases, the situation of the deceased was deplored, be it the case of a man or a woman. The grief was bigger when one of the deceased left children and a husband or wife behind. There were jokes and games, but people were more reserved. People were guided by the saying that there’s no burial without laughter or wedding without tears. Someone in his/her fifties was considered in the category of older people if he/she got married, had children and attended children’s wedding; in that case the life cycle was considered complete. People’s role after children’s marriage was that of support.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a “taming of the wake” according to the changed behaviour of the people. We may even state that we assist at a drastic change of the wake, as there are no games linked to it. The flea was played several times by the children and now it disappeared along with other games of the wake; they are only remembered by the elders. The only game that is still practiced though rarely is the card game. Concerning the people’s behaviour, they are more reserved, the jokes and laughter faded away and members of the community pay more attention to relatives of the deceased regardless of the age of the deceased. The only unchanged aspect is the people’s inclination to gossip.

### **Time of the wake and discussions**

The wake during the day is dedicated to the relatives of the deceased from other villages that are unable to come in the evening and express their condolences during the day. The older members of the community prefer coming during the day as well.

The most propitious period for the wake is in the evening depending on the season. In the summer the wake starts after 9 p.m. when people finished their daily tasks, while in the winter the wake starts after 7-8 p.m. most of the people attend the wake till 1-2 a.m.

When people enter the courtyard of the deceased they greet with “May God forgive your sins and the dead’s sins”; immediately after that each participant occupies a place in the house or in the courtyard. The place each person occupies is well established in the collective mentality of the community. The time of the wake delineated the space between the two sexes. The space

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<sup>5</sup> Horadron Saveta died in 1982, the registry of the deceased of the Orthodox parish of Coşdeni.

between the house and the courtyard is split by men and women, as women stay mostly in the house, in the front room where the coffin is placed. The interior space is occupied according to the relationship between the deceased and the others. When a husband died, the wife was at his head. Men and children stayed in the courtyard. During the warm period (end of spring, summer and beginning of autumn) the porch was destined mainly to women. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the architecture of the houses changed, the corridor or the hallway was a neutral space, where games of the wake took place and the two sexes met.

During the wake there were certain subjects to be discussed. Women are interested by the cause of death and the last moments of the deceased; gossips are also part of the wake, while in the past matrimonial strategies were also discussed. There are also moments when people remembered the deceased. During the wake, remote relatives have the occasion to see each other again. Feelings towards the deceased are expressed, as well as discussing the family life after that moment (Grenner 2005, 200-202).

Topics of discussions during the wake change from a period to another. Rada Eva told us that in her childhood men talked about the Second World War. War veterans told their stories and war experiences to the young people and children. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the wake was a good moment for a history lesson. Some debates of the daily life were debated, as well as recent events within the community.

During the wake, there is a so-called service of the pillar, which is generally made in the second night of the wake. Members of the family and neighbours take part in it or those who came for prayer.

The last period of the wake, around 1 a.m. and till 6 a.m. is a peaceful period when most of the people go home and only some prefer to come and seat quietly with the close family. In the past, in this period family of the deceased offered cake and some *pălincă*. Contemporary society maintained this custom, but transformed it entirely. People are served from 11 p.m. and some drinks are served throughout the night. That change attracted the discontent of our informers; nevertheless, each family adapted to this so-called “new fashion.”

Each stage of the wake is propitious for wailing, but this practice almost disappeared nowadays whereas in the past there was no wake without women’s wailings. In Popa Ancea’s words:

*“back in the days women wept after the dead, in the evening at the wake or whenever they came. And I was wailing till the priest came for the service. Oh Lord, how much I was wailing, I cannot do it anymore, I grew older and weaker. Nowadays the youngmen wail no more, but I liked it. That is how we did it back then.”*

### The wake games

One of the questions answered by our interviewers is “Do you know some wake games that people used to play during the wake?” Rada Eva shared that “there were rather fien games, it was easier to spend the time during the wake.”

The wake games are kept in the memory of older people of the community or of younger ones who had the occasion to participate. However, these games are no longer part of the wake.

Here are the descriptions of some games played during the wake. There were more games like these in the past, but they were forgotten by the community.

The flea was a game that has been played until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was played by children and young men and women, as well as married people. Married women that had the permission of their husband played as well: “married women played as well, those who were not afraid of the husband and whose husband wasn’t jeallous” (Informer: Rada Eva, Coşdeni, 86 years). There were several groups – children, the young ones and those who were married. They made a mitt out of a cloth and one took it, while another was the flea and sat on a chair; behind the flea there were the other participants. The flea is hit with the mitt and the verses are told:

*“- Turn around, flea!*

*Flea responds:*

- *My belly hurts.*
- *Until when?*
- *Till comes ... ”*

And then the name of a participant is pronounced and that person was kissed and became the new flea. If the flea was a girl, she chose a boy and vice versa. The game continued in laughter, as in some cases the named person did not agree and was forced to come; resistance was the charm of the game to create a moment of tension and laughter in the end. It seems a simple game, but it pointed out the different character of the participants, be it timidity or ease, audacity or shyness. It was a great occasion for parents with young men ready to marry to analyse the girls. The game was also a pretext to kiss a former passion or to steal a kiss from a past lover (Informer: Crişan Eva, Coşdeni, 82 years; Horadron Maria, Coşdeni, 78 years, Rada Eva, Coşdeni, 86 years).

The fly was another game played by the young ones. One of them, the fly, kept his palms to cover the left or the right part of his face; he was hit by someone else and had to guess who hit him. If he guessed, that person became the fly; if not, he remained the fly till guessing the subsequent person who hit him (Informers: Horalipa Varvara, Coşdeni, 78 years; Vlădic Saveta, Coşdeni, 69 years; Horadron Floare, Coşdeni, 45 years)

The horse and the merchant: two young people had a thicker stick on their shoulders and a third person was on top as if he sat on a horse with a shorter stick and a water pot in front of him. The three entered the house of the deceased as if walking to a fair to sell the horse. A fourth person, interested in the horse would ask the price and after not closing the deal, another one would come and the merchant would become angry because of the unfair price and hit the horse by deliberately breaking the water pot, while the two young men run away and leave the third one falling. The game is a simulation of an event typical for the village (Informer: Rada Eva, Coşdeni, 86 years).

The wife and the lover is rather a play inspired by the life in the village than a game. A wife pretends that she is sick and sends her husband to search for a remedy, while inviting her lover home, playing a traditional violin and preparing a fried chicken. Her husband meets someone on his way searching for the remedy and tells his troubles. The stranger advises the husband to go back and hide in a bag to witness

the remedy for his wife's health. In the next scene the stranger finds the wife and the lover dancing together and the wife singing about her fooling the husband. In that moment, the husband gets out of the bag, surprising both the wife and the lover together (Informer: Crişan Eva, Coşdeni, 82 years; Rada Eva, Coşdeni, 86 years).

Another similar game is about the family life in the village and has the same actors: the wife, the husband and the lover. The husband is away at the mill, while the wife is working and singing for her lover who comes in the evening, with hay underneath his coat. While the two discuss and kiss each other, the husband come home and starts beating up the lover. The play had the role of stirring laughter and fear at the same time: "when we were kids, we were scared that they actually let the husband bit the lover" (Informer: Rada Eva, Coşdeni, 86 years).

The mill was played by four men and it was replaced at the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the card game. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the mill disappeared or it was rarely played by men during the winter at home.

The card game "Cross" was played in two ways: for money, but the sums of money were symbolic or only for the pleasure of playing. Nowadays this game is sometimes played during the wake by men; this is the only game played during the wake in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Conclusions

What was the wake – a moment of recollection and expression, a period of expressing condolences to the family or a moment of social cohesion?

For the community of the Coşdeni village, the wake fulfilled both functions so that it represented a moment for transmitting feelings of regret and support for the family's loss, but also a moment of socialization when people gathered to support the family. From the support of the family by being present at the wake, there is a shift to a moment of social cohesion when barriers imposed by the collective mentality, by social status are faded away once people step out of the daily routine.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the wake, as other

moments that mark the life of the village (birth, wedding etc.) undergoes some radical changes. These changes may be noticed especially in people's behaviour during the wake; people attend the wake as they feel obliged when their neighbours or relatives die or when they have social or professional obligations. Fewer people attend wakes voluntarily. People are more reserved during the wake and try not to hurt the feelings of the deceased's family.

The most important change in the customs related to burial practices is the disappearance of the wake games. Unfortunately, we were unable to establish the causes of this phenomenon. Society was radically transformed during the last decades and the new ideas and customs that came from the urban area changed the collective mentality of the villagers.<sup>6</sup>

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### Informers:

1. Ciure Floare, Coșdeni, 75 years.
2. Crișan Eva, Coșdeni, 82 years.
3. Horadron Floare, Coșdeni, 45 years.
4. Horadron Maria, Coșdeni, 78 years.
5. Horalipa Varvara, Coșdeni, 76 years.
6. Horalipa Zorița, Coșdeni, 81 years.
7. Popa Ancea, Coșdeni, 85 years.
8. Rada Eva, Coșdeni, 86 years.
9. Vlădic Saveta, Coșdeni, 69 years.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

**Fig. 1.** Our informers: Horalipa Varvara (left), Ciurea Floare, Horalipa Zorița (right).

**Fig. 2.** Our informer, Rada Eva.

**Fig. 3.** A contemporary wake in the Coșdeni village, Bihor county.

**Fig. 4.** Our informer, Horadron Maria.



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## FORMS OF AGEISM AND FEAR. FROM FAIRYTALES TO FIELDWORK

Nicoleta MUȘAT

Lecturer, PhD.

West University of Timișoara

Faculty of Letters, History and Theology

Department of Romanian Studies

E-mail: nicoleta.musat@e-uvt.ro

**Abstract:** *The paper aims at discussing cultural forms of ageism and fear in the context of the 2020 pandemic. The study initiates a discussion analysing a rather common folklore motif (the killing of the old), accompanied by a sacrificial practice (lapot), identified by folklorists and ethnographers. It also identifies new forms of transforming the elderly into a vulnerable category following field observations and discourse analysis of the recent period, using interdisciplinarity as a way of unravelling new attitudes towards age, fear, and death.*

**Keywords:** *ageism, fear, vulnerability, cultural attitudes*

**Rezumat:** *Lucrarea își propune discutarea formelor culturale de vârstă și frică în contextul pandemiei din 2020. Studiul inițiază o discuție care analizează un motiv folcloric destul de comun (uciderea bătrânului), însoțit de o practică de sacrificiu (lapot), identificată de folcloriști și etnografi. De asemenea, identifică noi forme de transformare a persoanelor în vârstă într-o categorie vulnerabilă în urma observațiilor de teren și a analizei discursului din perioada recentă, folosind interdisciplinaritatea ca modalitate de a dezlega noi atitudini față de vârstă, frică și moarte.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *discriminare, frică, vulnerabilitate, atitudini culturale.*

### 1. From fairytales... Killing the elders

In a classic book discussing fear and western attitudes towards it over more than four hundred years, Jean Delumeau (Delumeau, 1986) identifies several agents that instill fear. The plague occupies an honorable place, alongside God, Satan, the Inquisition, and women (with older women being the most fearsome), to name just a few. In troubled or interesting times as the ones we are crossing, returning to the classics might be an opportunity to understand/construct/reconstruct social and cultural realities, and to identify or analyze in new perspectives what troubles societies, how they react amid health menaces, death, and therefore in life. For a few months, the world stopped its pace, people or groups of people were in lockdown, social/physical distancing became the new socializing approach, and several groups were renamed – medics became the *first line*, the elderly became the vulnerable, and workers were considered essential (everything related to survival: food, water, facilities), or non-essential (liberal

professions, artistic and creative areas, intellectuals). The body's survival over anything else. But, more than that, it was about the survival of the vulnerable (as older people were dubbed). This struck me as a noble effort in a society that seems rather disinterested by this group. A folktale motif kept coming to my mind, as an irony; the motif was identified by folklore collectors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is classified in the ATU index under the number 981 (see Ashliman, in Haase, 2008, 20-21) – or number 910 (see Schullerus, 2006, 62). It is a small corpus of tales of *gerontocide/senicide* taking place in the Southern/Eastern part of Europe, the motif being identified in Serbia, Macedonia, and Romania. The Romanian and Serbian versions are supported, to my knowledge, by ethnographic descriptions (see Tihomir Đorđević, in Constante, Golopenția, 2008, 13-107), which I will discuss in the second part of the paper.

*“Numerous legends from around the world tell of a time in the distant past when old people were put to death as a*

matter of custom and law. Various explanations are advanced as to why this practice was stopped, typically because of one old person's demonstration of unusual wisdom. 'Warum heutzutage die alten Leute ihren eigenen Tod sterben' ('Why Today Old People Die Their Own Death,' ATU 981, *Wisdom of Hidden Old Man Saves Kingdom*), as recorded by Bohdan Mykytiuk in *Ukrainische Marchen* (*Ukrainian Folktales*, 1979), is exemplary. Here a kind-hearted son hides his old father instead of putting him to death as dictated by custom. A famine comes, and no one has seed for the next crop, until the elderly father suggests dismantling their thatched roof and rethreshing the straw, thus gaining sufficient seed for a new planting. Impressed with the old man's wisdom, people resolve henceforth to allow everyone to die their own death." (Ashliman, in Haase ed., 2008, 21)

Chronologically, when referring to texts collected from nowadays Romanian territory, among the first texts which contained this folktale motif (*killing of old men*) was one published in 1845 by Arthur and Albert Schott in *Walachische Märchen* (*Basme valahe / Wallachian Fairytale*) (see Schott, Schott, 2003 – for the Romanian translation), with the title *A Story from the Time of the Romans*, identified by Moses Gaster some decades later and included in his *Literatura popular română* (Gaster, 1886, 29), and associated by the researcher with a ritual – *The Killing of the Khazar King* (Gaster, 1919). Also, Gaster published, in 1921, in *Folk-Lore: A Quarterly Review of Myth, Tradition, Institution, and Custom*, a text which had appeared in the Romanian folklore journal *Ion Creangă* two years earlier.

The Serbian variants are identified by Tihomir Đorđević, who also recognizes the motif while doing fieldwork, and who is not only specialized in Serbian folklore but is also familiar with Romanian communities in the Timoc valley (as a detail, one of the Romanian variants is collected from the Romanian Banat, which is an intercultural and interethnic region, with a documented history of connections with its Serbian counterpart, as well as with the communities in the Timoc valley – see again Constante, Golopenția, 2008). Therefore, the folktales might embody a motif circulating in a transnational space, of

a moving population, and is not necessarily connected to ethnicity.

The Serbian variants narrate the fact that in old times there was the tradition of killing the old (aged fifty), and only one son did not subject his father to this ordeal, hiding him in a vat. At a certain moment, some sort of competition started between villagers, and the only person who had a chance of winning was the forgiving son, who took advice from his old and astute father and surpassed his neighbors with his wit. As a reward, his father was spared, and, from that moment, all the elders were left alive because they were considered wise. Another folktale situates the scenery near the river Mlava (the village of Krepoljin), describing a tradition inherited from the Romans, which states that older people should be killed when no longer of service to society (again, at fifty years of age). A grandson manages to hide his grandfather in a cave; after this moment, time passes, and the villagers go to war, with the grandson being advised by the grandfather to take with him a mare and a colt, and, on their way to the battlefield, to kill the colt. The army fought and were defeated, then returned to the village, but only the grandson knew the road, being led by the grieving mare, looking for its dead colt. In the end, the conclusion was that old peoples' knowledge saved the army, and yet again, the elders should be spared.

Variants collected from nowadays Romanian territory state again that older men are useless, therefore, they should be killed, with one son being unable to kill his father (he hides him in the cellar). The young man is sent on a mission to kill a monster in a cave, and, on his father's advice, he takes with him a mare and its foal, which he kills at the entrance of the monster's cave. The troops manage to kill the beast and find the way back to their village with the help of the grieving mare, the community concluding that old people should not be killed due to their wisdom. (Schott, Schott, 2003, 165) Another variant presents the decision of a society to kill old men because they have lived their lives (*ți-ai trăit traiul și ți-ai mâncat mălaiul* – a Romanian saying which states that there comes an age – not specified, but sensed by the community – when a person has consumed not only his ratio of life but also his/her food supplies); as a result, the society prospered not

having to worry about the elders. Yet again, one son who loved his father deeply could not kill him, so he hid him in a cellar. After a flourishing period, there came a period of famine and poverty, and the only one who managed to produce grain was the son who did not kill his father. On his father's advice, he ploughed the land in front of the house, and the cereals which had been buried there produced a new crop. In the end, the king of the country allowed older men to live, as a reward for helping the community escape famine. (Gaster, 1921, 213-215) A Macedonian version of the story is the only one to briefly mention how the older men are killed – either by starving or by being torn to pieces. Again, the son hides the father in a cellar. The wise old man manages to solve a mystery related to a she-bear which menaces the village by defying the emperor to flay the so-called bear (the old man is the only one who can understand riddles, observe reality and use comparisons and metaphors), which is actually a huge rock. The emperor spares the old man's life.

These variants have common themes and motifs, as well as an archetypal structure. Killing the old predates the incipit, and only one young person (usually a son/grandson) saves the life of the father and hides him in a cell/cave/cellar/vat, the village/country is at a crossroads (a war/a monster/famine is menacing the balance), the father becomes the savior of the community with his wisdom. His life is forgiven/spared, and his status is regained. All societies dealing with old persons are rural (a village is mentioned), thus we can assume illiterate, transmitting information via orality. The community is presented at a moment where their dynamics change, and certain people are found to be undesirable. Also, the stories feature belligerent societies (either facing an army or fighting a monster), which are more dynamic than their presumed predecessors (the forefathers, who are incapable of fighting). Only one variant refers to drought and famine as a sort of consequence of the killing of the old. I would like to refer now to the unicity of the father who is kept alive and hidden in a cave. The folktale does not mention any details regarding the way the elders are being killed (with the Macedonian exception – which states, as I have mentioned, they are

either starved to death or left to be devoured by beasts). The violence implied could have a sacred/preventive dimension and might refer to a sacrificial aspect of the killing (see Girard, 1979, 25), reminiscent of some tribal acts/interventions: “the Chukchi often avert a feud by killing a member of the family.”

By killing a member of their family, writes Girard, the members of the tribe ensure themselves the problem becomes obsolete, the killing securing peace, in this case. The victim appears to be innocent (in the case of the folktale, their only blame is the natural process of *ageing* which transforms the functioning of the body and intellect). What the folktale brings in the discussion are two types of killing/sacrifice: the sacrifice of the old and innocent (the fathers) for ensuring a sort of social peace within the community versus killing the young and innocent (colt/foal) – in order to find the road back home. For human society, the predecessors have to be killed; for the animal regnum, the successors occupy that status: the victim.

The Brothers Schott not only collected folktales in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they also accompanied their published version with comments. *The time of the Romans* (as stated in the text) is interpreted as a Latin filiation assumed by their informants, who are proud of their heritage; the comment insists on the labyrinth motif which appears towards the end of the tale (a sort of trial for the hero), associating it with the minotaur myth and Ariadne's story, while naming the hero a Wallachian Theseus. The associations with Siegfried and Grani or Sigurd go within the paradigm of comparative mythology, and their conclusion stands as a sort of *euhemerism/evhemerism* (see Eliade, 1995, 34):

“...so the folktale wanders a hundred times when it abandons the field of myth and engages onto the history one.”  
(Schott, Schott, 2003, 346)

Overlapping elements of different fields of study, the folktale converts into a *hybrid text*, which requires an interdisciplinary methodology to navigate through. Treating it as an artefact is to be taken with caution; nevertheless, it is intriguing and at the brink of over-interpretation. I venture to state that in

the case of the folktales we could be dealing with texts which communicate about dynamic/modern societies/warfare societies (represented by the sons) which depart from their agricultural state (represented by the fathers), only to return to a more pastoral way of living. The older people are always men (and several tales state they are former soldiers, retired at the moment of narration), women are never represented (either they do not get old, or we are dealing with a patriarchal society). For the Romanian variants, I would add the fact that the word elder/old (which translates to *bătrân*) does have a Latin root: < lat. *veteranus* ">vetus, -eris Old' [adj. r] (P1.+; Enn. nom.sg. veter) Derivatives: *vetulus* 'elderly, ageing' (P1.+), *veteranus* 'mature, experienced' (Varro+), *vetustus* 'ancient' (P1.+), *vetustas* '**being old, age, antiquity**' (P1.+), *veternus* 'torpor, lassitude' (P1.+), *veternosus* 'lethargic' (Cato+), *veterator* 'an experienced practitioner' (Ter.+); [...] Adams 1992 observes that **veterīnus** usually refers to equines, and suggests that these came to be seen as 'the old stock' because by nature they lived longest of all cattle, and because the Romans did not, as a rule, eat horse meat Hence, especially equines could be referred to as 'old'" (de Vaan, 2008, 672-673)

There can be a connection between older men (in their fifties) who are no longer of use for a belligerent society and their probably symbolic social death, and the presence of the young horse/calf/foal. The retirement of the old can be read as a *rite of passage* (the neophyte is hidden in a vat/cellar/cave, a time of isolation, of attempting to survive, of also being disconnected from the outside), a sort of *andreon* Eliade states Zalmoxis created for himself to retreat and discuss immortality; it was a place where the god disappeared for three years, only to return to the world of the living (Eliade, 1995, 34). The elders in the folktales are isolated in a cavern to return only after their son fights/overcomes several challenges. Is the folktale representative for the mentalities of rural societies of Eastern Europe regarding elders, death, sacrifice? What makes it not only impressive but also deeply inhumane?

## 2. To fieldwork. "The secret of lapot"

*"Mr Iancu Petrović, the major of Valaconjie commune, says that when a person is in great pain before death and cannot die, it means he is either a sinner or, after his death, he will become a strigoi. Therefore, an old woman, the wife of a certain Ciolacović, from Valaconjie, being very ill and struggling to die, was burnt under the back of her head with a red iron, with the belief that they will prevent her becoming a strigoi after her death. However, the old woman got better. For the same reasons, all sick people, when struggling to die, are burnt at the back of their head. But these cases are rare in Valaconjie, or, perhaps facing fear from authorities, they are done in secret."* (Dorđević, 2008, 57)

*"Mr Mihailović states that he would have heard from Mr Milicović, former school inspector, that in Omoljje, Romanians, in the old days, were burning men and women on the back of their head with a red iron when they were too old and would not die. They put them in a casket, gave them food, where they were eating, drinking and shouting: May God forgive his/her soul! In these circumstances, if they still did not die, they would simply strangle them. They call this tradition pripoliš. This means, in any case, the killing of the old that Mr Sima Traianović is describing in his brochure: Lapotiproclatia u Srba (reprinted in Istria in 1893). Also, see: About the killing of the old, a popular tradition kept in Krepoline, in Karagić, 1900, p. 128 – 132)." (idem, ibidem)*

*"In some parts of Banat, when somebody is dying, no matter the category or the age, they all of a sudden dress him in clean clothes, put shoes on, comb his hair, then they light three wax candles and put them in his hands, while an old woman is also keeping her hands on the candles. And after his last breath, they put out the candles, and light a tallow candle or a lamp."* (Marian, 1892, 27)

*"How do they do it? / With incense. you take the incense in your palms. [...] and then there comes a woman who has a sick husband, or a sick father, or child, and brings a clean towel and incense. And the incense I keep it like this, between my*

*fingers. And the towel on my hands. And you say Our Father and say: Lord, help me and this sick man (and say his name) / If it is for him to live / May the incense be yours/ And if he dies / May it [the incense] be soft as a cloth / So that we know he is dying. And you say Our Father..."* (Hedeşan, 2015, 55)

The four fragments I chose to quote are excerpts from ethnographical studies of representative folklorists both in Romania and Serbia, who did fieldwork in the last century. The first two are among the forefathers of folklore studies in their respective countries and have produced texts to which generations of folklorists and ethnologists turn to when they need descriptive, almost exhaustive, non-interpretive, and non-contextual texts. Nevertheless, some information is not detailed. Both Tihomir Đorđević and Simion Florea Marian are preoccupied with the information itself and with describing it, rather than with generating context and content, and advance theories regarding what they collected. I confess I am not familiar with the Serbian folklorist (not speaking Serbian is a disadvantage, but I did have access to his works translated into Romanian) and his work methodology. Still, I draw the conclusion that he was a man of fieldwork (he travelled in some parts of Serbia inhabited by Romanians who are named by the Serbian authorities *Vlachs*) (see Đorđević, 2008). Florea Marian did his research by applying questionnaires that he sent in different parts of nowadays Romania, practicing what we would call *coach folklore*. They both address the theme of death (Marian wrote an extensive and exceptional study, *Înmormântarea la români*), and I selected a few quotes which identify the moment just before dying.

The last quote presented at the beginning of this second part is an excerpt from an interview taken in the '70s by Vasile Creţu, researcher and lecturer on folklore at the West University, who did extensive interviews on passage rites with an exceptional narrator, Maria Ionescu (a sorcerer), from Topolovăţu Mare, a village close to Timişoara. Again, he collected the information but omitted to offer an extensive interpretation. For all the excerpts, we are faced with a scene that precedes the moment of passing. The actors are the dying person (either very old or

very sick), and the family/an old woman who accompany/accompanies the passage or enforce(s) it on the dying person. The meta-scene, on the other hand, includes the informants (narrators of the scene) and the ethnographer/folklorist/researcher. We have the text and the context (the act of dying/the narration/the interpretation). Death in this context is not a biological fact (natural, that is), but by being *enforced* by the participants on the old/sick person, it becomes a cultural one (evading the accusation of murder, and thus any ethic dimension). It is culturally accepted because it is traditional. Tihomir Đorđević describes a brutal and invasive practice (I do not discuss the authenticity of the practice) which he was told about by several members of the village elite (the mayor, the school inspector) and therefore trusted persons (the principle FOMF, which functions in urban legends, seems to work here too). He also quotes a researcher, Sima Traianović / Trojanović (?), who published a study about a practice known as *lapot*, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The sources all referred to a part of north-eastern Serbia (Krepoline is mentioned, and it also appeared in one version of the folktale), with the author mentioned above being considered one of the first who recounted the practice:

*"With the article Lapotiprokletije u Srba, Dr. SimaTrojanović was the first to our knowledge to draw attention to folktales about killing old people and provided a scientific contribution from our country on this issue! He gave several examples from Eastern Serbia, where he had the opportunity to record such folk traditions himself, and, referring to similar phenomena in some other cultures, he included this phenomenon in the former legal folk customs."* (Radovanović, s.a.)

The subject seems to be approached by researchers, even though the bibliography is still relatively scarce. Both Romanian and Serbian ethnographers/folklorists treated the subject in a rather descriptive, non-interpretive manner. Data were collected and transformed into text, but they missed the opportunity to provide also the context (Pavicević, 2011). Beyond the description and narrative about death and its commencement, the act itself is a community as well as a family affair. The

authority of the community (represented here by local elites who are named by the ethnographers: Mr Petrović, Mr Mihailović, or Mr Milicović) ensures that not only the equilibrium is kept and the community benefits of everlasting youth (by killing the old) but also that each family transforms death into a private matter, with authorities knowing about the practice but eluding it, or avoiding taking any measures. Death is (even when provoked) intimate but can also be read as a form of ageism if authorities do not interfere with tradition to save a life (we are talking about an old person's life). In a 2018 study following the International Congress of gerontology, the authors write:

*"There are preconceived prejudices regarding ageing (it is usually seen in a negative light) present in our region, especially among younger population. Cruelty towards the members of the third age was maybe the best depicted in our region in a nowadays archaic occurrence, in the form of lapot (mythical practice of senicide in Serbia). [...] In Serbia, elderly are discriminated on numerous levels: materially, status-wise, emotionally, etc. They are often the victims of domestic violence, of which is often nothing said, due to shame and fear. And one of the most dominant problems of the contemporary world among the members of the third age is definitely – loneliness [...]" (Dinić, 2018, 224)*

Lapot in its mythical/folktales dimension is present/talked about in regions in Serbia inhabited by Romanians, as documented by Tihomir Đorđević one hundred years ago. It seems important to mention that, for the Serbian researcher, the Romanian community is the one practicing such violent traditions (the text was published under the title *Printre românii noștri*, and translated into French in 1916); therefore, alterity fits the proper stereotype of strange people performing stranger things. Nevertheless, I find it less important to establish the ethnicity of the practice/the narration about the practice and rather try to discuss the ageist dimension of it, which apparently resides both in the north and the south of the Danube.

### 3. Ageism nowadays. New fears

*A look at the lives of the elderly in the EU today*, published by the European Commission in 2015 (and updated in 2017), offers interesting data regarding several aspects of elderly lives in the EU and member states (see Eurostat report). Some numbers regarding Romania might confirm stereotypical images we have created regarding seniors: Romanian seniors represent 17.4 % of the population, life expectancy after the age of 65 (admittedly, the line which delimitates *old age*) is lower in Romania than the EU percentage – with women living up to 18 years, and men up to 14 years – in Romania, while the EU numbers go up to 21% for women, respectively 17% for men. The ratio of people living alone is high in the EU – 32,1%, but higher in Romania – 35,6; the percentage of persons who travel at an old age is extremely high in the EU – 48,8%, while in Romania, the percentage is only 13,5%. Internet usage rate is high in the EU: 45%, but extremely low in Romania – 13% (during this year's pandemic this should be an essential aspect, as lives and activities moved online). Based on statistics, the elderly living in Romania are represented by a woman, living alone, not traveling or moving from her household, with no access to the Internet or not using it, and with a lower life expectancy than the European ratio. Solitude, isolation, abandonment. Another EU infographic I consulted (I was interested in Romanians aged 75+), *You and the EU*, is a graphic which is personalised and can offer an accurate portrait if used by a person (but older women do not access the Internet, so the data might be processed only by another family member, if the case). The last months have seen an increase in discussions over older people and the impact that the pandemic has on their health (WHO reports that the percentage of people affected by the virus is extremely high):

*"Over 95% of these deaths occurred in those older than 60 years. More than 50% of all fatalities involved people aged 80 years or older. Reports show that 8 out of 10 deaths are occurring in individuals with at least one comorbidity, in particular those with cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes, but*

*also with a range of other chronic underlying conditions.” (Kluge, 2020)*

This exceptional situation brought to surface different issues that were not approached in public discourses. An entire group of people aged 65 and more were under special treatment (by the Romanian authorities and the press, as well as social media).

Digi24 website announced back in April that one project was put off by the government (*The elders should be taken from their families and isolated for three months*). Mediafax also announced in April that more than 3 million people are to be separated from their families and put in institutional isolation (the plan allegedly had the title *The Holiday*). Republica.ro, libertatea.ro, stirileprotv.ro, and the list can go on, all announced the “plan,” which was under the scrutiny of the media, and was also rejected by the Ministry of Health and the Group for Strategic Communication (GCS), part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. *Isolation and quarantine* were among the terms juggled when speaking about that possible intervention, resulting in more acid remarks: “Old people are sent to camps” / or A.S.C. sends old people to **CAMPS**,” with a direct connection to Nazi practices. A symbolic *gerontocide* appeared to have taken place in just a few hours back in April. State and local authorities seemed to become involved in family affairs by invoking a problem regarding public health.

Some things are to be noticed here. Romania has a population of almost four million seniors (see INS/National Institute of Statistics), people live in precarious conditions, having low life quality (see the Eurostat report and the infographics I have mentioned), social policies and cultural representations of older people are yet to be drawn and investigated (in the last months several reports about the welfare of children or adolescents appeared, but to my knowledge none about seniors). The pandemic created opportunities for ageism to reappear:

*“First, with the pandemic there has been a parallel outbreak of ageism. What we are seeing in public discourse is an increasing portrayal of those over the age of 70 as being all alike with regard to being helpless, frail, and unable to contribute to society. These views are being spread by social media, the press, and public announcements by government officials throughout the world.” (Ayalon et al., 2020)*

The society apparently split into young (and non-affected by the pandemic), and old (thus affected by the pandemic). A report of the UN, dating May 2020, states that older people are affected not only by the pandemic itself (in Europe a staggering 95% of victims are in the age group of 65 and +) but by societal attitudes towards old age:

*“Older persons may also face age discrimination in decisions on medical care, triage, and life-saving therapies. Global inequalities mean that, already pre-COVID-19, as many as half of older persons in some developing countries did not have access to essential health services. The pandemic may also lead to a scaling back of critical services unrelated to COVID 19, further increasing risks to the lives of older persons.” (\*\*UN, 2020)*

Also, older people may face abuse, states the report, while in lockdown or quarantine (three years ago, 1 in 6 persons was confronted with abuse); so, apparently, the most affected are the least defended.

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Killing older men, lapot, isolation – may or may not have a default connection, but they all are, in my opinion, various forms (either narrative or in practice) in which society deals with old age and the fear it provokes.

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# VISION, DEATH AND ANATOMY IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE. CASE STUDIES: BODYWORLDS, HYMN AND COLOR OUT OF SPACE

Silvia FĂGĂRĂȘAN

PhD Candidate

“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

E-mail: silvia.fagarasan@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on the genre of anatomical art in contemporary visual culture as exemplified by three case studies: Gunther von Hagens's BodyWorlds, Damien Hirst's Hymn and Richard Stanley's Color Out of Space. The chosen examples manifest the cross-disciplinary configuration of the aforementioned genre, as they represent an exhibition, a work of sculpture and a piece of film. The paper is organized around three sections: the first one sheds light on anatomical visualisations animated by an educational agenda, as well as on the collateral effects emerging in the way they denounce notions such as objectivity and scientific truth; the second one identifies elements of postmodernism and criticism of contemporary society as strategic morphologies in the anatomical art; the third and last one focuses on the way the three examples tackle the themes of death and human collapse either by obliterating or by displaying the violence inherent to anatomical visualisation and their respective contexts of production.*

**Keywords:** art, anatomy, body, death, exhibition, horror, knowledge, science

**Rezumat:** *Această lucrare se concentrează pe categoria artei anatomice din cultura vizuală contemporană, așa cum este ea prezentă în trei studii de caz: BodyWorlds de Gunther von Hagens, Hymn de Damien Hirst și Color Out of Space de Richard Stanley. Cele trei exemple alese atestă configurarea interdisciplinară a genului, primul constând într-o expoziție, al doilea reprezentând o sculptură, iar al treilea fiind un film. Lucrarea este împărțită în trei secțiuni: prima secțiune este dedicată vizualizării anatomice cu miză educativă, dar și efectelor colaterale acesteia în demontarea noțiunilor de obiectivitate și adevăr științific; cea de-a doua secțiune identifică în morfologia strategică din arta anatomică recursul la postmodernism și critica societății contemporane; cea de-a treia și ultima secțiune expune felul în care toate cele trei exemple alese tratează tema morții și a colapsului uman în moduri care ascund sau exhibă violența inerentă imaginilor anatomice și a contextelor de producție.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** artă, anatomie, corp, moarte, expoziție, horror, cunoaștere, știință.

This paper investigates key aspects of contemporary anatomical art in three pieces of visual culture from the late 20th century and early 21st century: Gunther von Hagens's *Bodyworlds* (ongoing since 1995), Damien Hirst's *Hymn* (2000) and Richard Stanley's *Color Out of Space* (2019). Each of them represents a different genre in terms of visual production: an exhibition (*BodyWorlds*), a sculpture (*Hymn*) and a film (*Color out of Space*). Despite their differences in terms of medium requirements and historical contexts, these visual works are nevertheless conceptually interested in a peculiar set of themes invested in anatomical art, while they are also marked by a potent interdependence between several fields: they tackle subjects ranging from the duality between art and science, the degree of objectivity attached to anatomy in art and the appropriation of pseudo-scientific vocabularies to the ways in which anatomy in visual works of art allows for the development of critical views concerning contemporary society and its adjacent

postmodern recourse to humour and morbidity in delivering its didactic or shock-inducing messages. The text is organised around three sections, each discussing *BodyWorlds*, *Hymn* and *Color Out of Space* separately, while simultaneously paying close attention to the similarities and differences that each of them brings to the issues highlighted above.

## Section I

The first section looks at how *BodyWorlds*, *Hymn* and *Color Out of Space* use anatomy as a figure meant to explore several dichotomies: between art and science, knowledge and aesthetics, objectivity and subjectivity. It examines how anatomical art projects the image of a powerful means of instruction, but also at how endlessly pluralist this pursuit's implications are: instead of bringing clarity between opposing terms, anatomical art references science in ways familiar to pseudo-scientific tropes; it acts as evidence that the historical conflict between art

and science is not readily available for codification in visual terms; it brings greater awareness that the anatomical body is scrutinised with an intensity that stems from concerns different from the ones strictly related to the medium they are produced in. Last but not least, these case-studies unveil a critical propensity for denouncing the illusions of the objectivity project in the ways they translate anatomical knowledge into tightly readable works of art: they reflect how bodies anatomised, whether in plastination, art or cinema are never purely scientific, nor uniquely provocative.

### *BodyWorlds*

The promise of showing the most uncompromisingly scientific human dead bodies has been from the very beginning the pinnacle of the PR machinery behind *BodyWorlds* (Goeller, 2007, van Dijck, 2005). Gallantly eschewing the label of shock-value and disdain for the spirituality of humankind as contained within the limits of the body, *BodyWorlds* takes pride in the stated ambition of showing the anatomy of man in the most scientifically redeeming light possible: without artistic embellishments, but also devoid of the feelings of fear instilled by the display of dead bodies in medical settings. The official website states that the exhibition “explains in an easy to understand way how the different systems of our body work in sync, so that we remain healthy and live to our potential.” (von Hagens, 2020) The bodies don’t smell and don’t frighten. There is virtually nothing morbid in the way they look because they are meant to instruct only. Interestingly, this insistence on the innocence of scientific accuracy both in the experience of the beholder and the material of the exhibition is a rather bizarre historical inadvertence. Modern anatomical endeavour can be traced starting with the 16th century (Graciano, 2019, Roach, 2003)). Plenty of anatomists preceding von Hagens had meant exactly the same: to subject the corpse to processes of visualization and dissection, equally in medical and artistic environments, with the identical purpose of instructing students in human anatomy. If this is the theme that renders *BodyWorlds* the 21st century equivalent of a historically-backed ambition, then what indeed signals its difference?

The way *BodyWorlds* enriches the instructive side of the anatomical field is through a “*kinaesthesia* of knowledge” (Valdecasas et al., 2009, 842) actualised not only through the way the exhibits are displayed, the positions of the bodies, but also due to the mental associations visitors unavoidably operate when confronted

with ‘reading’ them. This places ‘genuine position beyond the power of the eye’ (Valdecasas et al., 2009, 842), in other words an apparently simple issue (how do we position the body) brings into question something else: the hegemony and durability of the optical perspective. Does *BodyWorlds* prolong the tradition of the optical perspective or does it leave it behind? Does our perception get closer to an anatomical truth or is our gaze trapped in the spectacular dimension?

The act of looking at the plastinated body invites a myriad of questions in the viewer’s mind, but are they of a technological, scientific or philosophical nature? In order to answer them we will consider the body-specimens the methodological premise for our investigation. The specimens work as a “kind of cipher [...]: they don’t mean anything unless they’re in the context of a sentence or a system, and their meanings are extremely promiscuous.” (Asma, 2003, xiii)

Gunther von Hagens’s displayed bodies have also been related to a tradition linked to practices of collecting and displaying natural history: such museums “are inherently aesthetic representations of science in particular and conceptual ideas in general.” (Asma, 2003, 240) Art history, anatomy and medicine have merged not only by virtue of their relentless employment of image layouts, but more importantly, because “[...] they have always had uniquely visual subject matters. Whether one is talking about cladograms, microcopy images, or anatomical maps, the learning of life science is largely visual.” (Asma, 2003, 244) In the case of *BodyWorlds*, it is not just topographic or comparative anatomy that the bodies refer to, but their status as specimens negotiates the dynamics between fields generally associated with the production of images (art, modelling) and the production of knowledge (science, medicine). When promoting the exhibition as a tool for scientific instruction, von Hagens fails however to acknowledge that the history of art itself had included, at various stages of production of anatomical art, scientific viewpoints designed according to the laws and methods of objective representation of anatomical truth in any given historical epoch. Shortly put, the duality between art and science in this particular exhibition brings along the mirroring scientific and artistic twins of art history and history of medicine, respectively. For example, one of the *BodyWorlds* exhibits reproduces the famous engraving of Vesalius’s “Muscle Man”: a living corpse standing on an open field, his posture inviting our gaze to focus on its partly dissected body structures. In its time, such a representational device defined the scientific

perspective in the artistic representation of the human body. Its reiteration, several centuries later, in von Hagens's exhibition, in the shape of a plastinated body and not as a two-dimensional illustration, marks the inevitable cohabitation of several "scientific" perspectives: one belonging to the history of art, the other to the history of medicine. Such an iconographic appropriation reveals the enduring power of the hybridity inherent to the anatomical trope. It also undermines the marketing's message meant to attract the general public with the promise of delivering uncorrupted-by-aesthetics slices of scientific knowledge.

Von Hagens's statements had attracted criticism in light of the disjunction between aesthetics and medical science that his exhibition claims it could mend: "The anatomical artifacts that Gunther von Hagens produces reflect the historical friction between scientific accuracy and artistic or aesthetic embellishment, which he does not perceive as conflicting." (van Dijck, 2005, 50). This lack of awareness further attracts another question concerning the authenticity of the process behind the production of his specimens: how scientifically accurate the plastinated body can really be? Plastination is the only technology used for the production of the exhibits and the technique of plastination had been developed on the grounds of a scientific university laboratory for several years (Goeller, 2007). However, given the context of representation we mentioned before, the plastinated body eventually is too imbued with art historical context in order to freely function as a messenger of scientific truth. This is a topic we will come back to in the next section of the present text.

In a positive interpretation of the conditioning of science to art and vice versa, arguments have been placed about the mutual benefits the two fields bring each other (Hallam 2016, Asma 2001). While scientific modes of thinking can assist artists better express themselves, artistic images can be helpful in shedding light on scientific theories; images operate upon the empathetic side of the onlooker and when placed in an exhibition, a museum can instrumentalize this feature in order to promote its educational programs; ultimately "feelings, emotions, attitudes can be triggered by images and are employed by museums as the glue that fastens together informational facts." (Asma, 2001, 257) Starting with the late 17th century, museums progressively adopted the empiricist epistemology first articulated by Locke in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and in which "he argued that all knowledge originates in 'sensation' and

'reflection', that everything we know can be explained by sense perception rather than by innate ideas and that we get our ideas from experience." (Asma, 2001, 257). This experiential impetus will be debated in the second section of our analysis.

The scientific learning of human anatomy promoted by *BodyWorlds* reiterates an older ambition stemming from the 19th century when 'the production of new representational technologies nurtured the scientists' ambition to eliminate artistic contamination' (van Dijck, 2005, 50). However, this ambition could also historically never be separated from the added layers of meaning and interpretation embedded in the use and manipulation of the technologies themselves. Even if the presence of the artistic hand or input is eliminated, the choices made by the scientist in the way he uses technology reflect also that his procedures are contaminated by will and intention. From this point of view, the anatomical art of *BodyWorlds* highlights the limitations of objectivity and enhances the perception of subjective choice in the encounter with the anatomical exhibits. The material turn that methodologically frames the plastinated body opens the space for a multitude of subjective processes, both for the agent of production and his recipients. Von Hagens's new representational technology (plastination) is spectacular in purpose and deeply rooted in subjectivity. No matter how complex the technology behind the exhibition, it is never a guarantee for an encounter with objectivity. The experience of looking at the anatomical exhibits renders even more transparent how volatile the process of translating medical knowledge into artificially-treated human material is. The fascination of the plastinated body is not rooted in objectivity, but rather in the exercise of imagination it facilitates.

Plastination had been compared to the work of the pioneers in photography: just as they "[...] hailed it as a mode of writing with light beams, so von Hagens hails plastination as a technique enabling direct inscription, eradicating all mediation between object and representation, rendering all subjective intervention - inherent to representation - obsolete [...]" Like his 19th-century predecessors, von Hagens assumes the superiority of mechanical objectivity, thus perpetuating the myth of transparent scientific truth: a pure representation of the human body without the contamination of human intervention." (van Dijck, 2005, 56) Is however von Hagens fundamentally interested in using plastination as a technology for creating corporeal texts, meant to be read by the visitor, as if he had

already acquired the visual expertise necessary to make this bodily vocabulary readily available to the visitors? Is an anatomical vocabulary rooted in plastination more helpful or advanced than its predecessors when it comes to the process of deciphering embodied knowledge? *BodyWorlds* states that it functions as a “journey under the skin” by “providing fascinating insights into the body’s complex structure and explains how functional systems and organs interact.” (von Hagens, 2020) Even if the core relies on “conveying anatomical knowledge”, the ultimate aim seems much closer to a subjective project of allowing visitors to transgress the boundaries of scientific expectation and form their own mental associations (i.e. life and death phantasies). If we are to interpret plastination as a text-creating methodology, then what we are ultimately left with are subjective narratives, far removed from the objectivity that anatomy as medical science is supposed to deliver. Von Hagens’s *BodyWorlds* manages to create hybrid texts that conflate expectations of anatomical art and science, with the bodies acting as metaphors for philosophical and existential concerns.

Given that plastination cannot perpetuate traditional representational modes of artistic human anatomy, objectivity is thus only a myth. In addition, the plastinated bodies remove the natural excesses and distortions encountered during and after dissection of the corpses takes place. The plastinated body is in a much more fragile epistemological position than its creator might have aimed for: it cannot fully “convey anatomical knowledge”, not only because it is just another step in a long, transformative history that normalizes the anatomized body as an object of knowledge (no matter its support: image, text or real human surface and structure), but mostly because it carefully orchestrates an experiential journey for the visitor in which a superimposition of knowledge and visual delight or shock factor are necessary ingredients.

#### *Hymn*

The dynamics between art and science and their mirroring relationships are part and parcel of Damien Hirst’s body of work too. The most unapologetically anatomical of all his works is the sculpture *Hymn*. It shows a 5.9 meters tall anatomical model and it was first displayed in the Gagosian art gallery (2000), then in the courtyard of Norwich University of Arts (2018) and ultimately on the main shopping street in Leeds (2019).

In a book of interviews conducted between Gordon Burn and Damien Hirst we find many of the artist’s statements regarding his own

views on the art and science dichotomy reflected in his works. Asked if his art addresses ‘the rigour and science’ as opposed to ‘the irrationality of art’ Hirst states that “[...] science and art are both lacking in some sort of spirituality. And I think that they’re sort of headbutting each other trying to get something like that back [...] I’m instinctively drawn to these things. If you think art plus the rigour of science equals something spiritual, well, I think it’s the other way round... It’s an art-science-religion thing that’s going on.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 145) In one of the interviews provided before *Hymn*’s official presentation in the art gallery, Hirst confirmed that he had used an already existing anatomical model for his sculpture: that model consumed him with a fascination great and corruptive enough in order for him to quickly get persuaded to entirely reproduce it, except that in a larger scale (and also in different materials): “It’s a toy called the Child Scientist. I might even get sued for it. I expect it. Because I copied it so directly. It’s fantastic. I just thought it was so brilliant, and it was so accurate, it was like a chemistry set, and I loved it that it was a toy. It was really similar to a medical thing, but much happier, friendlier, and more colourful and bright. And I just thought, ‘Wow! I wanna do that.’ I suppose it came from that idea of Koons doing those things [the witches hat etc.]. I just thought, ‘Twenty feet tall. Fantastic.’” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 147) This passage both establishes a similarity with the conceptual frame surrounding *BodyWorlds*, whilst also marking an inevitable departure from it. It highlights that, similarly to von Hagens’s program to facilitate through anatomical artifacts a “journey under the skin”, Hirst too is enamoured with the playful (and subjective) dimension of anatomy as science. Triggered by the “happy” anatomical toy and influenced by Koons immersive journeys into pop culture, Hirst too sees medical science as an invitation to provide his own take on the venerable tradition of anatomical art. In a way, this reveals the inherent transgressive power of the anatomical imagery and its incarnations in the realm of visual arts that allowed a scientist (von Hagens) and an artist (Hirst) to enthusiastically embrace the objects of anatomy in deeply subjective and idiosyncratic ways.

Anatomical themes and interests pervaded Hirst’s activities long before he executed *Hymn*. As a teenager, he used to visit the morgue in Leeds in order to make drawings of body parts, but even more so, in order to enter the medically fetishised space of death. Hirst also used to collect pathology books and “[...] all kinds of horrible books.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 17) He liked

collecting them because his favourite painter was Francis Bacon and used them in order to do paintings from: “Something that really intrigues me about them is the fact that, on the one hand, they can be really horrific visual things, and on the other hand it’s a very beautiful, well-taken photograph. I think that’s what the interest is in. Not in actual corpses. I mean, they’re completely delicious, desirable images of completely undesirable, unacceptable things.” (Burn, Hirst, 35)

After ‘Sensation’, the show that skyrocketed his fame as a young rebellious artist, Hirst engaged in a fruitful practice of anatomical art: he put a severed cow’s head with an insect-electrocuting light suspended above it (*A Thousand Years*, 1990), then famously a shark in formaldehyde inside a glass cage (*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991), displayed two halves of a calf and a cow so that the visitor could walk between them and notice their insides (*Mother and Child (Divided)*, 1993), or put another dead sheep in a tank (*Away from the Flock*, 1994). Leaving aside the mastery of the ingenious titles, these sculptures beckon not only to his vibrant attachment to anatomical objects and themes, but mostly his abiding interest for using anatomy as a language in which his artworks are given the space to articulate the criticism attached to the very basis of objectivity that scientific rationality claims. For Hirst, the act of translating anatomy into anatomical art is possible (and also: hugely successful) precisely because of the transient character of objectivity that the scientific enterprise evokes. What kind of scientific knowledge did the engagement with anatomy as science leave on the artist? In a way, the intimacy with the visual culture of anatomy (art history, anatomical specimens and artifacts) as well as the acquaintance with the practical aspects of the science (the morgue and dissection room) removed him considerably from objectivity as working platform for his artistic practice and left him rather with an undissimulated desire to objectify science instead and rejoice in the “happy” and “friendly” potential of it. Even if *Hymn*, the “Big Man” seems to embody the subjective side-effects of democratising anatomy for the general public (for example, through the “Child Scientist” toy), it can also be linked to Hirst’s general mistrust in the didactic virtue of anatomical visibility.

A few years before *Hymn*, when he did the *Pharmacy* (1992) installation, Hirst attested to a personal experience in his family that marked him further in this perspective: “My mum was

looking at the same kind of stuff in the chemist’s and believing it completely. And then, looking at it in an art gallery, completely not believing it.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 23) Invited to reveal the thinking behind the medicine-cabinet pieces, the artist associated his mother’s mistrust in the authenticity of the medical message conveyed through the artwork with her “[...] entering a chemist’s shop and having complete trust in something she’s equally in the dark about.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 23) This sort of trust in something we don’t know about can be virtually extended to the visitors who enter the space of *BodyWorlds* too. The professional reputation of von Hagens as anatomist and the fact that *BodyWorlds* proudly insists that it is “real human bodies” that the exhibition presents (von Hagens, 2020), both silently delegate the initial premise of perception to a level of trust. As if we trust that what we are going to see there is inextricably linked not only to the anatomical truth, but to our own mediated relationship with death and the corpse. Do we see corpses as objects of science or do we see science anthropomorphized in the body-objects and the anatomical specimen?

*Hymn* proposes an additional interesting take on the dynamic between art and science. It promotes the producer of the anatomical work as curator of anatomical knowledge and someone acutely aware that there is not one way of showing anatomy in a scientific way, but plenty. Even if he had received considerable criticism for his fame-courting antics (not to mention his huge financial success as an artist), Hirst’s tackling of anatomy is not simply a matter of mocking the science of it. In relation to science, Hirst interestingly noted that “you get this thing in science, all right, which divides and dissolves the whole body into a thing: an object. You walk in there and you might as well be anybody.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 74) Hirst “walked in there” when he did *Hymn*, he appropriated from science the dissection and dissolving methods and from all the potential “anybody”-identities he could have appropriated, he chose the conceptual artist one. Von Hagens too, “walked in there” and he too assumed another “anybody”-identity: he left the scientist one and instead decided to become the curator of the visitors’ “journey under the skin”. The similarity between von Hagens’s and Hirst’s involvements in their respective projects of anatomical art lies in their lack of inhibition at retelling the story of scientific objectivity through new, surprising objects.

### *Color Out of Space*

Science is under question in another case of anatomical art, this time in the shape of a film, Richard Stanley's *Color Out of Space* (2019). By contrast to *BodyWorlds* and *Hymn*, *Color Out of Space* directly exhibits a narrative story, centered on the Gardner family, which nevertheless allows for the delivery of a message about the hybridity inherent in the visualisation of anatomy and its removal from the field of science. Based on the original Lovecraft material, it positions "colour" as the villain. However, what links the film to the other case studies is the relationship between the anatomical innuendo (or body horror) and its implicit promise for the failure of science and scientific thinking. The story of the film leaves its protagonists at the merciless hands of cosmic horror as manifested through its messenger of colourful evil.

This evil is lived through the myriad of strange, time warp experiences and mostly, through mild or extreme corporeal metamorphoses. It is precisely the latter's occurrence that allows us to include this film in the repertoire of anatomical art, not only because of the genre it references (body horror), but also due to its highly stylised post-production work which brings Stanley extremely close to the sphere of the artistic treatment of the anatomical understanding of body.

In the film, the director gives "colour" a very potent and luminous shade of iridescent fuchsia that leaves in no uncertain terms its cosmic and otherworldly substance and origin. The story of evil perpetuated to the detriment and ultimate extinction of the Gardners' both mental and corporeal existence is carried out through sophisticated visuals. The film describes and enhances the evil powers of "colour" by resorting to a criticism of scientific thinking coupled with a narrative of anatomical decay. The colour as evil is filtered through the anatomical mode, because it is positioned as an agent of didactic instruction, reflecting the original Lovecraftian theme of not only an indifferent cosmos, but a terrifyingly hostile one as well, teaching the reader hard lessons in human impotence and easy annihilation.

In the story developed by the film, human vision is not able to decipher the meaning of the dramatic events unfolding for its human protagonists. Their eyes, though fascinated by the appearance of the colour, are not provided with epistemological prowess. At the end of the film, Ward states that "there's only a few of us that remember the strange days now. What touched this place cannot be quantified or understood by humans' eyes. It was just a colour out of space. A

messenger from realms whose existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the ghastr that it throws open before our frenzied eyes".

From the perspective of film history, the hypothesis of a connection between body horror as genre and anatomy as knowledge-production had already been critically signalled: 'Body horror is defined as the body transmogrified into a repulsive source of fear[...] even if fear is present, the body horror is less connected with fear, but rather it performs the didactic function of the anatomy lesson, in film.' (Sharrett, 2015, 22). The interplay between fear, repulsion, disgust as necessary corollaries of the horror genre, on one hand, and Lovecraft's cosmology and vision based on 'cosmic indifferentism' is tracked in a substantial body of films such as: *2002: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and *Alien* (1979). Several adaptations after Lovecraft original literary works are also worth being mentioned: *The Dunwich Horror* (1970), *The Curse* (1987) or *The Call of Cthulhu* (2005) (Sharrett, 2015).

Lovecraft has been in several theoretical accounts linked with the creation and development of the horror genre (Powell, 2005, Pinedo, 1996). Moreover, the genre itself had benefited of a critical treatment that took into account its "non hedonic values" and contextualised it as "transformative learning": a set-up in which "[...] critical consciousness is activated in a way that makes the audiences examine, question, and revise certain existing perceptions shaped by their experiences. The process is more a shocking and disturbing experience than pleasurable." (Yeung, 2020, 75)

Both in the literary and cinematic works, the colour becomes the monster figure that terrorizes the Gardners: "Though it comes from the sky and returns to it, a sign in the heavens and its messenger, this monster assumes a peloric form in the well; the reader experiences it for only a short time as a teratic portent. It returns, explosively propelled from the center of the earth into the otherness from which it came, but a portion of it falls back; it tries to become one or the other but lags behind both." (Waugh, 2007, 24)

The duplicity of science, language and human intellectual pursuit is organically linked with the events and processes that ultimately lead to the Gardners' extension, and on a greater scale, with a loss of humanity: "A mysterious presence or color from the meteorite seemingly had infected the family, leading to illness, insanity and horror. The presence spread and killed all living

things. A natural contagion that comes out of space and may or may not be a conscious alien. The presence appears to be unknowable, another manifestation of the unnamable. It is like Arendt's image of evil as a fungus." (Goho, 2009, 44).

*Color Out of Space* basks in the lavish exposure of pseudo-scientific or scientifically-molded affirmations, delivered casually by the film's protagonists. Their often absurd and humorous dialogues seem to rework, in filmic language, what Lovecraft refuses to expose in the literary text: the absolute nonsense that science can change into when it is "talked" about by members of an ordinary family trying to have a peaceful life in the countryside. When Benny, the Gardners' elder son, hears the sound made by the meteorite's fall on the ground, he proclaims that "it sounded like a propeller plane having an aneurysm" or that he "thought it was a nuclear strike", as well as playfully teasing the apocalyptic scenario where the entire family "would be vaporized, become part of the reaction and convert into pure energy". His sister, Lavinia, casually drops that "maybe the meteorite sent an alien plague infecting the entire fucking planet". It is yet another comedic, cynical inflection of a discourse that aims to make fun of science, thus mimicking Lovecraft's own much-discussed loathing of modern science. Medical metaphors are also present in these casual dialogues: when Theresa complains to Nathan that she has several problems with the router and the internet connection is poor, she is afraid that the situation is one of "hemorrhaging clients".

The precariousness of the scientist figure (Ward) is gradually suggested in the film, up to the climactic point in the story where he fails to protect and save the Gardners from their fate. Ward, the hydrologist, is constantly mistaken for a "toxicologist" and a "geologist", almost as if Nathan is biologically incapable of correctly uttering a science-related professional denomination. The fragile status of science and its decaying relevance is suggested in the film by the camera's zooming in on old scientific artifacts, part of Ezra's mad little house in the forest near the Gardners' house. It seems as if Stanley, the film's visionary director, is animated by a similar passion that Hirst manifests for old medical apparatus and instruments. In the film however, this preoccupation with the frailing images of science is not of a medical nature, but instead it targets film-related tools such as tapes, mixers or recorders. In a way, they work also as visual markers for a meditation upon the inevitable decay of the film medium itself. They silently announce its submission to the destructive action

of time, as if "colour" is a kind of evil that envelops both the object and subject of the cinematic work of art. These deteriorated instruments are on their turn anatomized: the director dissects their filmic portraiture, as they are shown in parts, fragments and fissures. Moreover, a scene towards the end which shows Ezra as a mummified being, and his after-life presence is affirmed, as his voice is heard on a previously recorded tape. It is up to this mummified entity to deliver a more poignant explanation concerning the colour's force of destruction: "It's just a color, but it burns. It sucks, and it burns."

Curiously enough, the colour itself, materialized in the cinematic medium, is in a difficult position to instill fear in the audience, given its straight-out brilliance, saturation and beauty. In a way, it is quasi-impossible for the colour to play the villain role, given its sheer chromatic perfection. Hence, for the film as a piece of horror genre to work, another villain is needed. Thus, the monster is what the colour does, what it brings upon and what moves the events of the story into the realm of corporeal horror. The monster is the colour governing a process of transformation for the bodies of the entities it engulfs. This important change that differentiates the text from the film is again connected to the requirement of the genre: "What locates this 'scientific' account in the realm of horror rather than science fiction is the insignificant role rational discourse plays in the film and the larger focus that is placed on the irrational and the mutilation of the body." (Pinedo, 1996, 23). The fuchsia-tinted scenes of the film, whether they involve the well, the landscape, the 'meteorite', the garden and its flowers and vegetables reenact the potential space of a cinematic version of a morgue. In this sense, the audience is invited to witness the results of this dissection operated through the chromatic knife of the colour. This dissection exquisitely reveals how cinematic means are called to translate Lovecraft's source material into film material. *Color Out of Space*, the film, deconstructs Lovecraft's cosmic horror into a visionary tale of anatomical stupefaction.

## Section II

The second section of our text tackles anatomy as a legitimate vocabulary for the articulation of commentaries on contemporary culture, whether of a technological, social or political nature. It also draws on comparisons with postmodern strategies used in the spheres of museological, artistic or film practices, such as appropriation, humour or sarcasm. The section



frames all three case-studies within the construct of the morbid spectacle in order to engage with the implications each of them generate both for their respective producer and public.

### *BodyWorlds*

An important side-effect of the way *BodyWorlds* organizes, through its plastinated artifacts, a journey not uniquely “under the skin”, but “under” the art and science dichotomy is delegated to the section of commentaries upon contemporary mass culture. Defined as a postmodern Dr. Tulp, von Hagens conducts an interesting performance: his exhibition is not really a lesson in anatomy, in the traditional sense of the term, but rather its mutated, spectacular version in the post-humanist realm. (van Dijck, 2005, 63). This mutation is possible because *BodyWorlds* operates eventually under the guise of an objective lesson of anatomy: instead, it is a lesson in the museology of corporeal postmodernism, deeply aware of its contemporary context in order to generate a maximum impact on the audience.

This shows us the inextricable link between anatomical visibility (understood now as production of anatomical exhibits appealing to the anatomical imagination) and the impetus for scientifically grasping the boundaries of the human body (meat, flesh, bones, textures). However, following the Panofskian perspective, we can add that the spectacle of anatomy is deeply rooted in art history and the material production of artworks. Renaissance artists explored the biological limits of making art, by focusing on the body as a site of investigation, thus taking things a step further than the corpus of didactic instructions included in the textbooks for apprentices and artisans. The tension reappropriated by *BodyWorlds* is the one between knowing the body as a scientist/artisan and reflecting on the body as an artist/curator. Von Hagens is not just another anatomist seduced by the temptation of artistic embellishments in his field: he turns into an anatomical curator or curator of anatomical art, in the way he defends his exhibition concept and materials. His practice organically embraces the material turn in the display of his plastinated bodies: the viewer is not asked to contemplate, but rather is meant to be absorbed by the act of looking at the anatomical structures of the human body. This is all very different and pretty far away from how the anatomy scientist deals with the bodies in the spaces of the medical settings. The material turn as a cultural methodology means inviting the audience to look at the artifact differently: it is a

request for engaging with the object as if the object’s surface, texture and body constitute the only explanation needed, as if the struggle for meaning is not to be found in the philosophical traditions that nurture it, but more in the corporeal, bodily, material articulation of its fabric. This process is not without ambiguities: already in Vesalius’s *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, the anatomist introduced a return to the “texture”, which in his case was delivered through the art book and the public performance of anatomy.

*BodyWorlds* has also been fascinatingly interpreted from the perspective of tourist studies: “touring the dead” or the exhibition as just another touristic landmark, in the context of tourism defined as “culturally grounded embodied practice” (Desmond, 2011, 175), which is a deeply spatialized experience both in cognition and physicality. From this point of view, emphasis is placed on vision, but not in which vision acts as the dynamic version of the traditional optical perspective. In *BodyWorlds*, vision encompasses a sense of expectation for the exploration of a new touristic spot: the potentially morbid land of plastination. By removing the skin of the bodies in order to reveal the muscles and organs beneath, von Hagens manages to propose a “universalizing discourse” (Desmond, 2011, 175) selling the phantasmagoria of authenticity simply because it is impossible to make any guess regarding the history, sex and cultural background of the “real human bodies” displayed.

Plastination is defined on the website of the exhibition as a “relatively simple process [...] designed to preserve the body for educational and instructional purposes - in a more detailed way than ever before. Plastinates are dry, odorless, durable and are particularly valuable educational tools not only for medical professionals but also for a broader public” (von Hagens, 2020). Five steps mark the journey from a dead corpse to a plastinated exhibit: the first is fixation (when formaldehyde is pumped through arteries and skin, fat and connective tissues are removed), the second is the removal of body fat and water (the body is placed in a bath of acetone under freezing conditions), the third is forced impregnation (the specimen is placed in a bath of liquid polymer), the fourth is positioning (after vacuum impregnation, the anatomical structures can be aligned and fixed according to the anatomist’s sense of aesthetics) and finally the fifth is hardening (with gas, light or heat, the plastinate is protected against decomposition and decay). All in all, the production of one “real human body” takes about one year to complete (von Hagens,

2020). The entire process is meant to remove not only fat, fleshiness and soft tissues, but also any potential project to establish an identity. The spectacle offered by *BodyWorlds* resembles a curated design fair, which displays muscular and age-indeterminate bodies. This indetermination coupled with the capacity to provoke and shock had been put in conjunction with the late 20th-century culture of TV consumption and especially with the shows that casually make use of medicalized bodies and which naturalize the act of looking at the dead body in an indifferent and even entertained way. (Desmond, 2011, 181)

The spectacular dimension of the instructional anatomy proposed by *BodyWorlds* can be found not only in the exhibition, but also in von Hagens's literal reiteration of a public anatomy. In 2002, one hundred seventy years after public anatomies had been outlawed in Britain, he performed a public dissection. Even if marketed as a reenactment of a traditional and natural part of anatomy, von Hagens's spectacle gained the aura of a postmodern act of appropriation. Once the hospital became the exclusive host for performing dissections (starting with late 18th-century), an increasing understanding that the anatomical dissection is not an artistic show/performance gained in authority. In a way, von Hagens's action from 2002 functioned as a post-humanist attempt at returning back to a time when anatomical dissection on cadavers could also fulfill the promise of an artistic encounter between the public's gaze and the anatomist's maneuvers. In that context, it was less transparent where art ended and science started. Hospitals and anatomy departments made use of art-related modes of learning anatomy (collections and museums inside the faculty of medicine), but gradually denied the access of the general public exactly inside those spaces where bodies were dismembered and dissected. This measure removed the art-historical trace of the anatomical performance, without however getting rid of the optical perspective.

The postmodern anatomical art that von Hagens produces and curates is centered on plastinations, which had been called "imitations of representations, executed in modified organic material." (van Dijk, 2005, 53). They act as mirroring images of the body, but not as traditional representations such as the engravings in Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) or Bidloo's engravings from *Anatomia Humani Corporis* (1685). The plastinated body that copies the posture of Vesalius's "Muscle Man" is only one of the testifiers for the postmodern turn permeating the entire exhibition.

Ultimately, the instructional value of the plastinated artifacts cannot fully operate a process of transcribing science into a visual language. *BodyWorlds* makes use of a scientific process (plastination), but delivers a simulacrum of the medical science it claims to represent (the exhibit). Nowadays, despite a myriad of media that promises democratization of medical contents, the procedural side of anatomy stays hidden from the eyes of the general public and can be strictly accessed in the medical spaces only. Von Hagens himself keeps hidden from the public eye the very headquarters where these artifacts are produced (visitors are not allowed in the rooms of the Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg). There is a fantastic difference between what von Hagens performs in the institute's laboratory and what he chooses to show in the space of the exhibition. The operations carried out in the former are not necessarily endowed with the spectacular capacities that would draw an eager audience. Von Hagens ventured into the realm of public performance of anatomy, re-enacting a tradition annexed both to the history of art and that of medicine. It became yet another example of the application of a postmodern approach to a historical tradition, undergoing a metamorphosis in terms of audience and discourse.

### *Hymn*

Much of Damien Hirst's art, including his anatomical works, was designed in such a way as to gain maximum public attention. The postmodern element in *Hymn* is a double-folded one: it is related to the subject-matter (the copy of a well-known anatomical toy) and also to the material of execution (bronze covered by a coat of plastic-looking paint).

Even if *Hymn* is made out of bronze, it doesn't look at all like a sculpture in bronze, but rather like an oversized toy. Asked about his choice of material, Hirst replied: "I just wanted it to be grand. It can go outside. It's vandal-proof. Underneath it is this big fucking grand iconic fucking artwork. I mean, I love painted bronze. The paint on it's like skin... It's an outdoor sculpture. It's like a car. It'll decay. So eventually what you'll be left with is this solid bronze man with bits of paint hanging off it. So in a way it's like what happens to your body. I liked it for that reason. That's why I went in for bronze." (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 147) This passage makes visible several intersections in terms of cultural methods (the museological and the material turn), the symbolic value of materials in art (bronze is "grand", plastic is "paint") and the body metaphors used in conjunction with a piece of

anatomical art (the paint as “skin”, wearing off of paint is “like what happens to your body”).

*Hymn* is a bronze sculpture, painted to look like plastic. It emphasizes in no uncertain terms not only the original model after which it was redone as a massive replica, but also something else: it highlights the fact that the audience could be put in a position of not taking seriously the fabric of the human body, the anatomy of it. In a way, it mocks everything that has been called the genre of anatomical art, because doing anatomy as artistic pursuit will forever be seen as something childish, unserious, funny, far removed from the hidden spaces of the anatomical laboratory or the morgue.

Even if it is a striking invitation to reflect on existential themes such as death and decay, the striking, happy, shiny surface of the paint acts as inhibitor for a true grasp of the meaning of life. The overall design of *Hymn* seems to hint at another dimension of anatomical art: in its tradition and vision, it is nothing else than children’s play or at least science contained in a package for the child scientist. By resizing the original toy to a bronze statue Hirst draws our attention to the fact that any artistic embellishment of a scientific content is ultimately doomed to fake-instruct. Instead, it only manages to entertain and make fun of the decaying nature of all things, most painfully of all, the human body itself: “So I want a kind of very clean, minimal, kind of acceptable look, with an intellectual splatter. You know: you can look good, but you’re dying. That kind of thing. Something like that. That’s what interests me.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 35)

A marked mix of the anatomical, the medical and the morbid blend in Hirst’s body of work. Hirst remarks: “[...] there must be a cultural reason for me to actually use dead heads, a social reason why people react to it. I mean, I think sensationalism is only an element in a composition, and I don’t think if you’re making a composition you should overlook it.” (Burn, Hirst, 34) The use of dead heads in his sculptures is linked to the element of morbidity that caused much of the fame-creating controversy around his persona and art. But *Hymn* is gleefully non-morbid, just like *BodyWorlds*: it is beautiful to look at (similarly to the lean and elegant plastinated bodies), it is funny to look at (the childish look of the bright coat of paint) because it makes fun of a science (anatomy) so closely linked to a decidedly unfunny chapter of life (death).

The postmodern aspect of *Hymn* can also be detected in the history of its display. This history is marked by telling variations: first in an

art gallery (Gagosian gallery), then in the courtyard of an arts university (Norwich University of Arts) and eventually on a shopping street (Leeds). Such variations unsubtly reveal an eagerness to instrumentalize the anatomical aura of the artwork itself. They make clear how fluid the boundaries of the postmodern art promise for its audience are. The placement of *Hymn* on a shopping street in Leeds, as well as another sculpture, *Anatomy of an Angel* inside the central shopping mall renders clear the artist’s close understanding of the relationship between the art world and late capitalism. Hirst first gained wide attention with *Freeze*, the show he curated and launched to fame the Young British Artists group. The YBA and their supporter and promoter, Charles Saatchi shared an “elective affinity” because “both embodied the zeitgeist and the direction of travel of western society and culture in the late 20th and early 21st century” (Adams, 2017, 39). The ingredients of this mix between art, capitalism and brand power reveal the post-industrial shift in emphasis on information, creative industries, monetarism and consumerism. At the time when he did *Freeze*, Hirst was working at a market research company: “And what I realized is you can get anything over the phone. And the shark was the culmination of all that.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 46) This is an essential point of intersection between how an anatomical work functions as a metaphor for capitalism. It also helps that Hirst famously declared: “There’s no difference between being in the art world and working at McDonalds.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 55) This proximity of art to the consumerist society attracted also the criticism of Hirst that the artist vehemently resents: Damien Hirst makes “Damien Hirsts”. Late capitalism has been associated with the increasing dominance of promotion as a mode for cultural production, breaking up with the radical gesture of Pop Art in relation to the blurred boundaries between art and advertising, culture and commerce in the 1950s and 1960s. (Adams, 2017, 45)

In the case of *Hymn*, the debate had embraced two major points of criticism: firstly, that it is an example of postmodern appropriation art and secondly that it is a case of fraud and copyright infringement. The first aspect is one that Hirst deliberately embraced when he decided to copy the toy of the Child Scientist. The second one led him to court where he agreed to pay an undisclosed sum to avoid threats of legal action from the designer and manufacturer of the toy anatomy model. *Hymn*, the anatomical instance of appropriation art, was sold to Saatchi for one million pounds. Humbrol Limited, the maker of

the Young Scientist Anatomy Set, settled for restrictions on future reproductions and contributions by Hirst to two children's charities in lieu of royalties (Adams, 2017, 45). Appropriation art originated in the 20th century both as means of creation and for articulating social criticism (Okpaluba, 2002, 198). In order to have a full grasp of Hirst's art, it is vital to keep in mind the three articulations the appropriation practice: the first one occurs when images which are often protected by copyright are used in other works without any attribution to the copyright owner; the second one refers to montage, meaning the inclusion of images from several sources into one new work; the third one means that the appropriation targets a whole genre, with the purpose of generating a new work that doesn't look like any other specific work. (Okpaluba, 2002, 200)

In this context, *Hymn* can be interpreted as a mix of originality and the application of the third scenario mentioned above. It is nevertheless a method of working for the artist that brings his art in the vicinity of a perpetually comic endeavour: "Just by thinking about how a visual language works, you get thousands of really hilarious combinations." (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 212). This comedic strike is relevant for the understanding of other examples of anatomical artworks in Hirst's universe, such as *Death is Irrelevant* (where a real skeleton is used) and *Rehab is for Quitters* (where a fake one is presented). According to the artist, he always wanted "[...] to use a skeleton. But they're too heavy-handed, really. It's too loaded as iconography. Doom, death. Whooo! Like the vanitas and everything. So to give it those cartoon eyes...It's got that dumb slapstick in there. I couldn't resist it." (Burn, Hirst, 156)

### *Color Out of Space*

The film shares with the other two case studies the status of a postmodern piece of anatomical art. This verdict is applied if we take into account the characteristics of the postmodern horror genre such as: a violent disruption of daily life, a transgression of boundaries, the destruction of the rationality's usefulness, no closure at the end and a general sense of anxiety and fear the viewer is left with, even long after watching the film. (Pinedo, 1996, 20). In *Color Out of Space* we can decipher all the five aforementioned features: the Gardners's life on the farm is suddenly thrown into chaos by the appearance of the 'meteorite', their bodies suffer various stages of horrific transformation, the scientist cannot orchestrate their survival, the viewers are left with

no fixed meaning of the story's final chapter and a sensation of uneasiness stays with them long after the movie had ended.

Anatomy becomes the language through which body horror communicates, essentially a key feature of the contemporary postmodern horror genre. Body horror assumes thus a central position in the cinematic organization of the story (narrative and character development go second). Human carnage is presented in an emotionally detached way, so that what fascinates the viewer is not primarily the suffering of the victim but her or his bodily ruination (Pinedo, 1996). In the paranoid, inefficient, violent and unstable universe created after the first occurrence of the colorful evil, the human body becomes the site of a collapse. The most poignant element of a postmodern investment of anatomy in *Color Out of Space* consists in the bodily degradation and transgression endured by the animal and human elements of the story. The cat, the dog, the alpacas, the wife (Theresa), the younger son (Jack), the husband (Nathan) go through various stages of corporeal disintegration, be they grotesque, humorous or provocative. The postmodern turn in the film is played out by the workings of the unusual "monster" figure: in the film, Lovecraft's "unnameable" and "unnamed" source of horror is "colour", a quasi-abstract, shapeless, inorganic monster that nevertheless receives a visually stupendous cinematic treatment in Stanley's creation. The fuchsia-coloured monster of the film violates the boundaries of the human protagonists' bodies, while simultaneously retaining for itself a deeply objectified beauty. Coupled with the deliriously Cage-ian turns in the acting department, the postmodern take on the Lovecraft text is inevitably striking.

The postmodern face of body horror in the film engages also a social commentary regarding gender relationships, consumption of mass culture and the frailing role of science in bringing validation and salvation. *Color Out of Space* is consistently punctuated by the occurrence of the TV set and media-driven imagery as if to increase expectations for anatomical distress visiting the film characters. Evil is not only the colour, but also its domestic manifestation in Nathan's habit of easing emotional distress by watching TV. Nathan peacefully returns to the armchair in front of the TV, even while his wife's and son's bodies have mutated and relentlessly undergone anatomical alterations in the attic of the house. Watching TV is Nathan's patriarchal way of dealing with issues, criticism from his wife or rightful questioning from his daughter. Throughout the film, the idea of inherited family

evil is developed through the male vehicle. It doesn't help at all that it is the woman's body which undergoes the most drastic anatomical alterations, thus reinforcing the cinematic cliché of the woman getting punished for the sins of her male partner. Nathan insists that "everything is under control" even when Lavinia draws his attention to time warp, his wife's body is intertwined with his son's and Theresa can't speak any longer, except for some disturbingly grotesque and painful sounds. The evil of patriarchy occurs in the proximity of the anatomical disintegration of the female body: even as Nathan carries out irrational or insensitive actions, his elder son continues to show him support, appreciation and love ( i.e. after Nathan decides to move Theresa's changing body in the attic, Benny silently gives his support and even tells his dad that he loves him).

Body horror also acts as a vehicle for social commentary and what happens to female characters who hold a job in a potentially shady business world. We don't know exactly what Theresa's job is, but her work space (the attic) will ultimately conflate with the space of her anatomical destruction. The "monstrous other" which brings upon bodily decay and horror reiterates its literary pendant in Lovecraft's stance on the supernatural: "His cosmic vision became foundational (but uncredited) to the apocalypticism of current mass art, despite the fact that consumer culture, even in a time of perpetual war, cannot tolerate Lovecraft's meaningless cosmos." (Sharrett, 2015, 23). Cosmic horror, in the film especially, materializes in the fabric of the cinema Lovecraft's theory that all human endeavour is pointless in an indifferent and sometimes hostile cosmos. In such a world, the loss of sanity that the literary text's characters experience gets embodied in the cinematic mode through the body horror genre, by putting anatomical distortions at its core: "Since the horror genre is, in a manner of speaking, founded upon the disturbance of cultural norms, both conceptual and moral, it provides a repertory of symbolism for those times in which the cultural order—albeit at a lower level of generality—has collapsed or is perceived to be in a state of dissolution. Thus, horror, a genre which may typically only command a limited following—due to its basic powers of attraction—can command mass attention when its iconography and structures are deployed in such a way that they articulate the widespread anxiety of times of stress." (Carroll, 1990, 214) Body horror had been assigned to the realm of gothic transformations of the body (in literature, art and film). It stages a

"celebration of corporeal instability" in order to "disintegrate normative corporeality." (Reyes, 2014, 56) To be effective, it uses disgust, repulsion, mutilation and corporeal nightmare in order to generate physical reactions through extreme representations. Theresa's and Jack's transformed bodies turn into the double-headed anatomized monster that needs to be "fed", and Nathan, losing almost all rationality, proceeds to offer his own daughter, Lavinia, as food.

The inclusion of numerous moments of comedic relief are organically included in this universe of postmodern anatomical horror. It is also closely linked to the idea of societal criticism, gender relationships, patriarchy, the inefficient role of police and science in a collapsing part of society. The first to suffer the anatomical body horror treatment on the Gardners' farm are Nathan's beloved alpacas. Certainly, they were not on Lovecraft's radar of comedy when he wrote his text, but they act as triggers for Nicolas Cage's morbidly elastic acting chops. As his character claims that "no one eats alpacas [...] because they're the animal of the future", Cage the actor chooses to portray Nathan, the father figure, consumed by devotion for his animals. According to him, alpacas need to be milked, fed and gotten inside the barn by 10 o'clock in the evening. It is he who seems obsessed with feeding his alpacas, and it is he who will have to deal with the anatomical mess brought upon his alpacas by the "colour" as cosmic horror and incarnation of evil.

The postmodern turn in the horror genre allows for humour to closely operate in the bodily realm: "because the body is inherently interstitial and largely operates without our express cognitive control, certain functions, especially those that are internal, [it] may be both a source of laughter - when displayed histrionically - or of horror - when the excess is so overwhelming that it tips over into the comedic." (Reyes, 2014, 55) Even if the bodily transgressions brought on by "colour" are not funny in themselves, their coupling with the rest of the story bits and especially with the dramatic commitment of its actors enlivens the landscape of horror and allows for exhilarating moments of comic relief, while never sacrificing the overall aesthetic awe of the film's visuals.

Nevertheless, anatomical mutations speak in favour of patriarchy's punishment strategies. A marked difference in terms of intensity and gravity of the colour's inflicting of anatomical violence: Theresa and Jack have it the worst, but Nathan less. His skin gets itchy and receives a reptilian-like texture and appearance. Meanwhile, Theresa ends up completely transformed. In a

way, she suffers the same biological fate as the animals do. Like the cat, the dog and the alpacas, her corporeality turns monstrous and it is in this anatomical abomination that the most terrifying effects of cosmic horror are to be cinematically experienced. From all potential areas of visibility, it is the anatomy of the bodies that manifests the worst effects of cosmic horror. The colour as monster strikes in the realm of the body and it is there that we expect the most drastic turn-over.

Going further, it can be added that the film develops a theme of contradiction between the evilness and irrationality of men versus the rationality and goodness of the women. Eventually, Lavinia turns out the most rational of the children, while Nathan's constant blindness towards the severity of the threat is placed in a lineage going back to his father, whose picture we see framed next to a glass of "bourbon" (which of course, is the contaminated water from the well). Nathan doesn't seem to mind that his bourbon is not really what it looks like, and the story leads one to believe that his practice of drinking goes back to a time before the one marking the story the viewer is watching. Not only that he drinks it, but we see Nathan comfortably sitting in the armchair and rubbing some of the "bourbon" on his itchy skin, in order to alleviate the itchiness. When he wants to bring Lavinia to the attic, in order to feed the wife-turned-monster and she tells him he's hurting her, Nathan replies sarcastically: "Honey, I'm not that. No, I'm not a monster. I know I'm not my dad. I know." Even if Theresa tries to prevent him from taking her up to the attic, Cage makes sure he renders Nathan's response in the most devilishly witty manner: "Now, if there's one thing that families do, they stay together. Now feed your mother."

Ward's final scenes at the Gardners' witnesses him trapped in a time warp and the family sticks once again "together", this time in their resurrected version. The family as a unified body becomes a sort of mutated monster, because this resurrection is not followed by a happy end episode, but instead it is meant to torment Ward, the scientist. This is done visually by again reproducing the patriarchal iconography: the father sits once again in the armchair, while next to him the rest of the family is tightly sitting together on the sofa. In this gleefully morbid presentation, the film develops the theme of family menace and the way the colour envelopes each of them can only increase the feeling of disconnection and the imminent pressure of decay.

### Section III

Death and decay are major themes explored in the cultural histories of anatomy. The third and final section of the text explores how the chosen case-studies relocate death in each of their accounts, and what the role played by violence in each of their structures is. The three instances of anatomical art are seen as responsible for working out crucial anxieties in real-life or fictional stories. They reveal the potential for the visual-based vocabulary of anatomy to both deflect from and bring intense awareness on issues of mortality, insanity and life-after-death.

#### *BodyWorlds*

Decay and death are inextricably linked to the thematic body of anatomical art. In the case of *BodyWorlds* these themes are embodied in the plastinated specimens, but the appeal of the exhibition ultimately caters to the philosophical imagination of the visitors. Thus we could legitimately ask ourselves: given its educational concept, does the exhibition mediate a philosophical encounter with death or life? The official statement reads that: "the exhibition intends to strengthen for one's sense of health, show the potential and limits of the body, raise the question of the meaning of life." (von Hagens, 2020) Targeting the formation of individual answers based on the self-declared objectivity of the plastinated artifacts, *BodyWorlds* acts nevertheless as a giant, aestheticised morgue. It appeals to the curiosity of those who cannot or would not enter the spaces of a real-life morgue. The visual embellishment inherent to the plastination technology redefines however the appearance of the corpse. It is not repulsive in the least. The only thing left repulsive in *BodyWorlds* is the acknowledgement that real-life bodies are subjected to a process of degradation at the end of which, a much different picture of dead bodies would eventually emerge.

Gunther von Hagens's credo breathes the opportunistic air of postmodern neo-Romanticism which separates the figure of the taboo-rejecting scientist (in the anatomy field) from the one of the innocent, but eager-to-be-educated ordinary human being: "the anatomist alone is assigned a specific role - he is forced in his daily work to reject the taboos and convictions that people have about death and the dead. I myself am not controversial, but my exhibitions are, because I am asking viewers to transcend their fundamental beliefs and convictions about our joint and inescapable fate." (von Hagens, 2020) This emphatic propensity to highlight the religious, spiritual and fear-based collective consciousness

takes away attention from the fact that the aestheticised artifacts, copying anatomical representations from the vast imagery of the anatomical visual culture, function as excellent promoters of a non-scientific mode of appropriating the “lessons” of the exhibition. *BodyWorlds* has been criticised for playing on the visitors’ anxieties concerning death, but mostly because its elegant specimens allow for “thanatological voyeurism and narcissistic identification.” (van Dijck, 2005, 59) It is again the same reflection that sees the exhibition as an opportunity to become a tourist of one’s own decaying, bodily landscape, a journey in a beautified land of anatomical bodies and structures that leaves in the shadows of consciousness the very scientific and objective stances it invokes to encourage in the visitors’ minds.

*BodyWorlds* as anatomical art facilitates an overtake of biological decay. Even if the visitors’ bodies are in the process of decay, they are provided with the opportunity to take a break from the usual anxieties that are associated with the mental state in which a visitor to the exhibition might be in. The exhibition’s take on the theme of death is essentially an escapist one. It instructs much less than it mesmerizes. It proposes a vision of the rot-less, non-decaying body in its plastinated mode. It promotes the opportunity of eternal life, as demonstrated by the enormous success of the exhibition: plenty of visitors found their new identities as future bodies-to-be-dissected in the Institute of Plastination, to the extent that no new body donors are welcomed at present (however, those who wish to donate their bodies, are invited to do so at their local medical faculties). The curator takes pride in the fact that the exhibits themselves are not subjected to the process of imminent, physical decay: it will take at least a couple of hundred years for them to enter a process of degradation, which somehow holds a morbid appeal to those who want to find life after death as museological specimens.

Plastination sheds light on the historical marriage between science and its artistic embodiments, but it throws a veil of secrecy over the violence that governs the segments of action preceding the final form of the plastinated body: “The violence towards the body, the stripping of skin and the cutting away of extraneous fascia and fat that are precursors to the plastination process is not invoked, it is masked’ and ‘the anti-taxidermic approach is a crucial component to the acceptability of this display.” (Desmond, 2011, 182)

## Hymn

The fragility of existence, the action of the world on things is an important reason for Damien Hirst to put things behind glass and in formaldehyde, in big steel and glass cases. Before *Hymn*, as already mentioned elsewhere in the text, Hirst had a history with death-related spaces such as the morgue in the hospital. In his youth as an artist, the experience of death was mediated via the visits at the morgue as well as his preoccupation with books of photography showing pathological diseases. Recalling his visits as a young man at the morgue, Hirst mentions a peculiar awareness: for him, the vision of the corpses mediated only a fleeting encounter with the horror of death, simply because visualizing them in the morgue removed “that idea about death [...] it just gets relocated somewhere else.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 35)

Death relocated is a construct permeating much of Hirst’s body of work and *Hymn*, amongst other of his artworks, is a prime example of this. When he speaks of the collection of books of photography focused on the diseased or dead bodies, Hirst confirms this transition, this relocation of death through the enlivening gaze of the artist: “Something that really intrigues me about them is the fact that, on the one hand, they can be really horrific visual things, and on the other hand it’s a very beautiful, well-taken photograph. I think that’s what the interest is in. Not in actual corpses. I mean, they’re completely delicious, desirable images of completely undesirable, unacceptable things.” (Burn, Hirst, 35) The artist’s gaze scrutinises the surface of violent images and allows for the aesthetic judgement to change them into reasons to conduct a highly stylised artistic research.

Another example of this pendulating relationship between life in the choice of the subject-matter and death as irreversible inflection of the associated artwork is reflected by the two versions of *Pharmacy*. Hirst clarified the difference between *Pharmacy*, the artwork, and *Pharmacy*, the restaurant he used to run, in the following way: “they’re two totally different things. Completely. One’s alive, one’s dead.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 77) In a way, all art is a morbid thing for him: “It’s death. You can only get that in art. You can only get that in art galleries. Death. It’s totally fucking dead.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 77) His entire body of work can be then critically approached as evidence for this life-long fascination with the instrumentalised morbidity conjoined with the aesthetic impulse. This gives rise to a fundamental duality pertaining to his art practice. On one hand, art objects, even

if they are “death”, nevertheless allow for incommensurable artistic expression, glorious financial transactions and heated public debates. On the other, the artistic impulse is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the biological decay of humankind and it opposes the “dead” work of art to the truly decaying nature of the human body. Every approach that Hirst has mastered with morbid or anatomical subject matters overflows with a seductive aestheticism: “It boils down to death. I mean, we’re fucking dying. It’s a shambles. Total fucking shambles. What the fuck are we doing, dying? It’s so delicious, it’s so beautiful, it’s so fabulous. You don’t have to buy a fucking microscope to see how fabulous it is. The real gear, the stuff we’re living in, rots. And things that rot are so fucking colourful. It’s amazing on absolutely every level. And we’re dying. It doesn’t make sense. So everything’s about celebrating, and about living. It’s about living.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 79)

Similarly to *BodyWorlds*, the issue of violence is intimately connected to the apprehension of anatomy as both theoretical framework and corpus of iconographic references in the tackling of subject matter. In the case of *Hymn*, Hirst literally manifested his enthusiasm at the prospect of the art piece’s physical degradation, in the way sculptures “rot” in public spaces: the bronze gains a patina, the painted coat of colour starts to chip. The artistic decay of an aesthetically-pleasing work of art is in itself a vast theme in art history. In this perspective, *Hymn* represents a bridge between biological and art historical decay. The irony could be that perhaps *Hymn* will never be let to artistically rot, and it will always be re-painted to look like plastic by overeager collectors and curators. If Hirst doesn’t leave the instructions for posterity, all odds are that the sculpture will be repainted.

Where is violence located in the art of Damien Hirst? Firstly, the artist declares his appreciation of the violence attached to the simple existence of inanimate objects. It is a violence that motivates the metamorphosis of the everyday objects into Duchampian readymades that “[...] have been transposed from the morgue and the operating theatre to the gallery on the basis of the cold cargo of dread and terror that they carry.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 13). Categories of art criticism and aesthetics recall the evil brought in the world by Lovecraft’s “colour” in the way Hirst plays with the terms: “You can replace ‘more violently’ with ‘more colourfully beautifully’ and it’s exactly the same thing. And that’s the dilemma between Matisse or Bacon and Picasso. The word ‘violently’ is negative, all right, and you get

‘violently’ with Bacon. What floats Bacon’s boat is violence. And what floats Matisse’s boat is colour. And there’s no fucking difference is what I’m saying. That colour, in itself, if you live in a darkened fucking room, is violent. But it’s not called violence, it’s colour.” (Burn, Hirst, 2002, 125) Violence is embedded in the history of art as long as making art relies on an almost mechanistic application of beautifying routines: to paint beautifully is to anatomize through colour and other painterly tricks the space field of vision. For Hirst, violence has several locations, it exists and expands as long as the artist engages with violent images in the world: “Look, I make violent artworks. I think violently. I communicate violently. I’m not violent. I’m an artist. I really use violence as a way to communicate. I mean, I use violent images. I fuck about with violent images in a big way. I violently communicate how I feel as an artist [...] But I definitely wrestle with violent images, in a huge way. I get excited by violent imagery. But then it becomes weirdly tranquil - becalmed - once it’s made. Once the image is fixed.” (Burn, Hirst, 167)

#### *Color Out of Space*

If *BodyWorlds* and *Hymn* tackle the themes of death and decay in decidedly non-disgusting ways, the same cannot be told about *Color Out of Space*. Nathan draws our attention to the main signal that something horrific is imminently going to happen: bad smell. Bad smell directly greenlights proximate episodes of bodily decay, decomposition and morbid transformation. Curiously enough, it is only Nathan that takes notice of badly-smelling things around the house, starting with the fateful night of the “meteorite’s” fall on the Gardners’ property. It is almost as if, through this apprehension of bad smell in and around the house, the knowledge of future anatomical distress is conferred upon him only. While in the shower, Nathan discovers a strange entity and realizes he again feels a bad smell. Impatient and irritated, when asked by his wife to be more specific in regards to the description of the bed smell, Nathan provides an answer that links the idea of rotting to illness and death: ‘It’s exactly the same smell as the cancer ward where my father was. You know, death, disinfectant. The cancer smell. Rotting milk. You know the smell. You know the cancer smell better than anybody. And now the dog has vanished off the face of the Earth, so connect those dots.’ It doesn’t take long for bad smell to introduce body horror scenes, too.

Body horror in *Colour out of Space* is an anatomically-driven narrative of decay. In the style of the postmodern boundary-blurring



between subjective and objective representation, “the dream-coded-as-reality occupies a privileged position.” (Pinedo, 1996, 22) In *Colour out of Space* the dream acts as a working framework for an anatomical nightmare that engulfs both the characters and the audience. The dream-metaphor posits itself as a stance for art apprehension or for an artistic outlook on the theme of bodily decay. By enveloping the events of the story in the dream metaphor, the viewer is offered a tool for decoding the film’s key horror scenes. The dream acts as the critical apparatus through which an anatomical nightmare is yet to unfold. Nathan tells his wife that “a dream you dream alone is just a dream. A dream you dream together is reality” as if to make the viewers aware that they too are integrated into this project of collapse. The audience itself could dream the narrative of the film and is in it “together” for the development of the story (*Body Worlds* too could be “a dream we dream together” then). The night sequences introduced by the image of the Gardners’ house (lit in such a way that it almost looks like a sinister version of the McAllisters’ house from *Home Alone*) wave the bursting bubble of the dream sequences, announcing unsettling, unnerving, corporeal events.

Violence, comedy, sarcasm and irony abound in *Colour out of Space*. As Nathan reassures his anatomically disfigured wife that he’s “just trying to do his best”, he points the gun at her, tells her that she will always be his “golden lady”, and eventually kisses her on the mouth, transgressing the limits of conventional cinematic desirability. It is the monstrous body that he kisses and the effect is a mix of tenderness, solidarity and disgust. Anatomy becomes the perfect medium to negotiate the limits of desirability and abjection allowed on the big screen. What are we ready to accept as an audience? In what ways do we expect to be terrified? From all potential strategies (music, visuals, narrative devices), it seems that the anatomical realm is the most generous in terms of major discrepancies for the senses, perceptions and expectations of the viewers. Methodologically, the deconstruction of the literary fabric of cosmic horror in the medium of the film is carried out successfully through bodily modifications and anatomical transgressions. It is a strong manner to both attract and repulse the gaze. It plays on the classical dichotomy of the anatomical image: it both instructs and shocks the viewer. What are we instructed by the cinematic anatomy in this film? We learn of our position in the universe, our fragility and our limits. But anatomy is also here to reinforce the inherent evil in gender relations,

where a seemingly happy family turns out to be just another instance of dysfunctionality. As Nathan tells Ward who comes to check on the Gardners and inform them that the water from the well should not be drunk because it is contaminated: “Everybody’s here. We all stick together.” This is a false picture of unity, because it is not harmony, but the impossibility to escape danger and horror that keeps the family united. Moreover, even if they are all “together”, most of the members have already undergone drastic “journeys under the skin” that remove the veil of any hopeful resurrection in a post-horror world.

In *Colour out of Space*, violence is a stupendous visual spectacle performed by the otherworldly colour. In Lovecraft’s text, cosmic horror is inscribed in “both the feeling of terror located in a human body and the physical manifestation of that horror as an immense entity, a tremendous sign [...] The monstrosity of cosmic horror is about more than death: it encompasses all species of recoiling from and revulsions at that living, pulsing, endlessly mutating artifact that is the human body.” (Miller, 2011, 124 - 125). The revulsions which populate Richard Stanley’s film are manifold: fuchsia-tinted vegetation in the garden, overgrown tomatoes and peaches in the orchard, reptiles around the well, Nathan’s itchy and reptilian looking-like skin. If colour plays the role of the enigmatic, cosmic villain, it is nevertheless also the laboratory for the creation of a typical “tentacle monster” (Miller, 2011, 122): bodiless and unfixed, this postmodern monster moves around the unstable site of junction between bodily fear and cosmic horror. It is a site where maximum violence is deemed to occur. This violence spreads inside and eventually dominates the lives of the protagonists because its principle of functioning relies in “corporeal transgression”, meaning a “fictional representation of the body exceeding itself or falling apart, either opening up or being altered past the point where it would be recognised by normative understandings of human corporeality.” (Reyes, 2014, 11). Theresa’s and Jack’s conjoined bodies act as visual markers for the cinematic evaluation of Lovecraft’s construct of cosmic hostility: their intertwining reveals a newly-charged “gothic body” able to abuse the audience’s gaze and cast a grotesque shadow on preconceived notions of bodily integrity. Like other “gothic bodies” in the horror genre “they are scary because they either refuse absolute human taxonomies or destabilise received notions of what constitutes a ‘normal’ or socially intelligible body.” (Reyes, 2014, 5) Similarly to von Hagens’ plastinated exhibits, the Gardners’ corporeal transgressions reveal the

transformative power of the anatomical device. It shows how the theme of death can be didactically exposed through a frightening tale of anatomical disfigurement. By exposing monstrous appearances of the body, *Color Out of Space* ultimately reveals itself as an exquisite take on the Lovecraftian universe, while also making a strong claim on the representational versatility of anatomy-sourced visual rebellions.

*BodyWorlds*, *Hymn* and *Color Out of Space* ultimately reflect how meditation upon death represents an enduring concern for a certain genre of art production, no matter the medium it is

worked out through. The display of the human body in the spirit of democratising medical knowledge is not divorced from the awareness of its museological context, but rather it thrives on it and entails a response from the audience that far exceeds its pedagogical framework. Contemporary anatomical art walks a fine line between exposing crucial anxieties about the mortal condition of humankind and obliterating the concomitant aspects of violence involved in its own production. Hence, it preserves an ambivalence that is worth being critically broken down.

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## **B. MISCELLANEA**



## “CHRIST, THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE”: SAMUEL VON BRUKENTHAL’S BRITISH BOOKS ON CHRISTIAN CIVILITY

Alexandru-Ilie MUNTEANU

Ph. D., Brukenthal Library, Brukenthal National Museum,

E-mail: alexandru.munteanu@brukenthalmuseum.ro

**Abstract:** Religion played an important educational role in Modern Europe, regardless of the social status of the individual. In his work, *The Process of Civilization*, Norbert Elias analyzed a major historical process that began in Early Modernity, that of civilizing. Chartier also dealt with this idea. Both highlighted the important part played by books in this process, especially by an ever more successful type of literature: educational, civility related and practical. The popularity of these books increased more and more as elites all across Europe tried to civilize, to promote a new behavioral model, in opposition to the impulsive Medieval one, which was causing havoc in the context of the Reformation vs Counter-Reformation. Out of the roughly 700 editions printed in Britain that Brukenthal had in his library, around 30 deal with civility – secular and Christian, being destined for the general literate population as well as for the clergymen. The presence of these works printed in Britain in a Transylvanian private library stands testimony to their reach on the European book market in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Keywords:** Christian Civility, British Books, education, Samuel von Brukenthal, private library

**Rezumat:** Religia a jucat un rol educativ important în Epoca Modernă, indiferent de statutul social al individului. În lucrarea sa *Procesul civilizării*, Norbert Elias a analizat un proces istoric major care a început în Modernitatea Timpurie, cel al civilizării. Chartier s-a aplecat și el asupra acestei idei. Ambii au scos în evidență importanța cărților în acest proces, în special a acelor cărți cu profil educativ, de civilitate și practice. Popularitatea acestor lucrări a crescut din ce în ce mai mult, pe măsură ce elitele din întreaga Europă încercau să civilizeze, să promoveze un nou model comportamental, în opoziție cu cel impulsiv medieval, care făcea ravagii în contextul Reformă vs Contra-Reformă. Din cele circa 700 de ediții tipărite în Britania pe care le-a avut Brukenthal, în jur de 30 erau de civilitate, atât seculară, cât și creștină, fiind destinate populației alfabetizate în general, dar și clerului în particular. Prezența acestor cărți apărute în Britania în colecția privată a unui transilvănean reprezintă un exemplu al răspândirii acestui tip de literatură pe piața europeană a cărții în secolele XVII-XVIII.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Civilitate creștină, Cărți britanice, educație, Samuel von Brukenthal, bibliotecă privată

### Introduction

In 1740, when another edition of John Brown's *Christ The Way and the Truth, and the Life* appeared<sup>1</sup>, the European book market was being flooded with more and more

educational books, many of them with a strong Christian character.

Religion played an important role in education in the Modern Era, regardless of the social status and beliefs of the individual (Ellenzweig 2008, 2). In his work, *The Process of Civilization*, Norbert Elias analyzed a major historical process which began in Early Modernity, that of *civilizing*. Chartier also dealt with this idea. Both highlighted the important role books played in this process, especially by an ever more successful literary genre which roughly encompassed educational, civility related and practical books (Chartier 1997, 101; Jacob 2007, 253).

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<sup>1</sup> John Brown, Minister of Wamphray, Scotland (1610?-1679). His works, including the already mentioned *Christ, The Way and the Truth, and the Life* is still being printed and can be found on Amazon in several editions, a 2007 and a 2016 one. <https://www.amazon.com/Christ-Truth-Life-John-Brown/dp/0978098722>  
<https://www.amazon.com/Christ-Truth-John-Brown-Wamphray/dp/1601784597>

The popularity of these works increased more and more as elites all across Europe tried to civilize, to propose and sometimes impose a new behavioral model, in opposition to the impulsive Medieval one (Ariès 1962, 315), which was causing havoc in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe.

Tens of editions of books regarding civility, both secular and Christian, were identified in the Central European book market in the second half of the 18th century. From *The Whole Duty of Man, A Gentleman's Religion*, to Dodridge's *The Friendly Instructor for Young Ladies*, Duguet's *Institution d'un Prince* and many others, the offer of educational books on the market was growing constantly and they circulated all over Europe.

Samuel von Brukenthal, the governor of the Principality of Transylvania (1774-1787), had tens of editions – most of them reissues - on this topic, even ones that were printed thousands of kilometers away, in the opposite part of Europe, in Britain.

An important part in configuring Samuel von Brukenthal's collection of books printed in Britain is played by such works on *Christian civility* or *civilité chrétienne*, as La Salle called it (Elias I 2002, 140). The inventories of private libraries of aristocrats and scholars, as well as the instructive bibliographies of the time, revealed that, by comparison with other private libraries from Central Europe, Brukenthal's collection of British books on Christian civility had a particular specificity, due to both the number and topics of these works<sup>2</sup>. Out of the roughly 700 editions printed in Britain that Brukenthal had in his library, around 30 deal with civility, both Christian and secular, and were destined for the general literate population, as well as for the clergymen.

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<sup>2</sup> Out of the roughly 30 private library auction catalogues from Western, Central and Eastern Europe, from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that I have analyzed in my PhD thesis, the library of the Dutch theologian Johann Jacob Schultens had the most British books in general and on Christian civility as well, together with Samuel von Brukenthal. *Bibliotheca Schultensiana*, I, p. 104, 156-157, 173, 176, 247, 250-251 etc. See also Alexandru-Ilie Munteanu, *Când periferiile se întălesc: Cărți britanice din biblioteca lui Samuel von Brukenthal și a lui Ignác Batthyány* (teză de doctorat nepublicată).

This paper focuses on five such books from his library, all of them representative to this literary genre: John Wallis with his *Brief and Easie Explanation of the Shorter Catechism* (London, 1662), Thomas Lye, *A plain and familiar method of instructing the younger sort, according to the lesser Catechism* (London, 1672), *The Christian Education of Children According to the Maxims of the Sacred Scripture, and the Instructions of the Fathers of the Church* (London, 1678), John Scott, *The Christian Life* (London, 1702-1705) and Gilbert Burnet with his *Discourse of the Pastoral Care* (London, 1692).

The presence of these works printed in Britain in a Transylvanian private library stands testimony to their reach on the European book market and embodies the goal of this paper, which is to signal their existence at the periphery of Catholic and Protestant Europe. In other words, this paper is a study on the spread of the idea of Christian Civility in Eastern Europe in the Modern Era.

### Education and Civility

"What we learn first, we learn the deepest" is one of the most agreed-upon facts among educators, not just in the present days (Goddard 2011, 563-578), but also in the past (Erasmus 2003, 2, 13; *Education des Enfants (...) ou il est montré de quelle importance sont les premières années de la vie*, 1679, in Deschamps, Brunet, *Supplément*. T. I., 1878, 438-439; *Of Education* 1683, 137; Locke 1752, 2; Rousseau VII 1783, 2). "The well Educating of their Children is so much the Duty and Concern of Parents, and the Welfare and Prosperity of the Nation so much depends on it, that I would have everyone lay it seriously to Heart", warned John Locke, as if to strengthen the idea in parents that one of their main concerns ought to be the proper education of their children (see Locke's *Dedication* to Edward Clarke of Chipley Esq., in Locke 1752, [3]-[4]).

Moreover, the way children are educated steers reactions and opinions from various sides. As Aysha Pollnitz wrote, liberal education was and still is, both treasured and highly criticized (Pollnitz 2015, 1). This is because the education of children always raised discussions of ethics and morality, and the period from which the sources of this paper came from, is no exception: "Cette



premiere éducation appartient incontestablement aux femmes; (...) Parlez donc toujours aux femmes, par préférence, dans vos traits d'éducation", wrote Rousseau in a time when other voices argued that: "Above all, *the example of the Father* is of greater force to educate a Son." (*Of Education* 1683, 23).

Rousseau distinguished three types of education. One coming from within us, represented by the development of our organs and main faculties, or *l'éducation de la nature*, as he called it; then there are the things we learn from others, or *l'éducation des hommes*. Finally, there is our own experience which we constantly grow, *l'éducation des choses* (Rousseau VII 1783, 5).

The education of the individual, regardless if it underwent the process of what we call enculturation or acculturation, or by any other means, was done in several social contexts. In an unofficial environment, like family daily life, or a more official context, such as public or private schools, or again in the family, but under the supervision of a tutor.

At least for now, the oldest use of the word *civility* dates from Erasmus of Rotterdam's *De civilitate morum puerilum*. From that moment until the 1800's, when *civility* suffered a cultural decline similar to that of *courtoisie* after the 1500's (Elias 1 2002, 144-145), the word *civility* was generally understood as the science of a good, accepted behavior and the know-how of speaking well in society (*Encyclopédie* III 1753, 497). In this latter definition, taken from the *Encyclopédie*, *civility* is accompanied by other terms, such as *politesse* and *affabilité*.

In the treatise *Of Education. Especially of young gentlemen*, civility consisted in three major aspects: "1. In *not expressing* by actions, or speeches, *any injury, disesteem, offense or undervaluing* of any other. 2. *In being ready to do all good offices and ordinary kindness* for another. And 3ly in *receiving no injuries and offenses* from others" (*Of Education* 1683, 222). In other words, civility was understood as moderating and restraining ones' feelings and the disciplining of ones' entire behavior (Elias 1 2002, 144). Roger Chartier, on the other hand, regarded civility as a behavioral model that would temper the spontaneity and impulsiveness of

the majority of the population (Chartier 1997, chap. II, III).

### **Catechisms, the ABC of a civilized society in the Modern Era?**

Bound in a rather simple and common binding made up of cardboard and leather, Lye's, *A Plain and Familiar Method of Instructing the Younger sort* and *A Brief and Easie Explanation of the Shorter Catechism* by John Wallis are two books from Brukenthal's library that were printed with the same goal: to catechize, to educate the young in a Christian manner.

The typical method employed in the catechisms was that of question and answer, followed by short answers, including "Yes" or "No", and with instructions for the parents or tutors in guiding the child in learning the basics of the Christian religion.

The difficulty in the questions grew with each one. From "Is God a Spirit?" for which the answer was written very plainly: „Yes", to questions that required a more elaborate answer: "Try the Childs ability, to *expresß* his knowledge of the meaning of every *difficult* word or *phrase* in the preceding Answer" (Lye 1672, [1]). To give just one example, the child was asked what he understood from certain words: "What mean you by this word *Spirit*?", the father would ask, and the child was supposed to reply: "A *spiritual substance, without matter, body, or bodily parts*." (Lye 1672, [1]).

Besides being a testimony on how Europeans were "homeschooled" in the 17th and 18th centuries, books such as Lye's and Wallis's show us the relationship between Christianity and the patriarchal family and the way this Christian worldview was transmitted from generation to generation, a phenomenon which social scientists call *cultural reproduction* (Giddens 1990, 429).

Another short writing of Thomas Lye, found also in this colligatum, *The Assemblies Shorter Catechism Drawn out into distinct propositions* had specific instructions for the father. This document included directions for the "Master of the Family", as he was called, in using the Catechism to get the best results.

Lye recommended reading this book by the whole family constantly, every month (Lye 1672, 1); the very structure of the catechism was divided into days. Only after several re-readings of the Catechism, the

members of the family were allowed to respond without the help of the book: "When you first begin to examine your Family, let them answer *only within Book*; and after you have once, or twice gone over the *whole Catechism within Book*; and that you perceive their understandings to be somewhat *inlightned*, then, *and not till then*, let them be required to answer *without book*." (Lye 1672, 2).

John Wallis's work, *A Brief and Easie explanation of the Shorter Cathechism*, illustrates just how popular these books were. From 1648, when Edmund Calamy printed it for the first time<sup>3</sup>, until 1662, the year of this edition, *A Brief and Easie explanation* was reissued eight times, Brukenenthal's edition being the eight. So roughly one edition yearly. But why so many? Besides the religiosity of Europeans in the period, it brings us to a cause with political implications in Europe in general, as well as in Britain in particular.

"Many Kinds of Religion spring up, as there are Parish-Churches within England; every contentious and ignorant Person clothing his Fancy with the Spirit of God, and his Imagination with the Gift of Revelation, &c (Dugdale 1716, xxvi)". These words of William Dugdale came in a time of great upheaval for Britain: civil wars, religious divisions unlike never before and regicide.

A sense of an ending was pressing upon the secular elites, but mostly on the clergy. John Scott used dramatic words to describe the situation: "In such an Age as this, (wherein, through our Divisions and Debaucheries, both in Opinion and Practice, and the Hellish Contrivances of our Enemies, we have such a dismal Prospect of things before us) these Papers might be of some Use to Religion and the Souls of Men, I would never have troubled the World with them, but hoping they might, I have ventured upon that reason to publish them" (Scott I 1704, [1]).

Gilbert Burnet, another member of the clergy, wrote: "As our Disunion does not only weaken us, but diverts us from that which ought to be our main Concern...; so if we will not take Warning from our Saviour's Words, *That a City or Kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, but must come to an End*" (Burnet 1692, 22).

The implementation of a single *Book of Common Prayer* (*The Booke of Common Prayer* 1634, A2r-A3v) and the ever-growing number of catechisms and books on Christian civility, that appeared in 17th century Britain, edition after edition represented the elites' weapon of choice against civil and religious dissent.

### **Christian civility books, a risky do it yourself cultural incentive?**

To encourage people to read the Bible and other Christian works in the privacy of one's home in a time of social upheaval was quite a risky action for the establishment. And the outcome was not always the desired one, given the multiple cults that emerged in Europe in the Modern Era, almost certainly a product of the *private devotion*, besides the vernacular translations phenomenon.

In the 17th century, especially due to the Reformation zeal, which brought about a rise in literacy among Europeans, but also to other cultural and economical factors, such as the increased life expectancy of children (Ariès 1962, 43, 403-404), the education of the young became more and more important in the eyes of the parents, particularly in aristocratic, bourgeois and gentry households.

In works on Christian civility, like *The Christian Education of Children*, education was perceived as a holy duty towards God, as well as towards the "Master of the family": "Consider, that you can give him no greater proofs of your Love and your Fidelity, than to bring up your children according to the Laws of the Gospel and the Counsels of the Fathers of the Church" (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, [4], see section *The Authors Address to his Sister*; see also Walzer 2013, 227).

These are other words of the same anonymous author of this book to his sister, to whom it was dedicated: "Tis to help you in this laudable design, that I have begged of our Lord Jesus Christ so much light as was necessary for me, to observe in the sacred Scriptures and the Volumes of the Fathers of the Church, those Maxims which ought to be followed in the Education of Children" (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, [5]).

The subtopics of the book varied from *the Excellency of Christian Marriage* (chapter 1), the primordial importance of education among Christians (chapter 2), the errors

<sup>3</sup>"Imprimatur, Edm. Calamy. Aug. 25. 1648" appears on the back of the title leaf.

parents make in the process of educating their young (chapters 2 and 3), the mother's role in the Christian education of the child (chapter 4), to the obligation of both parents in educating their children in a Christian manner (chapter 5), maxims and advice for parents (chapters 8, 9 and 10), the ages in which those maxims ought to be applied (chapter 11) and many others.

Thus, owners of this book, as was a particular Mary Lawrence in 1729<sup>4</sup>, we're taught about the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, with all that it implied. The parallel made in the book between Jesus, who was the man/husband, and the Church, which "is his Spouse" (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, 7) was not new, but nonetheless it heightened the reader's sense of responsibility towards both the family as well as the Church. In the words of Saint Paul: "Let the Wives, (says this Apostle) be submitted to their Husbands as they are to God: for the Husband is the Head of the Wife, as Christ Jesus is the Head of the Church (...)" (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, 8). As for the husbands, they were demanded to: "Love your Wives as Christ Jesus hath loved his Church, and hath delivered himself to death for her" (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, 8).

The relationship between religious radicalism, education and the formation of a new "exemplary" society in Modern Europe is a known fact. The *politics of the saints*, as Walzer called the puritan movement in Britain, implied demolishing the old order, the old way of seeing the world and designing and building a new one (Walzer 2013, 5, 11-13). Whether the author of the *Christian Education* was a puritan or not we do not know, but one thing is certain, his radicalism: "For this Christian Education consisting in establishing them in a Christian Life, it must destroy in them all that is opposite to this Life; as to love of Honours, of Pleasures, and even of all unprofitable things" (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, 24). In other words: "The Education of Children ought not to be different from the Institutions of Religious people, since in truth we are all Religious, of

the General Religion of Christ Jesus (*The Christian Education of Children* 1678, 25).

John Scott's *The Christian Life* is another example of how popular was this type of literature. The first volume, out of the five that Brukenthal possessed, is at its eight edition. This work of the Anglican theologian stands out in Brukenthal's collection, not just due to its neat Cambridge leather binding, but by the fact that it deals with several defining concepts of the Protestant movement, such as *closet religion* and *private devotion*; it can be regarded as an important work in the general production of theological books in Europe in that time.

Beginning with the Protestant Reformation, Christians were obliged to: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life" (John V.39 from Scott V 1705, 323-365). The idea of *closet religion* implied the *know-how* necessary for Christians in lecturing the Scriptures and in living a Christian life: "By furnishing them with some short *Rules*, for the more profitable Exercise of their *private Religion* in each of those different States, together with *Forms of private Devotion*, fitted to each State" (Scott I 1704, 397). But what was Scott's advice to the readers?

Firstly, "In the *Morning*, before you go into the World, enter into your Closet, and there consider with your self a while the miserable State you have reduced your self to by your past sinful Courses, the absolute Necessity of your forsaking them, and the possibility of your Recovery if you heartily endeavor it; and then address your self to God in this following *Prayer*" (Scott I 1704, 399); a prayer and confession in the same time through which the faithful would open his or hers heart in the face of God. Then "In the *Evening*, when you find your self most fit for serious Thoughts go into your Closet again, and consider coolly with your self whether you are heartily willing to part with every Sin" (Scott I 1704, 403).

The author warned that the revelation of faith, of abandoning sin and following the word of God will not come immediately and that he, the devotee, must not be too hasty in proclaiming his victory over sin: "Beware you be not too hasty to form your Resolution, but take some little time to try your self; see whether you will continue tomorrow of the same mind you are in now, and if then you

<sup>4</sup> A handwriting with: "Mary Lawrence Book 1729" appears on the back of the title page of this particular book from Brukenthal's library.

perceive you have reason to suspect your self, try a little longer (...) and while you are thus trying your self, instead of the former, let this be your *Evening Prayer*" (Scott I 1704, 405-406). The goal of it all being summed up in an entire chapter called *Its ultimate End: Heaven* (Scott I 1704, 1-25).

"It is above Twenty Years since this Book was first published by me (...) I am now in the 70th Year of my Age", Gilbert Burnet wrote from Salisbury on November 15, 1712 (Burnet 1692, 3-4). Different from the books analyzed above in terms of content and the public for whom it was destined, Burnet's *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care* had in essence the same goal, to educate in a Christian manner, but from a different perspective, of the clergy. Samuel von Brukenenthal had in his library the third edition of this book. It contains a dedication *To the Queens Most Excellent Majesty*, a summary, a preface for the third edition, nine chapters, conclusions and an additional tenth chapter.

In general, in Britain, the catechizing of children, especially from low-income families, was the duty of parishes. However, priests were helped in this effort, as we have seen, by the parents, in their household, mostly in gentry and aristocrat households (Jacob 2007, 194, 205, 222, 236-240).

With this work, Burnet wanted to help consolidate the Anglican Church, by a proper instruction of the clergy: "It is chiefly on design to raise the sense of the Obligations of the Clergy to the Duties of the *Pastoral Care*, that this book is written" (Burnet 1692, XVII). In his dedication to the Queen, he wrote that: "But tho Your Majesty's Royal Ancestors have done so much for us, there remains yet a great deal to be done for the completion of our Reformation, especially as to the Lives and Manners of men. This will most effectually be done by obliging the Clergy to be more exemplary in their Lives, and more diligent and faithful in the discharge of their Pastoral Duty" (Burnet 1692, [3]. The book offered instructions for the Anglican priests regarding the dignity that came with their job, rules-driven from the Scriptures for the administration of holy matters, rules of the

Anglican Church, what they had to study, about the duties and tasks they had to undergo.

When it came to the responsibility of clergymen in the education of the young, Burnet had some clear thoughts: "The greatest good that one can hope to do in this World is upon young Persons" (Burnet 1692, 141). The author pointed out that education was very important and that: "Great care must be taken in the Instruction of the Youth" (Burnet 1692, 186), because: "Every Priest, that minds his Duty, will find that no Part of it is so useful to his People, as *once every year* to go through the whole *Church Catechism*, Word by Word, and make his People understand the Importance of every Title in it" (Burnet 1692, 187).

## Conclusions

In many ways, Christian civility books remind us that what we nowadays call or not so long ago called *civilized conduct* is a cultural construct, not a natural given, consequentially it suffered mutations and will undergo changes in the future as well.

Since its inception by the secular and ecclesiastical elites, the idea of *civility* was viewed as a tool for strengthening the fabric of society by tempering the spontaneity, impulsiveness and unpredictability of human behavior, especially in a context of roughly two centuries of intense religious dissent and instability.

The mixture of civility and Christianity gave this new *civilized* behavioral model the value of duty towards not just society, but especially towards God. In other words, Christian civility was a way of integrating oneself in society, and more important even, it assured the individual a place in Heaven.

Given a large number of reissuings of the same editions and their far reach on the European continent, from the British Isles to Transylvania, Christian civility books were, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, a constant presence on the European book market and not rarely acquirable at an affordable price.

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## A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN. THE ROLE OF HOMILETICS IN SHAPING THE ROMANIAN ENLIGHTENMENT IN TRANSYLVANIA<sup>1</sup>

Laura STANCIU

Senior Lecturer, PhD.

“1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, Romania

E-mail: laurastanciu@hotmail.com

**Abstract:** *The author deemed it necessary to reconsider the Prediche [Sermons] from the perspective of this work's social impact in the Romanian environment of Transylvania. The analysis of this corpus seems even more necessary as it has been assessed that the work reflects the type of modernity that the Romanians experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, the spreading and popularity of books in the Romanian society of the age also offered good reasons to see the author of the sermons as a “new type of scholar”, a Romanian Aufklärer from Transylvania.*

*Despite the conservative homiletics, in the discussion of the sermons the author has chosen to emphasize the distinct elements of Romanian Enlightenment, adapted to the local conditions of Transylvania, configured by the Catholic Enlightenment of Central Europe. The study also mentions the benefits for Transylvanian intellectualism of the Protestant Reformation (especially Calvinism), the Catholic Reformation (the Council of Trent), Baroque emulation, and the need for emancipation imposed by the Enlightenment.*

**Keywords:** *Society, Church, Transylvanian School, Philosophers, Priests, Josephinism, Parishioners.*

**Rezumat:** *Autorul a considerat necesar să reconsidere Prediche [Predicile] din perspectiva impactului social al acestei opere în mediul românesc din Transilvania. Analiza acestui corpus pare cu atât mai necesară cu cât s-a apreciat că lucrarea reflectă tipul de modernitate pe care l-au trăit românii în secolul al XIX-lea. În mod similar, răspândirea și popularitatea cărților în societatea românească a epocii au oferit, de asemenea, motive întemeiate pentru a vedea autorul predicilor ca un „nou tip de învățat”, un Aufklärer românesc din Transilvania. În ciuda omileticii conservatoare, în discuția despre predici, Autorul a ales să sublinieze elementele distincte ale iluminismului românesc, adaptate condițiilor locale din Transilvania, configurate de iluminismul catolic din Europa Centrală. Studiul menționează, de asemenea, beneficiile pentru intelectualismul transilvănean în cazul Reformei protestante (în special calvinismului), Reformei Catolice (Conciliul de la Trent), emulația barocă și necesitatea de emancipare impusă de Iluminism.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *societate, biserică, școală transilvăneană, filozofi, preoți, iosefinism, enoriași.*

The Prediche went through a lengthy preparation period, it was a precursor to other works of Maior, and it was written gradually (hence the term “selected” in the title), as the author acquired more maturity and experience serving as a protopope of Gurghiu and a

parish priest of Magyar - Reghin, in the entire period between 1784-1809. Although the Propovedanii, Didahii, and Prediche [Funeral orations, Teachings and Sermons] were the first works of Maior published in Buda, they were overshadowed by his later works which reflected the political and

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<sup>1</sup>The abbreviated version of this study was published under the name „Despre conținutul religios al Iluminismului ardelean: *Predichele* lui Petru Maior (Buda, 1810) “, in *Transilvania*, nr. 4-5, 2016, p. 27-34.

cultural agenda of the time: *Istoria pentru începutul românilor în Dacia* [The history of the beginnings of the Romanians in Dacia] and *Istoria Bisericei Românilor* [The history of the Church of the Romanians]. The situation remained unchanged, unduly we might say, if considered that Petru Maior's homiletics mirrors the daily life of Romanians and describes the – albeit slow – assimilation of modernity in the Romanian community of Transylvania (Stanciu, Circa 2011, 44-48). These texts express the joint efforts of Church and State at the very moment when these efforts started having their effects on the emancipation of ordinary people (Hazard, 1973, 451).

### **Between Tradition and Innovation: Roots and Influences**

Prior to the publication of the *Prediche sau Învățăture la toate duminicile și sărbătorile anului* [Sermons or Teachings for all Sundays and Feast days of the year], the only homiletics of the Greek Catholic Church had been the *Propovedanii sau Învățăture la îngropăciunea oamenilor morți* [Funeral orations or teachings for the burial of the dead] by Samuil Micu (Blaj, 1784). While Samuil Micu's work was the first Romanian book of funeral orations in the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, Maior's work was the first book of Sunday and feast day sermons meeting the requirements of Josephinism. Samuil Micu's funeral orations were a continuation of the specific Transylvanian practice of learned funeral speeches influenced by Calvinism, highlighted by titles such as the *Sicriul de Aur* [The golden coffin: funeral orations] of Ioan Zoba, Protopope of Vinț and the *Cazaniile la morți* [Funeral teachings] printed in Bălgrad (Alba Iulia) in 1689 (Szegedi 2005, 70-85; Dumitran 2007, 270-275, 398, 405). By contrast, Maior's sermons illustrated the requirements of Catholic Reformation recalibrated by the ideology of the Enlightenment, which saw education as the main force of social change (Duchhardt 2003, 132-139). In Transylvania, this trend was announced by Ioan Zoba's work *Cărea pre scurt pre fapte*

*bune îndreptătoare* [Short path: sermons on how to be a good Christian] printed at Alba Iulia in 1685 (Zoba 2019, 421-423).

Petru Maior inherited a certain Eastern tradition of homiletics in Romanian, which his work displays on the whole, but transforms it into an original style and enriches it with the experience of the Western culture and values that had influenced his education (Stanciu 2015, 273-321). As concerns the sources of his sermons, Maior was undoubtedly influenced by the earlier homiletic literature, learned or anonymous, which he was both informed about and interested in. However, no direct connections can be established between the homiletic literature circulating in Transylvania in printed or manuscript form and the text of Maior's sermons. We can only speak about certain similarities or proximities. At the same time, in the case of various passages, the direct influence of the Jesuit Paolo Segneri (1624-1694) can be demonstrated, as it had been done in the bibliography (Segneri 1724, *passim*). Segneri was an illustrious preacher of Baroque Catholicism whose work was studied by Romanian alumni (Grigore Maior, Gheorghe Șincai and Petru Maior) in Rome (Stanciu 2016, 48-59), at the Collegium Urbanum De Propaganda Fide, and his work was Maior's major model. His book, *Il Quaresimale*, a pivotal work for mass evangelization in the age, was preserved in Maior's library (Stanciu 2010, 160-166).

### **The Sermons between Catholic *Aufklärung* and Josephinism**

The originality of Maior's work lies in the way he reemployed and transformed the previous Romanian homiletic literature, enriching it with the imperatives of Catholic Reformation. The *Aufklärung* reestablished the social position of these imperatives, emphasizing the importance of education and dissemination of knowledge on all channels, both orally and through repetitive reading (Jodock 2000, 3; Klueting 2010, 140-145). The most



forceful idea of the sermons is the decision of the priest – a civil intellectual, according to the concept of Josephinism – to “walk towards the masses, to reach them and persuade them” (Barnett 2003, 57-62). Even with the limited means available for a cleric, this was Maior’s ambition and the novelty of his book, which placed him and his work within the ideology of the Enlightenment, and which won him his audience and later his readers. In a manner less visionary than in the *Didahii*, where he saw parental love as the main source of regeneration and education, with the *Prediche* and *Propovedanii* he offered for the Romanian priesthood of Transylvania the fundamental work of pastoral guidance, and for the congregation a source of Enlightened education for the rest of their lives, guiding them on the road of modernization (Maior 2018, *passim*; Gherman 2015, 109-120).

While European historiography speaks openly about the religious origin of the Enlightenment, Transylvania was precisely the territory where this Central European version was experimented (Trevor - Roper 1967, 181, 183, 189). For instance, in this context, there are discussions about the role of Calvinism in the intellectual revolution of the 17th century, which was also at the basis of the origins of the Enlightenment in Transylvania (Schmale 2012, 333-351). Even if one only considers the contribution of Calvinists in translating and delivering sermons in the vernaculars of Transylvania (in particular Hungarian and Romanian), one may recognize the role of Reformation in the first attempts to transform the sermon into an instrument of future pedagogy of the Enlightenment (Szegedi 2002, 36-43; Lehner 2010, 16-44). In the environment of Catholic Reformation, the intellectual education of the first theologians of Blaj in schools dominated by Jesuits and then Jansenists was decisive for their career and work and helps us understand the sources they used for their theological works (Hersche 1977, 189). The analysis of these works reveals the religious origins of their conceptions, and indicates how the Enlightenment was structured and

defined in Transylvania: namely, that specific unity in diversity of Catholic Reformation perceivable in the differences between various branches (Febronianism and Jansenism), the conflicts between Jesuits and Jansenists, and even the role of different tendencies of Jansenist groups (Italian, French, Austrian) influencing the Catholic Enlightenment in the Habsburg Empire (Stanciu 2014, 71-115). I refer primarily to the Jansenism of philosophers or journalists (Muratori, Bellarmino) who condemned superstition, obscurantism and the deceptiveness of all those who spoke about Christian morals and fought against forms of religiousness they considered backward: pietism, mysticism (Munck 2000, 7-14). Jansenism gained great attractiveness both in the church and in the social and political fields. The Church and the State were at a deadlock, and the crisis needed reforms. Gradually, in their confrontation with the Jesuits, the Jansenists adopted a behavior suitable for ideological debates, which generated solutions for the reformation of society: erudition and discipline of priests, moral and intellectual development of the clergy, simplicity of cult and devotion, promotion of pragmatism, or a spiritual perspective on the history of the church (Klueting 2010, 147-148, 150-152). This was the terrain where Jansenist ideas met with the requirements of the Enlightenment as expressed in the works of intellectuals like Febronius, Montesquieu, Renaudot, Pufendorf, Sonnenfels or Wolff (Outram 2008, 282-284).

Starting from the text of the sermons, the editors seek answers for the following questions: how much of the religious doctrines played an essential role in changing the mentality? Or were they only an influence on moral discipline? To answer these questions, two more should be asked: how much of religious tradition counted on the level of society and coincided with the ideals of the Enlightenment? How much of these theses can we recognize as predecessors of the ideology of the Enlightenment? As an extension of the catechesis of Catholic

Reformation, which fuelled the principles of education in the age, homiletics was a fertile ground for the clash of the viewpoints of Baroque theology and philosophy and then the Enlightenment (Ghișe Teodor 1972, 206). Maior's attraction for education and his will to detach from the previous kind of homiletics in Transylvania, even Samuil Micu, did not mean that the *Prediche* were penetrated by Enlightenment philosophy (Teodor 2000, 272-274), even if Maior was more engaged with the principles of Enlightenment education than his predecessor, Samuil Micu, both in conception and in the heuristic style of his sermons (Hitchins 1964, 662-663). This attitude appears in all of Maior's sermons, conceived under the influence of *Sapere aude!*, the imperative of the Enlightenment. Following Kant (in the text *Was ist Aufklärung*, 1784), and also influenced by the Baroque rhetoric of the Italian Paolo Segneri, Maior urged his flock to think, to discover the passion of knowledge. We see here the authentic conception of a Catholic intellectual of the Enlightenment who used the knowledge of the Catholic Reformation and engaged the views of the Council of Trent on pastoral responsibility and the need to catechize his flock (Neumann 2013, 40-51). From the editors' perspective, Maior illustrates the local side of the Catholic Enlightenment precisely by the essential parts of his homiletics: the ethics of good and the ethics of duty which were in fact the pillars of the Catholic *Aufklärung*. The individual good which makes one do one's duty towards the society was the stake of the joint efforts of the Church and State for the emancipation of man (Schneider 1992, 104). Most representatives of the Catholic Enlightenment considered that progress must always be based on the supernatural help of the Church because without it evolution would always be constrained by mundane reformism. This is how one can explain why Maior's sermons, despite their homiletic genre, are related to the European literature of the Enlightenment, promoting, by the works of Bianchi, Baumeister, Febronius, Muratori, Pufendorf and Wolff,

the wellbeing and happiness of all man in the private and public spheres as channels that lead to the emancipation of the individual and the elevation of the community (Martus 2015, 507-515). The meeting point is precisely the ideas of Catholics of the period who considered that religious texts marked the daily life of people and stood at the basis of society, generating freedom of speech and tolerance (Porter 2001, 96-100). They believed in the rationality of man ("*lumen naturale*"), they were optimistic about social changes, which they saw as founded on the potential of human nature, which can always be perfected (Outram 2008, 282-284). It is an anthropological view of theology originally based on pietism and Molinism, but dominant in the Catholic Enlightenment, which stood firmly against scholasticism, dogmatism, prejudices and superstitions, militated for the limitation of monastic privileges and ensured the progress of education of the secular and regular clergy (Lehner 2010, 3-5, 9-15). Even if it was less spectacular on a social scale, it was a substantial result of the joint efforts of the Church and State in reforming the countries of the Habsburg Monarchy. Although they were constrained by their clerical education and the environment and rules of the church, these thinkers were thought of as reformers who did not want to achieve progress through revolutions but through the abolition of obsolete systems and the constructive criticism of papal despotism and the abusive power of bishops (Schmale 2012, 333-351). They had a new perspective on the relationship between the Church and State, they defended the sinodality of the Church and believed that only the national churches, autonomous from Rome, are capable of introducing the reforms they called for (Maior 1998, *passim*; Stanciu 2017, p. 83-116).

In Transylvania, in contrast with the West, the relationship of Church and State was not something abstract, limited to the clerical and secular elite, but it descended to the level of the commoners (Munck 2000, 29-37). These religious texts

mirror the particularities of the East compared to the West also on the level of historical anthropology, meaning the religious life, popular religion, as experienced in communities of Eastern Christianity as opposed to Western (Hitchins 1964, 662-663; idem 1997, 35-41). With all their efforts to adapt to the rules of the Catholic Church, and their struggle to assimilate the standards of western culture, the Greek Catholic clerical elite was never iconoclast. It remained attached to the values of the East (Suttner 2013, 101-102). Maior for instance used in his sermons citations equally from Western (Saint Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great [cited by Maior as Gregory the Dialogist, as used in Eastern Christianity]) and Eastern (Saint Cyril, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, Gregory of Nazianzos) patristic literature as well as philosophers, historians, writers or orators of Greek and Roman Antiquity (Aristotle, Diogenes, Plato, Plutarch, Seneca, Socrates, Suetonius, Tacitus, Tertullian).

At the same time, these religious texts also prove the knowledge of a series of cultural references of the European Enlightenment and display a certain type of intellectual: the Catholic or ecclesiastical intellectual of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, it also shows that in Transylvania, even in the 18th century, culture and religion were one, and this is the way to understand and explain the role of culture in the social emancipation of the Romanians. This way the Romanian culture of Transylvania stands as an example of European culture where the Aufklärung did not exclude the Church and the dogma (Barnett 2003, 190-194). As everywhere across Central Europe, for the adepts of these ideas, the Catholic Aufklärung meant the harmonization of rationality with revelation in the struggle against the tradition of intolerance and superstition, for the progress of society (Daly 2000, 87-90). While most Catholic representatives of the Enlightenment sought to combine rational knowledge and tradition, Maior's sermons wish to overlap the pragmatic, utilitarian

rationalism and the mystical relationship with the sacred that is part of the Romanian tradition and the traditional forms of Baroque piety. At this point, the Romanian representative of the Enlightenment differs from the Catholic Aufklärer who contests Baroque piety. This was the element with impact on a social scale that explains the success of Maior's homiletics which, despite its limits, eventually configured the modern mentality of Romanians from Transylvania in their attitudes, aspirations and convictions.

Through these texts, Maior illustrates better than anyone else in Romanian culture the type of Aufklärung embraced by Transylvanians, the harmonization of faith and the rationality of the Catholic Enlightenment. All the more so as, in Vienna's perspective based on Jansenist doctrine, the sermon was an agent of change, as the main means of the individual's social emancipation. Over and above everything else, these texts inform the period in which the turn towards modernity finally took place in Transylvania as well. This is the time when the priest transforms from a guide of his flock into a true leader of his community, becoming a modern intellectual involved in social life (Stanciu, Circa 2011, 44-50). Petru Maior's *Prediche* is the terrain where the "civil theologian" meets the "civil historian". This is how the success of these texts can be explained and this is how they help us discover an involved intellectual with a reforming attitude who surpassed the status of a simple imitator of the Jesuit Paolo Segneri's sermons.

From the believer's perspective, the popularity of Maior's homiletics, regardless of its Greek Catholic or other confessional context, rural or urban environment, is explained by how it offered guidance and advice anchored in daily life. The priest was not merely a counselor of his flock but answered to the Josephinian commandment in his capacity to transform into a true leader capable of becoming a promoter of the ideology of the Enlightenment (Schneider 1992, 104). This very capacity of homiletics to respond to the

challenges of daily life made it important for historical research as well. These texts mirror perceptions and attitudes from various perspectives reflect an undifferentiated reality of various social strata regardless of the age and intellectual level of the audience. In addition to the continuous ambition of linguistic innovation, it was the strong connection that Maior's homiletics established between the teaching of the Church and social reality that ensured the success of the book and explained its contribution to the construction of modern Romanian culture in Transylvania.

### Conclusions

Against the backdrop of Catholic Aufklärung, the *Prediche* demonstrate a successful combination of Jansenism and Josephinism by the modern use of homiletics as an instrument in the service of the State that is utilized to penetrate to the level of urban and rural communities. As much as it was possible, the message sent by the priest each Sunday established a relationship between Church and State precisely by the communication of the secular and religious values that could be transmitted in a homiletic speech. Through the sermon, the most efficient communication discourse of the time, the priest became a mentor for his flock, speaking about European culture and disseminating its values: Greek and Latin classicism and Judeo - Christianity.

These texts combining tradition and innovation are also attractive for the historian because they showcase how a Romanian Greek Catholic priest familiarized himself with the ideas of the age. The theses

of Catholic Reformation, the agenda of the Enlightenment, and the objectives of Josephinism were the elements that fuelled Maior's homiletics. The *Prediche* offered the chance to communicate theological knowledge to the laity, precisely because the volume was disseminated as a work of practical theology which made its author famous. At the same time, the circulation of the book in the entire province and the popularity of the work also contributed to the formation of the modern unitary culture of Transylvania (Blaga 1966, 204-205).

In the age of the rationalization of religion, which meant the acceptance of faith and the politics of the Church (Porter 2001, 102-129), but equally – albeit slightly – a time of indifference and disbelief also in the Romanian world, one can speak about the ability of a representative of the Catholic Enlightenment to spread the ideas of the time through homiletics.

How much of the ideas of the Enlightenment could be understood, shared and disseminated by the priest? In a time when, even for the empiricist John Locke, as for most of the representatives of the Enlightenment, religion was a school of virtues, for Samuil Micu or Petru Maior rational faith was the way to progress. Read in this manner, the *Prediche* proves the progressiveness of a priest who took on the mission to guide his flock on the way of modernization precisely with the instruments offered by the Catholic Enlightenment. The message of the book had a decisive role in shaping the Romanian Enlightenment in Transylvania, despite its religious content which was a response adapted to the local development of Romanian society.

Translated from Romanian  
by Emese Czintos

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## THE CULT OF HEROES DURING THE AUTHORITY MONARCHY OF KING CAROL II: OLTENIA (1938 – 1940)

**Diana-Mihaela PĂUNOIU**

Researcher III PhD.

“C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” Institute for Studies in

Social Sciences and Humanities, Craiova

Email: dianamihaelapaunoiu@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *In the analysed period, the Cult of Heroes gained a high importance, because specific manifestations were considered civic-educational means of training and reinforcement of national patriotism. On the other hand, from a contextual necessity, created from the imminence of a new war and from the particularities of the authority monarchy regime, the Cult of Heroes had set in the middle of ideological principles the patriotism, the sacrifice for Country and King. From the analysed archive documents, it appears that in Oltenia/Olt County the Cult of Heroes was promoted within all social categories containing the adult population and also the youth. Thereby, various celebrations of the Nation's Heroes can be found: public ceremonies dedicated to the heroicization of death and veneration of hero's memory (Hero's Day – Ascension of Lord etc.); building of cemeteries for heroes, caring the graves and monuments specific to the Cult of Heroes; building the “living monuments” – parks of heroes etc. All carried, partially, the ideological load of the regime, but also an emotional component a lot more authentic compared to other festive events of the regime. The authenticity of the moments dedicated to the Cult of Heroes stemmed from the identification of the participant crowd with significance of dead heroes remembrance, those fallen on the fields of honour. That authenticity was prompted by the loss of the loved ones and, partially, by the heroism and virtues that led the soldiers to fight for their country. Beyond the particularities of authority monarchy regime of King Carol II, can be stated that, through the practice of Cult of Heroes the memory of nation's heroes was kept alive, bringing in, during that stage of Romanian and Oltenia history, added value to the construction of collective memory.*

**Keywords:** *heroicization of death, parks of heroes, funeral monuments, Hero's Day, commemorative events.*

**Rezumat:** *În perioada analizată, Cultul Eroilor a dobândit o importanță crescută, deoarece manifestărilor specifice erau considerate un mijloc civico-educativ de formare și întărire a patriotismului național, dar și dintr-o necesitate contextuală izvorâtă din iminența unui nou război și din particularitățile regimului monarhiei autoritare, care avea așezate în centrul principiilor ideologice patriotismul, jertfa față de Patrie și Rege. Din documentele de arhivă analizate, reiese că în Oltenia/Ținutul Olt Cultul Eroilor a fost promovat în rîndul tuturor categoriilor sociale cuprinzând atât populația adultă cât și tineretul. Astfel, se regăsesc comemorări Eroilor Neamului diverse (Ziua Eroilor – Înălțarea Domnului etc.); construirea de cimitire ale eroilor, îngrijirea mormintelor și a monumentelor specifice Cultului Eroilor; construirea „monumentelor vii” – parcuri ale eroilor etc. Toate purtau, în parte, încărcătura ideologică a regimului, dar și o componentă emoțională mult mai autentică în comparație cu alte evenimente festive ale regimului. Autenticitatea momentelor dedicate Cultului Eroilor izvora din identificarea mulțimii participante cu semnificațiile comemorării morții eroilor căzuți pe câmpurile de onoare, precum și cu identificarea acestora cu durerea pierderii celor dragi și, în parte, cu eroismul și virtuțile care i-au determinat pe soldați să lupte pentru țara lor. Dincolo de particularitățile regimului monarhiei autoritare a regelui Carol al II-lea, se poate afirma că, prin toate acțiunile, demersurile și activitățile specifice Cultului Eroilor s-a menținut vie memoria eroilor neamului, aducându-se, în această etapă din istoria României și a Olteniei, un plus de valoare la construirea memoriei colective.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *eroicizarea morții, parcurile eroilor, monumente funerare, Ziua Eroilor, evenimente comemorative*

The celebration of death, as well as its heroicization is a phenomenon seen within humane communities, from the oldest times, its

significations being particularized depending on religious beliefs, local customs, as well as political particularities specific to states or



geographic areas. (See for a detailed analysis Mihalache 2007, *passim*).

Through the cult of heroes shall mean: “the total of actions and ceremonies carried out by the institutions of the state or nongovernmental that had the purpose the remembrance of the militaries and civilians fallen in battle for their country”, but also “the whole of mortuary constructions, cenotaphs, cemeteries built in the same purpose”, in the same category including also the publications edited with the purpose of popularisation the achievements and actions related to the cult of heroes (Hentea 2012, 363).

Up until the First World War, the veneration of the memory of heroes (organisation and participation at the public ceremonies, construction of memorial monuments etc.) – soldiers dead during the independence war 1877-1878 or Balkan wars 1912-1913 – is seen amongst the preoccupations of the public authorities, but especially in the centre of activities of veterans societies<sup>1</sup>, established in the first decade of the XXth century (Dobrin, 2003, 93-96). Also, amongst the celebrations from the first two decades of the XXth century, can be found the celebrations of some of the representative personalities for Romanian history (Ștefan cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul, Alexandru Ioan Cuza – See widely, for a detailed analysis, Mihalache, 2007, 71-123, 150-232).

After the end of the First World War, the Cult of Heroes, commemorating *the collective hero, the generic soldier, the collective sacrifice*, becomes a common phenomenon in the European space and not only, between 1919 and

1922 taking place numerous ceremonies for the burial of the unknown soldier. The Tomb of the Unknown Hero/Soldier becomes a national symbol of “the heroes dead for the country”. In Romania, the Cult of the Unknown Hero was legislated on September 12, 1919, when the Society “The Tombs of the heroes fallen in war” was established (under the leadership of Queen Maria), which became, in 1927, the Society “Cult of Heroes”, in 1940, “The National Settlement Queen Maria for the Cult of Heroes”, disbanded in 1948 by the communists (Hentea, 2012, 363-364).

In 1938-1940 period, during the authority monarchy of king Carol II, the Cult of Heroes gained new valences, arising from the particularities and restrictions of the carlist regime, the public ceremonies and symbolic representations (monuments, shrines etc.) being included and subordinated to the official propaganda apparatus (Păunoiu, 2013, *passim*).

The analysis of the archive documents available to us reveals the fact that, between 1938 and 1940, the Cult of Heroes gained an increased importance, the projection of its representations in the public space registering a widening of possibilities. The patriotism and sacrifice for the Country were essential concepts for the definition and shaping of the carlist citizen, but also for the formation of citizen’s willingness to fight for the country in an eventual new war. The Cult of Heroes, with all the manifestations and representation in the public space, was under the control and monopoly of state’s authorities, being used as a tool for civil-educational propaganda, targeting the youth and also the adult population.

The Cult of Heroes in the analysed period manifested under various forms: public ceremonies organized with the occasion of celebrations dedicated to the heroicization of death and the remembrance of hero’s memory (Hero’s Day – Ascension of Lord, Navy’s Day – August 15, “Day dedicated to Heroes and Great men”, From the Week of Guardianship [Străjeriei]) or with the occasion of other events: building cemeteries for heroes, care of the tombs and monuments specific to the Cult of Heroes; building the “living monuments” – parks of heroes; establishing the golden books of heroes of the nation etc.

### **The Cult of Heroes and the youth**

The national-patriotic education of the youth had at its base also the Cult of Heroes of the Nation. Besides the participation of the guardians at the festivities organized with the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, “Societatea Veteranilor Grade Inferioare din Oltenia «Smârdan»”, with the headquarter in Craiova, established on May 11, 1908, (30 years from the Independence War of Romanian State), formed by the veterans with inferior ranks that participated in the War for Independence from 1877-1878 and had stated amongst the purpose of the society: building a commemorative monument, symbolizing all the soldiers from Oltenia that died in the War and former commander of Division, general Mihail Cristudol Cerchez, „The hero from Plevna” – „towards the eternal memory and examples for young generations”; as well as the participation *in corpore* at the military solemnities of other occasional solemnities (National Archives Dolj, Constantin Puțoreanu fund, file no. 9, f. 174-174v.). On September 23, 1918, is established the Society of Fighters 1913, 1916-1918, inferior ranks „General Al. Averescu”, from Craiova. On march 30, the two society will join under the name United Societies „Smârdan” Veterans from [18]77-[18]78 and Fighters 1913-1916-1919 Inferior Ranks „General Al. Averescu”, keeping the purpose regarding the commemoration of the soldiers fallen on the battlefield (*Ibidem*, f. 1-3; Păunoiu, Mitrică 2010, 130).

occasion of national holidays, in “The Week of the Guardianship” (June 1-7), finished with “The Celebration of Youth and Restoration” (June 8), a special day was planned, on June 5<sup>th</sup> to honour the heroes, called “Day dedicated to Heroes and great men” (Păunoiu, 2013, 32).

The guardian’s schedule was within the one developed by the Society “Cult of Heroes”, having, in general, the same pattern. In the first part of the day, at the cemetery of heroes or at the tomb of the heroes or at the church (in cities where no hero cemetery or tomb existed) were held religious services with special text written for heroes, followed by the requiem and the appeal of heroes (for some the guardians answered: “Present”, and for others : “dead for the Country”); short and “impressive” speeches of a delegated guardian; depositions of crowns, flowers at the tombs, monuments, accompanied by singing patriotic songs („Pe-al nostru steag”, „Imnul nostru”, „Imnul Regal”), holding a moment of silence by the crowd; parades facing the tombs or monuments. In the after-noon the guardians would visit the exhibitions of the great Romanian artists, at the birth places of local personalities (“Places of birth, living, sufferance, death, eventual care of the houses”, gathering of their representative objects in a single place), organisation and participation at celebrations “showing the actions of great people born in the town” (*Straja Țării*, 1939, 205-207; Păunoiu, 2013, 32). In the week before “The Week of the Guardianship”, the guardians made preparations for the ceremony dedicated to The Cult of Heroes: clean the monument and finish the care of the tombs in the cemetery etc. (*Straja Țării*, 1939, 207).

The guardians will deposit crowns at the monuments/tombs of heroes also with other occasions. For example, on November 25, 1939, with the occasion of celebration of the patron of High school of Girls “Ecaterina Teodoroiu” from Târgu Jiu, a group of guardians, together with the school inspector, the guardian’s commander and a group of professors deposit a crown of flowers at the tomb of the Hero “Ecaterina Teodoroiu” (National Archive Dolj, Rezidența regală a ținutului Olt fund, file no. 9/1939, f. 217).

The build of collective memory and the national-patriotic education within the rank of youth was done also with the help of spectacles and movies reproducing scenes of heroism/bravery from Romanian history. For example, at the beginning of 1938, the president of City Community Centre “Mihai Eminescu” from Craiova, affiliated to the Royal Cultural

Foundation “Prince Carol” Oltenia Region, was asking the director of “Frații Buzești” high school to allow the students to participate at the spectacle that the community house was about to organize at the National Theatre from Craiova on February 27, 1938: “a matinee for students with the play: «HORIA, CLOȘCA ȘI CRIȘAN», 5 acts by M. Pascaly, [...] given that the play represents a page from history: The revolution and sufferance’s of the three martyrs from 1784 that fought for the freedom of Romanian nation”. (National Archive Dolj, „Frații Buzești” Highschool Craiova fund, file no. 5/1938, file without number<sup>2</sup>).

Viewing by the students of some historic movies in the same day with the promulgation of the “King Carol II” Constitution was not by accident, this way was achieved the association of the promulgation of the new fundamental law of Romania with heroic acts from the history of Romanian nation. Besides, the King, in his proclamation towards the Romanians from February 20, 1938, and in other occasional speeches and proclamations, present itself as “the saviour of the motherland” (Păunoiu, 2012, 28-29).

In the same year, on March 23, the chief inspector of Craiova School Region, based on the order of National Education Ministry, send to directors of secondary schools from the region a memo through which he inform them “The Cultural magazine for the people «Satul»” has organized an ambulant cinema, that would operate, according to the schedule prepared by Royal Cultural Foundations and the guardian journals of National Office for Tourism, only cultural and patriotic movies, like „Vitejii Neamului”, “Ecaterina Teodoroiu Sanț” and eventually small comedies, “good for the children and for the villagers”. Likewise he asked the directors to allow the operation of the respective ambulant cinema and recommend the students to participate in viewing the movies (National Archive Dolj, “Elena Cuza” Highschool Craiova fund, file no. 1/1937, f. 362).

### **The Cult of Heroes and the adult population**

Analysing the archive documents at our disposal, can be seen that, at Oltenia level (included, according to the administrative law from August 14, 1938, in the Olt County, administrative-territorial unit composed from 6

<sup>2</sup> File without number: letter of City Community House „Mihai Eminescu” from Craiova, sent on February 16, 1938, to the director of „Frații Buzești” High School from Craiova.

counties: Dolj, Gorj, Olt, Romanați, Mehedinți and Vâlcea – Păunoiu, 2012, p. 77-79), still exists, between 1938 and 1940, a preoccupation to create or reorganise the institutional structures that had to transpose in practice the objectives of Society “The Cult of Heroes” from Romania. Thereby, on January 18, 1939, at the headquarter of Dolj prefecture, the representatives of local authorities, formed into a committee, established the Society “The Cult of Heroes”, Craiova subsidiary, having as president the general Ioan Popovici, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and vice-president general Constantin Z. Vasiliu, the mayor of Craiova City. The headquarters of the society would be established in the Dolj prefecture (National Archive Dolj, Dolj County Prefecture fund, file no. 242/1939, f. 26-26v.). The following were decided: establishing the registers needed for the operation of the society: establish the golden books of Craiova and Dolj County; transform the Cemetery of Heroes and intensify the registrations of as many members as possible. To increase the number of society’s members it had to be launched an appeal towards all military and civil institutions in the city, the purpose being the increase of society’s income to fulfil the objectives regarding the honor the memory of nation’s heroes (*Ibidem*, f. 26v.).

At the same date, 41 committees were established to care for the tombs of heroes fallen on the honour field in the 1913 – 1916 – 1918 campaigns: a county committee in Craiova City, two urban committees outside the county seat, in the cities of Calafat and Plenița and 38 rural committees – 20 in *plasa* Amaradia and 18 in *plasa* Filiași (*Ibidem*, f. 25).

The appeal of the Society “The Cult of Heroes”, Craiova subsidiary, established based on the Law regarding the War Tombs in Romania and the Status of the Society “The Cult of Heroes” from Romania, addressed to military and civil institutions with the purpose of attracting new members, contained the essential objectives that had to be fulfilled to build and keep the collective memory of heroicization of death of soldiers fallen on the honour fields:

*“The Society «Cultul Eroilor» Craiova Subsidiary, (...) calls on the duty they have, towards the memory of the children of these Oltenian lands, that formed with their blood the New Romania, all the Romanians animated by the love of the country and her past.*

*This duty force us all to honour and praise the memory and their acts of heroism, through gathering their glorious remains in Cemeteries of Honour, well cared for,*

*embellished and kept with all the piety worthy of their sacrifice; to commemorate their acts of heroism through monuments and memorial plates, to write their names into the “Golden Book” of the City, and also to glorify their names and acts on the «Day of Heroes».*

*The Craiova Subsidiary intends firstly to bring a radical change to the current Cemetery of Heroes, to suit indeed to their sacrifice and to be able to serve thus to future generations, as example of special veneration of nation’s heroes.” (National Archive Dolj, “Frații Buzești” High School Craiova fund, file No. 1/1937-1939, file with no number)*

Increasing the available funds for “the care of war tombs, establishing the definitive cemeteries of honour, and also the eternal remembrance of the soldiers fallen on the battle fields, in the entire country” was amongst the preoccupations of the central committee from Bucharest of the Society “The Cult of Heroes”. For example, in 1938, were sent for sale to the public institutions, hundreds of pocket calendars „România Eroică 1939”, which had, besides the calendar data, the pictures of King Carol II and the Great Voievod Mihai, also various cultural and patriotic urges. The financial contributions delivered through the purchase of the calendars were considered to be the contribution that everyone will bring to the fulfilment of the society’s objectives:

*“We all alike have the holy duty to contribute to the achievement of this work of national recognition, for the soldiers, that through their supreme sacrifice ensured the prosperity of the country and the entire people (...).” (National Archive, Dolj, “Frații Buzești” High School Craiova fund, file no. 9/1938, file without number<sup>3</sup>; Idem, „Elena Cuza” High School Craiova fund, file no. 1/1938-1939, f. 226)*

Distribution for sale of the calendar „România Eroică” was done annually (Idem, „Elena Cuza” High School Craiova fund, file no. 1/1939-1940, f. 159).

A fund raising initiative at the national level for the remembrance of heroes can be found in a memo dating from January 9, 1939, belonging to an initiative committee of mitropolit Nicolae Nicolae Bălan and mitropolit

<sup>3</sup> File without number: the letter of the Society “The Cult of Heroes”, central committee, Bucharest, no. 18467 from November 19, 1938, delivered to the High School of Boys „Frații Buzești” from Craiova.

Alexandru Nicolescu, „established in the 90<sup>th</sup> year of anniversary of the great historic act from May 3/15 and the 20<sup>th</sup> year from the Unification of all Romanians”. In this letter, the committee asked the director of the Carol I high school to organise a fund raising within the ranks of students and teachers, destined for building a monument on the *Câmpia Libertății* from Blaj,

*„that will symbolize the meaning of this gathering, as an homage brought to the generations that awaken the Romanian people in Transilvania to the conscious of nation and national freedom.*

*The monument that will be built will immortalize the virtues, the sacrifices and the love of nation of our ancestors.*

*It has to be for future generations a spring of inspiration and refreshment of the ancestors virtues, to keep awake the conscience of nation, freedom and love for the Country”. (National Archive Dolj, „Carol I” High School Craiova fund, file no. 7/1938-1939, f. 103)*

With special approval from the authorities, public collections were allowed even on “Day of the Heroes”, when the Society “The Cult of Heroes”, through her subsidiaries, could sell badges (National Archive Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, file no. 23/1938, f. 8; National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, files no.: 27/1939, f. 1; 16/1940, f. 430).

The establishment of “**The Golden Books of the Nation’s Heroes**”, on cities, represented another important endeavour to keep and honour the memory of soldiers fallen on the battle fields. As a result of the Olt County (Ținutul Olt) royal resident order, the prefects of the 6 counties give the dispositions to establish the golden books on communes, the historic registers and sanctuaries. According to the order from January 30, 1939, given by the prefect of Dolj to the praetors from the county, in “The Golden Book” of the commune/town:

*“(…) will be recorded all officers, petty officers and soldiers from that commune, that fell on the fields of honour, on the fields of Bulgaria, in the wars of the Nation from the years 1877-1878-1913-1916-1919. For those from 1913 will be considered [Heroes] and those dead from cholera, and for those from 1916 and those dead from typhus.” (National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, file no. 22/1939, f. 20)*

After the First World War, by including into the ranks of heroes, next to the ones that fought effectively and fell on the battle field with the weapon in hand, and those that died of cholera and typhus, “the concept of hero, theoretic uncontested by anyone, was replaced, practically, with the one of victim (deceased or invalid of war)” (Mihalache, 2007, 253).

According to the directive for preparation of historic registers of towns, given on January 15, 1940 by the prefect of Gorj to the authorities under his control, the register had to contain a chapter special called “**Heroes of the Commune**”, that will include the following:

**„War 1877-[18]78** – Will be recorder nominal and by ranks and regiments all those that took part. Where they fought. What decorations they received. Who died on the battle field and where.

**War 1913.** – Idem.

**War 1916-1918 for the Nation Unification.** – Idem. Plus [will be added] the scouts.

**The Monument of Heroes.** From who’s initiative was built. Names of the committee’s members. How much it costs. When was inaugurated, a history of the ceremony.

**The Cemetery of Heroes.** – How many heroes are buried. When and who organized it. Who takes care of it.” (National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, file no. 268/1940, f. 12-13)

Comparing the documents from the years of 1939 and 1940, used in our analysis, we can see that the establishment of the Golden Books of the towns was another goal that had to be fulfilled at the Olt county level. The enthusiasm and probably zeal of local authorities was not enough to finish, by March 1939 the complex work that was supposed to be The Golden Book of the Nation’s Heroes.

Another initiative destined to symbolize the sacrifice and heroism of the soldiers fallen on the fields of honour and contribute to the creation of the collective memory and the formation of the patriotism within the youth and the adult population was represented by the establishment of “**parks of heroes**” in every urban and rural town in the country. The main responsibility for the build of these came to The National Renaissance Front and the Guard of the Country. (Țurlea, 2006, 162).

According to the letter from the National Renaissance Front from April 13, 1940, containing detailed instructions for the presidents of the counties of the unique party, “the parks o

heroes” had to symbolize “memory perpetuation” and “national gratitude” due to the sacrifice of the soldiers fallen on the fields of honour and become, in time, schools of patriotic education for local communities:

*“Perpetuation of memory of those that destiny wanted to edify them at the foundation of Great and Eternal Romania can be done not only through bronze, stone and marble monuments, but also through «natural monuments» creating in every commune «Parks of heroes», where, in great days of the nation, when is glorified the memory of these martyrs of love for the Country, religious services will be performed, followed by the solemnities that we assist to every year on hero’s day.*

*(...) To the Organisations of National Renaissance Front, lies the duty and honour that, in cooperation with the local authorities and patriotic associations, to accomplish this work of national gratitude, that in the same time will be one of the highest schools of education and patriotism, being a relentlessly call for the fulfilment of the duty and love for the Country, Nation and King.” (National Archive, Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, file no. 31/1940, f. 10)*

Receiving the main role in the transposal in practice of the “parks of heroes”, the unique party (the National Renaissance Front) and the King itself, symbolic transfer to themselves something from the allure of the heroism of the Nation’s Heroes.

These parks had to carry the names of local heroes, “thus tying, the names of our martyrs to a living being, the tree”. The location of these parks had to be made in courtyards of schools, churches, on free plot of lands in the rural and urban towns and, in the exceptional way, on free land around the towns (*Ibidem*).

Locating them inside the town took out the heroism and sacrifice outside the funeral space, while naming the parks with known names made that the heroism and patriotism will become *living organisms*, capable of fading the pain caused by the absence of the dead ones and generate within the ranks of local communities the sentiment of pride and desire to be ready anytime for a similar sacrifice for the Country and King.

More than that, the heroism was transferred also in the private space of the families of national heroes:

*“In the same day will be planted in the yards and households of the widows of war, invalids and war orphans, fruit trees that will be donated by the agriculture chambers, bringing this way a weak solace to those that were left without support by giving the country a hero.” (Ibidem, f. 10v.)*

This way, was desired to enforce the conviction that the death of a family member or more on the fields of honour was not in vain, the sacrifice for the country being a reason of price for the entire community, increasing, in a way, the prestige of those left behind the hero, that had to be an example to follow for the future generations. Not last, caring for the trees in private space could equal with a certain solace, coming from the possibility of honouring and caring those dead for the country.

Highlighting, mainly, the indissolubly link between the King and the Church, just like in the case of other laic events (The Day of Aviation was celebrated in the same day with the religious celebration St. Ilie: “The Victory from Mărășești”/”The Day of Romanian Glory”, in the same day with “Holy Transfiguration”), the festive event of inauguration of parks of heroes was associated with Sunday Tomii (Mihalache, 2007, p. 237; Buzatu [Ilie], 2010, p. 183; Păunoiu, 2013, 66-69). Thereby, on May 5, 1940, in the entire country the “parks of heroes” had to be inaugurated with great fast, using a schedule pre-established by the authorities of the National Renaissance Front. At 8 a.m. in the morning the entire population from the urban or rural town had to gather at the church to witness the holy service. After that ended will march towards the place where the trees will be planted as follows: music, widows, orphans and the great wounded of war, secretaries of the National Renaissance Front and members of the national guards of the unique party, pre-military and the rest of the population. At the place where the trees will be planted a new religious service will be officiated for the rest of the nation’s heroes. (National Archive Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, file no. 31/1940, f. 10-10v.)

The short speech, that will succeed the religious service and had to be given by the secretary if the National Renaissance Front or by a member of the National Guard of the National Renaissance Front from the town, had to synthetize “the chart of each hero”, that, through his sacrifice contributed at the creation of Great Romania. Highlighting the great acts of the heroes from that town, authorities wanted to plant “in the soul of youth, the spirit of sacrifice

and dedication of soldiers”, that fought for the Country (*Ibidem*, f. 10v.).

The ritual of planting trees was similar with the funeral one, used at the burial of a dead body, and appointing the closest relative of a hero to plant a tree was equivalent, practical, with a late burial, timeless, of the hero whose name was called. Also, the ritual of planting trees destined to form the “parks of heroes” could be interpreted through a return to the pattern of commemorations from the first decade after the end of the First World War (See widely, Mihalache, 2007, 234-235), with the attempt, probably, to build a collective memory that will include the King Carol II and his regime. On this, we re-enact the following fragment from the instructions of the National Renaissance Front from April 13, 1940:

“5) Next is the planting that will be done as follows: a) Dig the holes; b) The Secretary of the N.R.F. will read from a list (prepared before) the name of a hero and ask who is the closest member from his family (widow, orphan, mother, father). He/she will receive a sapling that will be set in the hole and after the priest will sanctify the hole with holy water, those present will pull the earth to cover the sapling, the same will continue with the planting of all trees and bushes destined for the commemoration of heroes. 6) The empty spaces from these parks will be covered with flowers and grass.” (National Archive Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, file no. 31/1940, f. 10v.)

The last stage from the ceremony of inauguration of the parks of heroes was a hand over of the baton towards the young generations, representing the future of Romania, transferring this way, a part of the heroism of the ancestors, but also the responsibility of keeping the memory of the heroes fallen on the field s of honour:

“7) After the plantation, these parks will be handed over to guardians and pre-militaries in the commune, ensuring this way that the youth of the village will cooperate with the action of the National Renaissance Front, ensuring this way the connection between the life of those fallen for the country and the patriotic spirit from today.” (*Ibidem*)

Local authorities were made aware to take care of these plantations because were considered:

“(…) a permanent symbol of gratitude for the heroes. (...) We ask [the local president of National Renaissance Front] to be kind and give this solemnity all your attention, because it does not exists a more beautiful simplification of cult of heroes, then when the descendants are placed in the situation to put in the ground and take care of the saplings, that will provide the **monument of the family hero** (*underline of the author*).” (*Ibidem*)

Although, from various reasons, parks of heroes have not been established in every urban or rural town in the country, on May 5, 1940, in the Sunday of *Tomii*, have been inaugurated parks of heroes in many towns of the country according to the instructions of the unique party (Țurlea, 2006, 162-163).

A commemorative local event was “**celebration of the victory from Valea Jiului**” or „**Celebration of the heroes of Gorj**”, carried out in Târgu Jiu, on October 27, 1938. The event was dedicated to the celebration of 22 years from the battle that took place at the bridge of Jiu during the First World War. Although initially had to take place on October 14, at the request of Arethia Tătărăscu, the president of the Society National League of Christian Women from Gorj County, it took place on October 27. The reason to postpone it was “to introduce in the program of the future celebration the consecration and the hand over to City hall Tg. Jiu the Column of Recognition<sup>4</sup> from the new park, and also the Portal from the public garden, monuments built by the League to honour the memory of the heroes of Gorj” (National Archive Dolj, Reziđența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, file no. 4/1938, f. 1).

The celebration was presided by the royal resident of Olt County, General Romulus Scărișoreanu, and the school’s program was suspended that day so that the students will be able to attend the program of celebration (*Ibidem*, f. 150).

According to the program, the festivities started with the consecration of the Column of Recognition from the new park, then a procession will be formed (the clergy, the officials, the guests, the public, the schools and the army), that would walk the “Hero’s Path” up

<sup>4</sup> “Column of never ending gratitude” – „Column of Infinite” (“Coloana recunoștinței fără sfârșit”/“Coloana Infinitului”), built by the sculptor Constantin Brâncuși, was dedicated to the Romanian soldiers fallen in 1916 in the battles on the Jiu shores and is part of the trilogy of the monumental ensemble, next to the Table of Silence and the Gate of the Kiss.

to the Church „Sfinții Apostoli”, were a *tedeum* will be officiated for the remembrance of the heroes dead in the fights in Valea Jiului.

Speeches had to refer to the fights from Jiu, to take over and receive by the city hall of Târgu Jiu of the monuments given by the National League of Christian Women from Gorj County. After the end of speeches, the procession would walk up to the Jiu Bridge, where a new speech will be given to commemorate the fight at the Jiu Bridge. In the same order the procession will travel to the grave of Ecaterina Teodoriu<sup>5</sup>, where a religious service will be held for the remembrance of the hero and a crown of flowers will be set. The festivities will end with the parade of schools, societies, pre-military and the army in the front of the portal from the public garden (*Ibidem*, f. 2).

The program of the festivities from October 27, 1938 reveals a commemoration of heroic death but also a commemoration of victorious death, a celebration of the victory of Romanian soldiers in the battles from the Jiu Bridge in 1916.

Caring the cemeteries or the graves, of the monuments of the nation's heroes was amongst the preoccupations of local authorities, in the reports regarding their activities being also reports on the Cult of Heroes. For example, in the report of the Slatina City Hall from July 22, 1929, the following were recorded:

*“The Cult of Heroes was also the object of this communal administration that, with the Slatina garrison, ensured the hero's cemetery was taking care of with the greatest attention, but was not built and is not in the project to build such a monument, except the existing one in this of hero Ecaterina Teodoriu.” (Ibidem, file No. 144/1939, f. 7v.)*

Celebrations with commemorative purpose of the organisations of veterans or their contributions to the build of some monuments of heroes represented moments of glorification of the sacrifice and heroism of the Romanian soldiers fallen on the fields of honour. Participation of war veterans to perpetuate the Cult of Heroes, to “officially embellish the war” can be explained from their desire to keep alive the memory of acts of their comrades, of the values that the military live provide, but mostly out of the “self-protecting reflex of the individual,

inclined to give a positive interpretation of the special events, to integrate them into his biography, to make them compatible with the rest of his life”. (Mihalache, 2007, 236-237)

In this context, every year the veteran associations participated at the events dedicated to the Cult of Heroes and they had their own celebrations to commemorate the heroes. Thus were the **celebrations of Mărăști-Mărășești Society, inferior ranks**, from Romanați county, with the headquarter in Caracal. On August 14, 1938, the members of society started in the morning in army formation, with music, from the headquarter of Society towards the cathedral „Adormirea Maicii Domnului” from Caracal, where, together with the representatives of the army and the other local authorities, assisted the service and memorial service of the Romanian Heroes fallen in the Independence War and the one of Nations Wholeness, and also the memorial service of deceased members. After the religious service was finished, they walked in the park from Caracal, where occasional speeches were given:

*“In well felt words, all have exalted the memory of our soldiers and the action of Mărăști-Mărășești Society – the builder of the imposing monument from the cemetery of heroes that, with the commemoration of the entry in the campaign of the Great War, take care to provide memorial service. All – in thought and soul – raised the glass in the health of M.S. the King and the Great Voievod Mihai.” (“Romanațul”, Caracal, year III, no. 27, September 8, 1938, 5)*

In the afternoon, a picnic started that ended at midnight.

On August 15, with the religious holiday “St. Maria”, was celebrated the “Navy Day”. On this occasion was officiated memorial services for the heroes sailors dead in the War of Nation Wholeness (First World War). In 1939, next to the representatives of civil, military, ecclesiastic and cultural authorities participated also the representatives of the unique party and National Guard. Thus according to the letter from the Olt County prefect, from August 14, 1939, the commander of the National Guard of National Renaissance Front from Olt County, was invited to participate with the members of the Guard at the “Navy Day” and the memorial service for the heroes sailors at the Olt pool (National Archive Olt, The National Guard of the National Renaissance Front Olt County fund, file no. 6/1939, f. 59).

<sup>5</sup> See Grancea, Grădinaru 2020, 87-101 for the mythologizing path of Ecaterina Teodoriu in Romanian films.

### Hero's Day – Ascension of the Lord

The decree law no. 1913/1920, "Hero's Day" declared holiday and was celebrated in the same time with the religious holiday "Ascension of the Lord" (holiday with no fix date). The program of the day was prepared and executed by the Minister of Defence (Păunoiu, 2013, 68). The day of Nations Heroes was celebrated first time on May 20, 1920, in every urban and rural town in the country. The program had to take into account the local conditions and particularities because the significations of the ceremonies had to, in the vision of authorities, express "only those elements that Romanian citizens could have in common." (Mihalache, 2007, 245)

The situation was kept also in 1938-1940 when the religious and ethnic substrate of the ceremonies did not target exclusively the orthodox religion or Christian orthodox cult. For example, in the analysed documents regarding the organisation and conduct of the "Day of Heroes" in Oltenia, it turns out participated the representatives of Catholic Church and also the Orthodox, the processions being formed based on confessions. (National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, file no. 27/1939, f. 66). Also, according to the circular order from the president of the Minister Council and the Ministry of Internals, Armand Călinescu, from May 15, 1939, sent to all the prefects in the country, with the occasion of Celebration of Heroes (May 18):

*"(...) the occasional speeches given by either the officers, or by the representatives of civil authorities, shall not have offending appreciations or allusions towards other nationalities they have been in war with. They will limit to praising the heroes in general." (Național Archive Vâlcea, Vâlcea County Prefecture fund, file no. 84/1939, f. 41)*

The public ceremonies with the civil-educational purpose, as they are known in the first decades of XXth century were born out of popular cultural tradition regarding the death and the precedent commemorative experience, combined with the realities and sensibilities born out of the humane losses suffered during First World War. The novelty was the fact that the population of villages, that up until 1920 assisted passively at various ceremonies, without identifying themselves in real mod with the celebrated events, "with the establishment of the day of heroes, the system of commemorations entered truly into Romanian village, the peasants

stop forming the ornament public, but representing the main characters of the war" (Mihalache, 2007, 25, 253).

After almost two decades since the Day of Heroes was declared national holiday, it continues to be organized by the authorities to the smallest detail. Was desired that staging it into public space will produce powerful effects within the population and, beyond its original significations, will obtain the sensitisation to be willing to perform great acts just like the Nation's Heroes. Was considered, therefore a mean of citizen's education, of keeping and forming of patriotism within the population of all ages.

According to the programs dedicated to the Day of Heroes (June 2, 1938; May 18, 1939; June 6, 1940) in Oltenia, that we use in our analysis, is revealed to us a common pattern: a great mobilisation of people from all social categories, where was added also the population joining the festivities from their own initiative; religious services, held in the morning in churches or cathedrals, processions towards the cemeteries or monuments of heroes, accompanied permanent by military music and choirs that will sing patriotic and religious anthems, occasional speeches about the Nation's Heroes fallen on the fields of honour in the war for Nation Wholeness; parades of the army, the guardians etc.; ringing the bells of the churches during the processions. In the afternoon school celebrations were organized; the military music was kept in front of the administrative institution representative for the town. In the evening the retreat was done with torches, the music being heard until midnight in the centre of towns. Everywhere the towns were embellished as for a day of celebration, the schools, public institutions and shops were closed and the police was ready to keep the order. (National Archive Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, files no.: 23/1938, f. 9; 25/1939, f. 42; 31/1940, f. 13; National Archive Vâlcea, The National Guard of the National Renaissance Front Vâlcea County fund, file no. 4/1939, f. 17)

In Craiova, the residence of Olt County (Ținutul Olt), at the celebration of "Day of Heroes" participated also the royal resident (National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, files no.: 27/1939, f. 66; 38/1940, f. 66).

Also, with the occasion of the Day of Heroes, the representatives of the unique party and its annex formation, the National Guard, as well as cultural and administrative authorities, received instructions to participate at the



occasional ceremonies with the purpose of ensuring a wider visibility of the carlist regime representatives. For example, on May 30, 1940, the general commander of the National Guard of National Renaissance Front, A. Vişineanu, sent a letter to the local Guard commanders where he asked them to take actions that, on June 6, when the Day of Heroes was celebrated, the members of the National Guard will participate in a high number:

*"Day of Heroes, June 6, a.c., Mr General Comander wishes that will be celebrated by our units through a wider and more visible participation at the program that the authorities will organize in every town." (Național Archive Olt, The National Guard of the National Renaissance Front Olt County fund, file no. 27/1940, f. 61)*

Equally, analysing the documents available, can be seen also differences regarding the preparation of the program for the day of Heroes. Thus, if in 1938 and 1939, was made up out of representatives of public authorities they were part of and from the local organisations of the Cult of Heroes Society (National Archive Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, file No. 25/1939, f. 40), in 1940, according to the telegram from June 4, the royal resident of Olt County (Ținutul Olt), asked the prefects the following:

*"Agreeing with the organs from the town of National Renaissance Front, Guard [National of] National Renaissance Front, pre-military and Guard of the Country, you will organize the program for the Cult of Heroes for Thursday, May 6, both in the towns, as well as in communes." (National Archive Vâlcea, Vâlcea County Prefecture fund, file no. 32/1940, f. 23)*

On the other hand, the heroism represented one of the main themes of the authority/dictatorship monarchy of King Carol II, the king being presented to the wide public as a hero of the Country official propaganda. He was the one that saved the country from the problems of the past and offered, through his political regime the chance of "national renaissance". The King and, by extension the supported values, at theoretical level, by his regime, represented the model of the hero that every adult citizen or young in formation had the opportunity and obligation to take for itself to be of use for the country (Păunoiu, 2013, *passim*).

From official political point of view, the Cult of Heroes, benefiting of own significations,

born and stated before the instauration of the carlist regime, represented, rather, an occasion for affirmation of the image of national solidarity, of a regime of order and authority, most of the participants at the commemorative events identifying a lot better with the emotional intensity produced by the veneration of the Nation's Heroes then with the ideological principles of the regime.

Practical, the glorification of King Carol II with the occasion of public ceremonies destined to the Cult of Heroes was done adjacent, as a result of official protocol regarding public ceremonies. That is why does not seem by accident that the king wrote in his journal, on May 18, 1939, that he will spend his Day of Heroes as a regular day:

*"Ascension of the Lord, Day of Heroes, a day when, this year, when so much rattling of weapons can be heard, has its special meaning. Still, I spend it as a rest day, working on my own, then at half past 6 poker, with Dudaia, Malaxa, Max and Ruscescu." (Carol al II-lea, 2003, 352)*

In the analysed period, the Cult of Heroes gained an increased importance, because the specific manifestations were considered a civic-education mean, of formation and straighten the national patriotism, but also out of an contextual necessity born from the imminence of a new war and from the particularities of the authority monarchy regime, that had fix in the centre of ideological principles the patriotism and the sacrifice for the Country and King.

From the analysed archive documents, it appears that in Oltenia/Olt County the Cult of Heroes was promoted within the ranks of all social categories comprising both the adult population and the youth.

The commemorations of the Nation's Heroes carried, mostly, the ideological load of the regime, but also an emotional component a lot more authentic comparing it to other festive events of the regime.

Authenticity of the moments dedicated to the Cult of Heroes came from the identification of the participating crowd with the significations of commemorating the dead heroes fallen on the field of honour, as well as the identification of it with the pain of losing the loved ones and, partially, with the heroism and virtues that made the soldier to fight for their Country.

A novelty, in the last part of the carlist regime, was the fact that it passed to personalization, individualization of the soldier's heroism and the mourning of their descendants,

when the commemorations transcend the public space and enters timid into the private space, through the plantation of trees of heroes into the yards of the families of those left behind.

Beyond the particularities of the authority monarchy regime of Carol II, can be stated that, through all the actions, endeavours

and activities specific to the Cult of Heroes was kept alive the memory of the nation's heroes, bringing, in this stage from Romanian and Oltenia history, added value to the built of collective memory.

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# THE BUST OF FIELD MARSHAL HERMANN KÖVESS BARON VON KÖVESSHÁZA BY HANS MAUER DONATED TO THE BRUKENTHAL NATIONAL MUSEUM IN SIBIU

**Alexandru Gh. SONOC**

Curator, PhD.

Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu

E-mail: alexandru.sonoc@brukenthalmuseum.ro

**Adrian LUCA**

Curator, PhD.

Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu

E-mail: luca.adrian87@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Field Marshal Hermann Baron Kövess von Kövessháza had a personal relation with the Banat and with Transylvania: he was born in Timișoara and at the outbreak of World War I he lived in Sibiu, as the commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> Austro-Hungarian Army Corps. He was until then a competent, but unremarkable general, close to retirement. During the war he fought successfully against the superior Russian forces in east and central Galicia and later in Russian Poland, then against Serbia. In independent command he overthrew Montenegro and occupied Albania. He fought as well in Northern Italy and later drove the Russian troops almost entirely from Bukovina. From mid-January till early April 1918 he commanded the whole Austro-Hungarian front from the Dniester to the southeastern corner of Transylvania and to Dobruja and afterwards the Austro-Hungarian forces in the Balkans. However, he is known especially as the final commander-in-chief of the Austro-Hungarian Army (November 2 – December 19, 1918). The donated bust was made by Hans Mauer, most likely in 1916 (like a little smaller author version in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna), according to the best tradition of the Roman Early Imperial public portrait and of the late Hellenistic heroic sculptural models. It may be considered of a much better quality than the simple wartime patriotic souvenirs and even than many works of art rendering this commander.*

**Key words:** *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza, Hans Mauer, World War I, wartime art, wartime patriotic souvenirs.*

**Rezumat:** *Feldmareșalul Hermann Baron Kövess von Kövessháza a avut o relație personală cu Banatul și cu Transilvania: s-a născut la Timișoara, iar la izbucnirea Primului război mondial trăia în Sibiu, în calitate de comandant al Corpului de Armată XII austro-ungar. Până atunci a fost un general competent, dar neremarcabil, aproape de pensionare. În timpul războiului a luptat cu succes împotriva forțelor rusești superioare în Galiția Orientală și Centrală și apoi în Polonia rusească, apoi împotriva Serbiei. Comandând independent, a zdrobit Muntenegrul și a ocupat Albania. A luptat și în nordul Italiei, iar mai târziu a izgonit aproape cu totul din Bucovina trupele rusești. De la mijlocul lui ianuarie și până la începutul lui aprilie 1918 a comandat întregul front austro-ungar de la Nistru până la colțul de sud-est al Transilvaniei și în Dobrogea și apoi forțele austro-ungare din Balcani. Cu toate acestea, el este cunoscut în special drept ultimul comandant suprem al armatei austro-ungare (2 noiembrie – 19 decembrie 1918). Bustul donat a fost realizat de către Hans Mauer, cel mai probabil în 1916 (ca și versiunea de autor, ceva mai mică, de la Heeresgeschichtliches Museum din Viena), după cea mai bună tradiție a portretului public roman imperial timpuriu și al modelelor sculpturale eroice elenistice târzii. El poate fi considerat ca fiind de o calitate mult mai bună decât simplele suveniruri patriotice de război și chiar decât multe opere de artă reprezentându-l pe acest comandant.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza, Hans Mauer, Primul război mondial, artă pe timp de război, suveniruri patriotice de război.*

On her 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Dr. Helga Sibylle Silvia Hedwig Stein-von Spiess, living in Hildesheim, Germany donated on September 26, 2017 to the Brukenthal National Museum a precious family heirloom: a bronze bust (37.5 x

22 x 22 cm; signed on the neck's back lower part: H. MAUER). It renders her granduncle, the Austro-Hungarian Field Marshal Hermann Albin Josef Baron Kövess von Kövessháza (Timișoara/Temesvár, March 30, 1854 – Vienna,

September 22, 1924), who is known especially as the final (but improperly said „completely ceremonial”) commander-in-chief of the Austro-Hungarian Army (November 3/4 – December 19, 1918) after the armistice of Villa Giusti between Italy and Austria-Hungary was signed and also after the abdication of Emperor Charles I.

The Field Marshal's bust (Figures 1-7) renders him according to the best tradition of the Roman Early Imperial public portrait and of the late Hellenistic heroic sculptural models: unclothed, with an idealised young man physiognomy, serene, looking far. The bust's base is U shaped, with 2 orifices made to fix it by 2 threaded rods on a pedestal (Figure 6). The bust's original pedestal, which due to its weight could be brought to the museum only separately, in late summer 2019, is made of a cubic block (19 x 19 x 19 cm) of black granite with white quartz intrusions. However, it has only one threaded rod, which was rusty and had to be replaced. Till the original pedestal was brought to Romania, the item was mounted on a wooden pedestal, painted in field-grey, which was made by the stone sculpture conservator Mihai Iancovescu-Rudeanu in order to exhibit for first time this work in the museum, on the occasion of the temporary exhibition “The First World War in the Art Collection of the Brukenthal National Museum”, which was held in the Cabinet of Prints and Drawings at the Brukenthal Palace (April 26 – July 1, 2018) and whose curators were Dr. Laura Coltofean and Dr. Alexandru Sonoc. The donated bust, once owned right by the portrayed commander, is obviously an author copy of another work (made in 1916), kept since 1944 at the Museum of Military History (*Heeresgeschichtliches Museum*) in Vienna (Figure 11), which is however a little smaller (20 × 23 × 29 cm, according to the aforementioned museum's records). Therefore, the donated bust (which got the inventory number S592) should be dated, most likely, in 1916 as well, although when the donation was firstly mentioned in the Brukenthal National Museum's magazine *Brukenthal. Acta Musei* the work was dated „cca. 1915” (Mesea, Sonoc, 2018, 377).

Next day after the donation was made, Dr. Adrian Luca made commemorative photographs showing the donated art work, its donor and her family with Dr. Alexandru Sonoc, the Chief of the Brukenthal Art Museum Department (Figure 8), right in front of the building which was the former headquarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> Austro-Hungarian Army Corps's Staff (Figure 9), whose commander Baron Kövess von Kövessháza was from 1912 to 1914, when he lived in the Commander's Palace,

where presently the Lucian Blaga University's Rectorate is housed (Figure 10). Nowadays the commander's deeds during the war and particularly his connection both with Transylvania and with Sibiu are almost completely ignored by the contemporary inhabitants of the city and, generally, by the Romanian public, as well as the original functions of the two buildings mentioned above. It is worth therefore to recall some information on the Field Marshal's biography compiled from various sources (Peerz, 1921; Hoffmann, Hubka, 1944, 43-44; E. Steinitz, in: NÖB, 1925, 138-146; Kövess, 1945-1946; R. Kiszling, in: ÖBL, 1969, 53-54; Rainer Egger, in: NDB, 1979, 416-417; Arnbom, 1997, 154; Bühner, 2000; Reichlin-Meldegg, 2009; Balla, 2010, 191-193; Kerepeszki 2017, 81), including as well details offered by the bust's donor. To know if there are other works of arts and generally „wartime patriotic souvenirs” rendering this Austro-Hungarian commander may help to detect them in other museum collections in order of their better study as historical sources and their valorisation in various exhibitions. This is particularly important in Romania, where there is a very weak interest for the Austro-Hungarian military history, excepting if concerning the military of Romanian ethnic origin and the mid-18<sup>th</sup>-mid 19<sup>th</sup> c. border guards regiments in which Romanians were recruited.

### **Biographical information about Field Marshal Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza**

During World War I, Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza became undoubtedly the most popular army leader of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, although before its beginning there were few signs that he would be so famous. In a generally Catholic officer corps, he was one of the few Protestant officers who managed to reach to the highest commands and the only Protestant Field Marshal of the Austro-Hungarian army. In 1918, when he became the last Commander-in-Chief of the Austro-Hungarian army, Protestants had already the two next highest commands: Colonel General Arthur Arz Baron von Straußenburg (1857-1935) was the last Chief of the General Staff of the Austro-Hungarian Army (March 1 – November 3, 1918) and Vice Admiral Miklós Horthy von Nagybánya (1868-1957) was the Commander-in-Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Fleet (February – November 1, 1918). However, as Géza Kövess noted in 1956 in an unpublished biography of his father, the Field Marshal was almost und unjustly forgotten both in Austria and in Hungary, where no monument, no street, no square, no memorial plate recalls the famous Field

Marshal and even his tomb in the Kerepesi cemetery in Budapest is neglected. This situation changed very few (Figure 12) during the last decades: his burial place (plot 26/1, location 26/1-1-29) is protected since 2001 as a „national burial ground” by the Institute for National Heritage.

Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza's father was Major General Viktor Albin Kövess von Kövessháza (1821-1890), who was made an Austrian Baron on November 25, 1873, although his ancestors belonged since some centuries to the Hungarian gentry from the Zala County and the *von Kövessháza* branch of the family is documented in Austria since the 18<sup>th</sup> c. His wife, Regina Johanna Sterzing (1835-1898), was the daughter of Friedrich Joseph Sterzing (1808-1867), a Thuringian pharmacist in Făgăraș/Fogaras, married to Johanna Fritsch (1818-1889), a Transylvanian Saxon woman from Sibiu/Nagyszeben. After the secondary school in Černivci/Czernowitz (formerly Cernăuți), Suceava/Suczawa and Buda and military studies in Hainburg (1865-1868) and Loucký klášter ve Znojmě/Klosterbruck bei Znaim (1868-1869) and finally at the Technical Military Academy in Vienna (1869-1872), where he was the 12<sup>th</sup> of his class and characterized as „calm, very ambitious and decent”, Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza attended with good success the War School (1876-1878) and received an accelerated promotion to Captain (November 1, 1879), due to his excellent service. He led his first military mission in 1882, to suppress a mutiny of the Muslim and the Orthodox recruits in Herzegovina, namely in the Bosnian region of Krivošije, north of the Bay of Cattaro / Kotor and was awarded for this with a War Medal. He got the same year, on July 9 the Knights Cross of the Order of the Crown of Italy. After the stipulated period of troop service expired, he was transferred in 1886 to the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps in Cracow. During his service there, he was supposed to pass the examination to become a Staff officer, a requirement for acceptance into the General Staff. However, as he failed this very important test (colloquially called „the Archangel's examination”) in 1888, he was not accepted into the General Staff and had to return to the troops. Probably this was one of the reasons why this excellent officer never received the Military Merit Cross during peacetime. He was transferred from the Military Engineering to the Infantry, where his first-rate performance of duty resulted in further accelerated promotion to Major (May 1, 1890) and the subsequent award of the Bronze Military Merit Medal „Signum Laudis” with war ribbon (July 26, 1890), considering right his previous merits in

Herzegovina. After a „normal” promotion to Oberstleutnant, respectively First Lieutenant (May 1, 1894), and on November 1, 1896 he became one of the youngest colonels of the Austro-Hungarian army. In March 1898 he took over the command of 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, which became one of the best in the Vienna garrison and often received commendations from the Emperor. Around 1900 Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza was a well known officer within the Viennese garrison because so many details made him unique: he was one of the youngest colonels in the whole army, he was a Protestant (Lutheran) and it was therefore all the more remarkable that he had climbed so far and fast in a predominantly Roman-Catholic military hierarchy. Further, as he was granted permission not to wear a beard because of his psoriasis, this made him look much younger than he was. He was awarded with the Military Service Badge 3<sup>rd</sup> class (September 1, 1897), the Jubilee Memorial Medal for the Armed Forces (December 4, 1898), the Serbian Order of the Cross of Takovo 2<sup>nd</sup> class (April 1900) and the Knight Cross of the Imperial Order of the Iron Crown (April 16, 1902). Afterwards he served as brigade and division commander, being promoted Major General in November 1902 and Lieutenant Field Marshal in May 1907. He constantly tried to modernize the Imperial and Royal Army in tactical and operational terms and to improve its training and equipment. The Duchy of Baden bestowed upon him the Order of Berthold 2<sup>nd</sup> class (April 1903) and the Order of the Lion of Zähringen 1<sup>st</sup> class (January 1904), and Austria-Hungary the Knight Cross of the Imperial Order of Leopold (August 12, 1908).

In April 1910 he became inspector of the fortifications in South Tyrol, a task which he saw as a retirement foreshadowing sign. However, in June 1911 he became the commanding general of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps (consisting of all troops located in Transylvania), whose Staff headquarter was in Sibiu/Hermannstadt. Shortly afterwards he was awarded with the title of Privy Councillor (*Geheimrat*) and on November 1, 1911 he was promoted General of Infantry (a rank corresponding now in Austria to Lieutenant General). Shortly after he was appointed Honorary Colonel and Patron (*Oberstinhaber*) of the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in August 1912, he was innocently involved in a religious affair, in which about 400 German speaking Roman-Catholics from Sibiu converted to Protestantism after a conflict with Prince Karl Egon von Hohenlohe, the Canon (1908-1918) of the local Catholic

cathedral<sup>1</sup>. This caused a huge scandal within Catholic circles around the court at Vienna, as the Canon of Sibiu reported in a letter to Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Heir Apparent, that the commander had not done anything against this and was generally supporting this „movement of separation from Rome” by his ignoring of the problem. This was a good opportunity for intrigues against him and he expected to be prematurely retired on the occasion of the Emperor’s Maneuvers in 1912, but they had only a limited success, as he was not promoted to Army Commander, but kept in his position.

When the First World War broke out, Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza, considered a competent, but rather unremarkable commander (excepting the conflict mentioned about), was close to retirement, but still an army corps commander, even the oldest of all, while other and younger army corps commanders took over command of whole armies. The war offered him unexpected, but long-awaited opportunities to earn fame and honours and especially to surpass those who previously passed him. The first battles in east Galicia against the 8<sup>th</sup> Russian army commanded by Aleksei Brusilov (1853-1926) at the end of August 1914 were lost with heavy casualties and despite the tenacious defense of the Austro-Hungarians troops led by him, they had to retreat beyond Lviv/Lemberg (formerly Lwów) and finally (late October 1914) even from central Galicia to Silesia, where they prepared for trench warfare in the area of Belchatow. He received the war ornaments to the Grand Cross of the Imperial Order of the Iron Crown (October 5, 1914), awarded to him some months before the war’s outbreak, already on March 1, 1914 (however a year later as expected, due right to his conflict with Prince Karl Egon von Hohenlohe).

At the beginning of 1915 his 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps was enlarged to become the Army Group Kövess and after the return of its most part in the Carpathians region, it was subordinated to the Prussian General Martin Wilhelm Remus von Woyrsch (1847-1920). It fought bravely against the stronger Russian forces, which could be stopped and repelled into Russian Poland, where with the spring offensive of 1915 and during the breakthrough near Tarnów-Gorlice the Army Group Kövess advanced on May 2 to the Vistula river and captured by storm on August 4 the

Russian fortress of Ivangorod. In September 1915 Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza took over command of the newly formed 3<sup>rd</sup> Army against Serbia and under the command of the famous German Field Marshal August von Mackensen (1849-1945) he led it during the whole Serbian campaign, captured Belgrade (October 9) in co-operation with the German General of Artillery Max von Gallwitz (1852-1937) and penetrated deep into Serbia, which was completely occupied by the German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces. For his achievements during this year, the Austro-Hungarian commander was awarded with the Merit Star of the Red Cross with war ornaments (May 1, 1915), the Grand Cross of the Imperial Order of Leopold with war ornaments (August 3, 1915) and the Military Merit Cross 1<sup>st</sup> class with war ornaments (November 28, 1915). Germany bestowed upon him the Iron Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> class (March 9, 1915) and 1<sup>st</sup> class (July 3, 1915) and finally the Order „Pour le Mérite” (December 5, 1915).

Transferred to Sarajevo, he led in independent command a successful assault of Mount Lovćen (January 11, 1916) and overthrew Montenegro after the capture of its capital Cetinije. Subsequently, he invaded Albania and till the end of February 1916 he occupied this country, where the Serbian army managed to retreat, taking advantage of the secret alliance concluded on September 17, 1914 in Niš with Essad Pasha Toptani, who controlled Central Albania, in exchange for the support offered by Serbia to the latter, who secretly agreed, also in autumn, the annexation of Southern Albania by Greece. Unlike Essad Pasha Toptani, Albania’s short time ruler Prince Wilhelm von Wied, although supported by Austria-Hungary and Romania, could not defeat the insurgency stirred by Greece and Serbia, which both (as later Italy as well) claimed parts of Albania, and thus at the outbreak of World War I he had to leave the country, at whose neutrality he refused to renounce. Therefore, the occupation of Albania by Austria-Hungary was aimed to prevent further complications and to consolidate its influence in the Balkans for the period after the war’s end. For more details on the Albanian crisis see: Câmpianu, 1918; Kondis, 1976; Heaton-Armstrong, 2005; Ineoan, 2016. For the successful storming of Mount Lovćen Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza was awarded the Austro-Hungarian Silver Military Merit Medal „Signum Laudis” with war ribbon on January 12, 1916 and for his deeds on the Balkan front, on February 26, 1916 he was promoted Colonel General, passing again those of his contemporaries who had passed

<sup>1</sup> Later (in 1923), Prince Karl Egon von Hohenlohe, who was about to be appointed bishop, switched from the Catholic to the Lutheran church and married a famous Budapest beauty, the former reception clerk Annette Koranyi.



him before, as he was at that time the single Army Commander (excepting Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf) who reached this rank without to be an Archduke of Austria. To his success contributed as well the knowledge of many languages: he spoke quite well English and French and was able to communicate in Hungarian as well as scantily in Italian and Russian.

On March 17, 1916 he and his 3<sup>rd</sup> army were transferred from Cattaro to the Alps, on the southwestern theatre of war. Its Staff headquarter was at first in Klagenfurt, then at Bolzano/Bozen and finally at Trento/Trient. In the early summer of 1916, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army led by him cooperated in the operation led by Archduke Eugen from South Tyrol against Arsiero and Asiago in Northeastern Italy. Despite the conquest of the latter town right by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the offensive had to be wound down and terminated because of the deteriorating situation on the Russian front, after the breakthrough of Aleksei Brusilov. So Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza was quickly needed in the Galician theatre of war, where he went in all haste, assuming in Stanislau (now Ivano-Frankivsk, in Ukraine) the command of a newly formed 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which had to attack the stronger Russian troops, which compelled it to withdraw. Understanding this difficult situation, he wanted to resign, but at the explicit wish of his commander Archduke Karl (the Heir Apparent and in few months next emperor), on October 15, 1916 he was appointed to take over the command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army, whose Staff headquarter was at Sighetul Marmăției/Mármaros-Sziget. In hard defensive battles he was now able to protect Hungary and Transylvania against Russian attacks across the ridges of the Wooded and Eastern Carpathians. On December 10, 1916 he was honoured with the award of the Golden Military Merit Medal „Signum Laudis” with war ribbon. Additionally, the Central Powers honoured his efforts during the year 1916 with the following awards: the Grand Cross of the Bavarian Military Merit Order with swords (January 24, 1916), the Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown of Württemberg (April 30, 1916), the Ottoman *Imtiyaz* (i. e. „Distinction”) Medals in Silver and Gold (April/May 1916), the neck badge of the Marian Cross of the German Knight Order (June 19, 1916), the Grand Cross of the Bulgarian Order of Saint Alexander with swords (September 16, 1916) and finally the Ottoman Large Golden *Liyakat* (i. e. „Merit”) Medal (September 30, 1916) and the Ottoman War Medal (*Harp Madalyası*), colloquially known as „Gallipoli Star” or „Iron Crescent” (September 30, 1916). In the spring and summer of 1917 he received the newly introduced swords on all

Austro-Hungarian orders and medals he already won.

Largely unaffected in July 1917 by the subsequent (but disastrously unsuccessful) Russian offensive, the Austro-Hungarian commander, who carefully prepared the counter-advance into Bukovina, sallied from the mountains with his 7<sup>th</sup> Army, reconquered Czernowitz, the province’s capital, as well as Rădăuți/Radautz, and drove the Russian troops almost entirely out from Bukovina. For this achievements, on August 5, 1917 he was promoted to Field Marshal by Emperor Charles I on the occasion of the latter’s visit in Czernowitz. On August 14, 1917 he received the Military Order of Maria Theresia’s Commander Cross and afterwards he was made a Hungarian Baron (August 17, 1917) with a lifelong seat in the House of the Magnates. From January 15 to early April 1918, he commanded the so-called Kövess front extending from the Dniester to the south-eastern corner of Transylvania and to Dobruja and consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies, whose Staff’s headquarter was in Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca). After Romania signed the Bucharest Peace Treaty (May 7, 1918), this command ceased to exist, as Romania was considered defeated. He received the Grand Cross of the Hungarian Royal Order of Saint Stephen (March 26, 1918) and the oak leaves to his Prussian Order „Pour le Mérite” (May 30, 1918).

As the war’s fate changed for the Central Powers after the withdrawal of Bulgaria (September 29, 1918), he was again recalled to duty, receiving the command over an Army Group in the western Balkans, in order to arrange for the evacuation of the occupied territories according to plan and for defence along the Danube – Save – Drina line. In October this mission became impossible due to the decomposition of the Empire and of its army. As Emperor Charles I did not want to sign the armistice with Italy from Villa Giusti (as it was contrary to the alliance with Germany), he laid down the supreme command (November 3, 1918) and nominated Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza as succeeding Commander-in-Chief (on November 3/4, 1918, but by a decision fictively post-dated on November 2). Appointing him as Commander-in-Chief, the emperor followed actually the proposal made by the last Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Army’s General Staff, Colonel General Arthur Arz Baron von Straußenburg, a Transylvanian Saxon and the Field Marshal’s close maternal relative, who declined to be nominated himself in this position. However, the study of the correspondence related with the armistice

evidenced that the Field Marshal had nothing to do with its harsh conditions and was not involved in its negotiation, being rather a suitable „escape goat”, whose immediate role was to absolve the Emperor from the public and historical responsibility of accepting such an armistice. Maybe for this, on November 4 upon Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza was bestowed the Sovereign Military Hospitalier Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta's Merit Order's Grand Cross. The Field Marshal's appointment as the new Commander-in-Chief was communicated to him by a dispatch from the Emperor, which he received during his journey from Belgrade to Vienna, where he arrived on November 9, after a stop in Budapest, where he transferred the command of the western Balkan Army Group to Archduke Josef. But on October 31 the Emperor ordered that the fleet be handed to the newly proclaimed Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and on November 6 he ordered the complete demobilisation of Austria-Hungary's common army (the Imperial and Royal army). On November 11, Emperor Charles renounced to take part in the state's affairs of the Empire's part ruled by Austria, but without to have absolved the soldiers and the officers from their oath of allegiance to him. On November 13 the Hungarian government signed the Belgrade military convention, ceasing thus too the hostilities against the Entente. Trying to secure a safe retreat for the military personnel and its return to home (now through or to different countries), as well as the needed financial resources, the Field Marshal had to perform his duty in conflict with the authorities of the newly proclaimed (November 12, 1918) German Republic of Austria, till he duly laid down his command following the Chancellor Dr. Karl Renner's official request made on December 19, 1918.

The German allies had divergent opinions about him. Colonel General Hans von Seeckt (1866-1936), a talented and subtle strategist, considered Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza as a generally and militarily educated soldier of good amiable forms and physically tolerable fresh, but uninspiring and easy to handle in difficult situations, very pessimistic and very concerned about maintaining his fame and dignity, not easy to treat and quickly injured, who was able to recognize the damage to his country's military situation and the German achievements. Field Marshal August von Mackensen had a better opinion, considering him after the conquest of Belgrade as a new Prince Eugene of Savoy, i. e. a popular commander and the most efficient of all

Austro-Hungarian generals and as very sympathetic to him. Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza's Austro-Hungarian subordinates remembered him as a rightful commander, open to listen to everyone's problems and who tried to help if possible.

The retired Field Marshal lived in Vienna and in Budapest, but refusing to be involved in Hungary's internal political conflicts, neither against the communists nor on the side of the conservatives or against them, by supporting the former Emperor and King Charles I's attempts to take again the Hungarian throne. He preferred to cultivate his historical and artistic tastes and to take part at war veterans' meetings, both in Austria and in Hungary (although in order to justify his refuse of being involved in the country's internal conflicts, he deplored his great lack of Hungarian language knowledge). He enjoyed even previously, in wartime, the company of artists, as evidenced both by the impressing amount of his portraits made in various techniques (of which many painted, printed and photographic ones were reproduced on postcards which spread very much across the Empire and increased his popularity, especially among the military and their families) and by 2 photographs from the collection of the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum (inv. 12890/2019 and inv. 7560), showing him in Rijeka / Fiume with the painters John Quincy Adams (1874-1933), Hans Beatus Wieland (1867-1945) and Karl Ludwig Prinz (1875-1944) from the War Press Quarter. Many artists who portrayed him, as will be evidenced in another study (to be published in *Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis*), worked indeed at the War Press Quarter in Vienna. They represented both old and new trends in the art, from Academism, Realism, Impressionism, Symbolism, Secession to Expressionism. Another evidence of the commander's relation with now less known artists is a posthume portrait of his son Adalbert / Béla (1893-1914) by Marianne von Eschenburg (1856-1937) from the collection of the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna (oil on canvas; signed and dated lower left: *Eschenburg 1915.*; inv. 2034/2001). It should be understood as a memorial commission, because his son, a Light Infantry (*Jäger*) Lieutenant, died in Uhniv/Uhnów (now in Ukraine) during World War I, fighting against the Russian army. On September 22, 1924 the Field Marshal died by cerebral apoplexy (now called „stroke”) in Vienna, where he preferred to live. He was laid out in the military casino on the Schwarzenbergplatz and buried in Budapest on

September 29, being honoured by the Hungarian government with state funerals.

At the War Archive (*Kriegsarchiv*) in Vienna are kept no less than 50 crates with his documents. Many personal objects, works of art, photographs and documents which belonged to him are currently kept and even displayed at the Heeresgeschichtliche Museum in Vienna, whose Director was for a short time (in 1950) right the Field Marshal's son Dr. Géza Kövess (1896-1977), an artillery officer and a historian, who was as well Registrar of the Austrian Order of the Golden Fleece. Besides the latter and besides the aforementioned Adalbert / Béla, the Field Marshal had from his marriage with Baroness Eugenie Hye von Glunek (1861-1941), the daughter of the former Justice Minister (June – December 1867), Baron Anton Hye von Glunek (1807-1894) a third son, namely Eugen / Jenő (1898-1929), also an artillery officer, living after World War I in Budapest. To the latter's death contributed very much the cocaine consumption, and this publicly unsuspected aspect was evidenced only by the post-mortem examination, arousing much discussions at that time, when the whole Hungarian society was traumatised by the disastrous consequences of the war (Kerepeszki, 2017).

Dr. Géza Kövess was married in 1943 to Gertrude Spiess von Braccioforte zu Portner und Höflein, the daughter of Colonel August Roland Roman Spiess von Braccioforte zu Portner und Höflein (1864-1953), Director of the Romanian Royal Hunts (1921-1939), whose family house in Sibiu is the actual Hunting Weapons and Trophies Museum „August von Spiess” of the Brukenthal National Museum. This colonel's other daughter, Silvia, is the mother of Dr. Helga Stein-von Spiess, who thus is the Field Marshal's grandniece (For the genealogy of Dr. Géza Kövess: Kövess, 1945-1946).

### **Biographical information on the sculpture's author**

Hans Mauer was an Austrian sculptor about whose life and work there are still few information, despite his talent and fame during the last decades of Austria-Hungary and during the First Austrian Republic and the Corporate State (*Ständestaat*), when he was an appreciated author of portrait sculptures for public monuments, most of them still existing (On the work and life of Hans Mauer: Vollmer, 1930, 274; Krumpöck, 2004, 117-118).

He was born in Vienna, on February 28, 1879 and died there in 1962. He attended at first the State School of Trade and Craft

(*Staatsgewerbeschule*), as a student of the famous architect and urban planner Camillo Sitte. At that time, he made wood sculptures and at the age of 15 he made a highly appreciated wax model of a hiking boy statue, which was exhibited at the Jubilee exhibition held in Vienna, in the Rotunda (1894), where it had a place of honour in the youth section. Also in Vienna, Hans Mauer attended during 1901-1909 the Academy of Fine Arts (*Akademie der bildenden Kunst*), where he was a student of Edmund von Hellmer, Hans Bitterlich, Carl Kundmann and Caspar von Zumbusch. The portrait sculptures made by the latter, which were very appreciated for their historicity, influenced very much Hans Mauer, who travelled also several times to Italy, where he had the opportunity to see the works of ancient, medieval and modern sculptors. Hans Mauer's studio was in Alsergrund, in Vienna's 9<sup>th</sup> district, on the Währinger Straße, 5-7.

Most of Hans Mauer's works were portrait busts of famous personalities, like members of the Imperial family (Emperor Karl I, Empress Zita and Princess Adelheid), Field Marshal Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza, philosophers, physicians etc., but especially artists (most of them, composers and actors). In Vienna, 2 portrait busts by him decorate the University's Court of Honour: that of the philosopher and psychologist Friedrich Jodl (1849-1914), unveiled in 1917 and that of the lawyer and legal philosopher Karl Anton von Martini Baron zu Wasserburg (1726-1800), unveiled in 1929. Besides them, in Vienna there are other 2 works by Hans Mauer, both of marble: the portrait of Court Councillor Dr. Eduard Lang (1841-1916), a dermatologist, in the Lupusheim clinic, respectively the bust of the actor and theatre critic Joseph Lewinsky (1835-1907) in the Burgtheater. Around Vienna, besides the portrait of the paintress Ilka von Kuczyńska-Fessler (1871-after 1930) in Sulz im Wienerwald – Stangau, should be mentioned several monuments of composers by Hans Mauer in Baden bei Wien: a herm of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), dated in 1927, in the park before the Sauerhof, a group (dated in 1912) rendering Joseph Lanner (1801-1843) and Johann Baptist Strauss (1804-1849) in the spa's park as well as the statues of Karl Komzák (1850-1905), Alfred Schreiber (1838-1910) and Carl Michael Ziehrer (1843-1922) in the same park. Outside the Viennese area should be mentioned the head of the composer Franz Schubert (1797-1828) in Graz (made in 1907), an high relief for the funerary monument of the Ortner-Poschacher family in the cemetery of Linz and a portrait bust of the ballet dancer and

choreographer Albertina Rasch (1891-1967) in the Metropolitan Opera in New York. In still unknown places are kept, besides the three aforementioned portraits of the Imperial family, a relief portrait of Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), made on the occasion of the composer's death's centenary, as well as a bust of the composer, actor and singer Gustav Albert Lortzing (1801-1851).

Almost unknown is that Hans Mauer was also a medallist, although only incidentally. For the farewell celebration (March 7, 1915) of Court Councillor Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke (1861-1936), a distinguished Romance philologist who taught in Zürich, Jena, Vienna and later in Bonn, he made a portrait medal (*Oesterreichische Volks-Zeitung*, 1915, 66, 7). Being struck most likely as an unique issue, this medal remained unmentioned in the Artists' Lexicon edited by Hans Vollmer (Vollmer, 1930, 274), but was unknown also to L. Forrer, who does not mention Hans Mauer in his Biographical Dictionary of Medallists (Forrer, 1907), nor in the supplement to it (Forrer, 1930).

Hans Mauer earned several distinctions, but all of them before 1930, as they are mentioned in the Artists' lexicon edited by Hans Vollmer (Vollmer 1930, 274): the Gundel Prize (conferred by the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts), the Füger Medal (conferred by the General School of Sculpture within the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts), the Prize of the Königswarter Foundation (which was a memorial prize conferred by the Jewish community of Meran / Merano in South Tirol to poor Jews needing a cure in the local sanatorium) and the Prize of the Fröhlich Sisters' Foundation (for artists and scientists).

After 1930 his fame began gradually to fade, as his neoclassical style showing sometimes elements of Baroque dramatism or naturalism seemed outdated. However, right due to these style features the Austrofascist Corporate State (1933-1938) commissioned to him the statue of Marco d'Aviano (1631-1699), the Capuchin friar who encouraged the Christian defenders of Vienna (1683) and subsequently played a crucial role in promoting good relations within the allies during the Great Turkish War (1683-1699), when he also preached against any violence and cruelty towards the Ottoman war prisoners and the Muslim population (On the spiritual and diplomatic support of Marco d'Aviano for the policy of the Holy League: Feigl, 1993; Pisa, Wasner-Peter, 2000; Fantuz, Renier, 2012). This statue, which is the sculptor's most famous work, had to be a symbol of the alliance between the authoritarian Corporate State and the Church, as in 1933 Cardinal Theodor Innitzer (1875-1955), Archbishop of Vienna (1932-1955), referred both

to this monk and to the Austrofascist chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß as „Saviors of the Western World“, the regime's propaganda changing thus Marco d'Aviano into a forerunner of the latter. The monument, placed in front of the Capuchins' Church in Vienna, was unveiled by Cardinal Theodor Innitzer during a great public festivity on June 9, 1935 (thus long after the assassination of the aforementioned Austrian dictator) and seems to have acted in the sculptor's benefit later, under the Nazi regime (1938-1945), when no public commissions to him are known, but the bust of Fieldmarshall Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza was unveiled on January 10, 1944 in the Hall of Fame (*Ruhmeshalle*) of the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna (Figure 12). A photograph of the work, made on this occasion, is kept in the collection of the museum mentioned above (inv. 2323/2013). Apparently, Hans Mauer managed thus to hide his relation with the Jewish community, being most likely protected by Cardinal Theodor Innitzer, who supported the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany, but being severely reproved for this by the Holy See (Valvo, 2010, 181-210) and seeing the concordat concluded by Austria and the Holy See on July 5, 1933 broken by the German government, he became gradually a critic of the Nazis and was himself the subject of violent intimidations from them, as the research evidenced already since the late 1970s (Loidl, 1976; Loidl, 1977; Liebmann, 1982; Reimann, 1988; Graf-Stuhlhofer, 2011). However, on November 20, 1947 (as documented by a photographic picture in the Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv in Zürich) the sculptor was brought to a Viennese hospital weakened by starvation and with marks of hunger edema. He recovered, but spent the rest of his life without public commissions, almost forgotten and wrongly perceived by the Austrian critic of art as a sculptor associated with the Austrofascist regime. This perception should be reconsidered, as nowadays Marco d'Aviano is beatified (since April 27, 2003, by Pope John Paul II) and seen, especially by the Catholic Church and by the historians connected with it, as a harbinger of an united Christian Europe (Krautsack, 1999; Mikrut, 2003; Fantuz, Renier, 2012).

## Conclusions

The bust of Field Marshal Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza by Hans Mauer donated to the Brukenthal National Museum is a sculpture of good quality, by a well-known artist. Along the author variant from the Hall of Fame (*Ruhmeshalle*) in the Heeresgeschichtliches

Museum in Vienna, it may be considered as one of the best portraits of the Austro-Hungarian commander. For sure, it is the single work by this sculptor in public museums and collections in Romania, where the Austro-Hungarian wartime official art and patriotic souvenirs are very rare in public collections but also on the antiques market and where there are very few studies on Austro-Hungarian wartime patriotic souvenirs (Sonoc,

2019; Sonoc, Barbu, 2019). The decision to donate this bust to the Brukenthal National Museum is of a particular importance, as Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza lived for a while in Sibiu, where he was in service right at the outbreak of World War I.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

- Fig. 1-5** Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza* (1916). Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).
- Fig. 6** Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza*. Detail. Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).
- Fig. 7** Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza*. Detail. Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).
- Fig. 8** Dr. Helga Stein with the donated bust and Dr. Alexandru Sonoc (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).
- Fig. 9** The former headquarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> Austro-Hungarian Army Corps's Staff, nowadays (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).
- Fig. 10** The former 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps's Commander's Palace, with a sentinel at its gate (undated photograph by Emil Fischer). Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu.
- Fig. 11** Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza*. Author version in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna's Hall of Fame (*Ruhmeshalle*). Photography from 1944. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.
- Fig. 12** Field Marshal Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza's tomb in the Kerepesi cemetery in Budapest.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3





Fig. 4

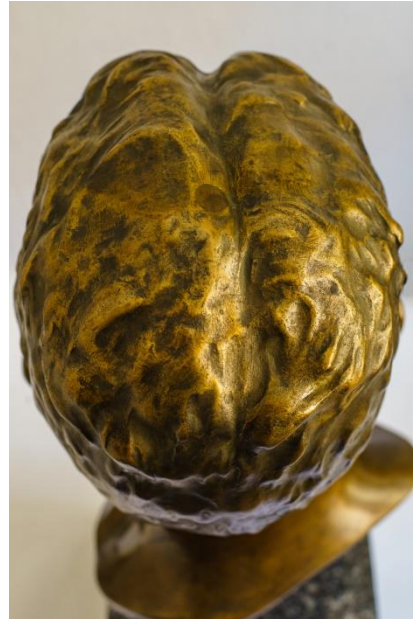


Fig. 5

Fig. 1-5 Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza* (1916).  
Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu  
(photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca)

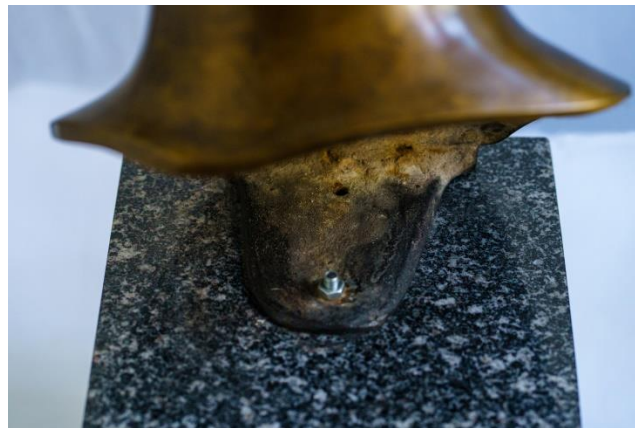


Fig. 6 Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza*. Detail.  
Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).



Fig. 7 Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza*. Detaliu. Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).



Fig. 8 Dr. Helga Stein with the donated bust and Dr. Alexandru Sonoc (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).



Fig. 9 The former headquarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> Austro-Hungarian Army Corps's Staff, nowadays (photograph by Dr. Adrian Luca).



Fig. 10 The former 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps's Commander's Palace, with a sentinel at its gate (undated photograph by Emil Fischer). Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu.



Fig. 11 Hans Mauer, *Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza*. Author version in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna's Hall of Fame (*Ruhmeshalle*).  
Photography from 1944. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.





Fig. 12 Field Marshal Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza's tomb in the Kerepesi cemetery in Budapest.

**THE END OF THE COMMON MAN  
AND THE IDEOLOGICAL CREATION OF THE “HOMO SOVIETICUS.”  
ESSAY**

**Francesco RANDAZZO**

Associate Professor, University of Perugia, Department of Political Science

E-mail: francesco.randazzo@unipg.it

**Abstract:** *Homo sovieticus* is the individual who emerged from the Soviet dictatorship and who has unique characteristics that make him different from other Russian men of the monarchic period. The essay highlights how difficult life was under the Soviet dictatorship, where “ideological” death made more victims than more world wars. According to this thesis, *homo sovieticus* did not die with the end of the Soviet Union but continues to live on through the new Russian leaders.

**Keywords:** *Russia, homo sovieticus, Soviet, Stalin, Zinoviev*

**Rezumat:** *Homo sovieticus* este individul care a apărut din dictatura sovietică și care are caracteristici unice, ce îl diferențiază de ruși din perioada monarhică. Eseul evidențiază cât de dificilă era viața sub dictatura sovietică, unde moartea „ideologică” a făcut mai multe victime decât mai multe războaie mondiale. Conform acestei teze, *homo sovieticus* nu a murit odată cu sfârșitul Uniunii Sovietice, ci continuă să trăiască prin noii lideri ruși.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Rusia, homo sovieticus, Soviet, Stalin, Zinoviev*

## **Introduction**

The history of the conquest of Soviet space has roots that come from the ancestor of the USSR, Imperial Russia, which, over a few centuries, was able to set up an empire as vast as it was militarily competitive. In an area of thousands of square kilometres, the Tsars had to contend to the Persian, Ottoman, and Chinese empires for supremacy over men and territories located on the edges of the enormous frontiers from the shores of the Black Sea to the banks of Vladivostok. Meanwhile, a process developed that was both parallel and consequent to the forced aggregation and assimilation of many peoples and cultures to the Muscovite Empire – from Poland to Mongolia via Bukhara: the gradual elaboration of theories on the superiority of the Slavic “race” over the others, and, in particular, of the Russian race over all the other peoples within and beyond the empire.

But how could it be possible to reconcile the vocation of the empire to represent the Russian people (*Russkaya Imperiya*) with the imperial *grandeur* personified by the Tsars? How could one combine the aspiration expressed in 1833 by Count Uvarov, Russian Minister of Education, to base the state model on the principles of orthodoxy, autocracy, and national genius, with this insuppressible vocation of

conquest over faraway lands and diverse peoples that reached its climax at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the war with Japan highlighted the Russian interest in consolidating its influence as far as the Pacific? This imperial identity, whose Russian-centricity was already declining at the dawn of the century – strongly reduced by the Manchurian *debacle* that triggered a retreat into domestic politics – apparently received its nail in the coffin with the October Revolution: which, in turn, generated the prototype of the *homo sovieticus*, alter ego of the *homo russicus* whose imperial genome inherited. The disintegration of the state during the First World War was followed by the construction of a new supranational subject, which placed at the centre of politics the interest of the proletarians and the peasants – the main interlocutors of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

From 1917 to the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the history of the countries involved in the processes of creation, enlargement, and implosion of the USSR has been characterized by cyclical crises, with Russia as the protagonist of a longstanding tug-of-war with nations and peoples that were part of a system of republics linked by ideological, political, and cultural ties. These particles were connected through the central party of the Soviet Union based in Moscow, from which

the directives to the various local political committees were issued. But this would not be enough to justify decades of rivalry in the bordering areas of European and Central Asian Russia, conditions dictated partly by the exclusive and dominant character of the Russian ethnic group, partly by the phenomena of intolerance shown by peoples who badly accepted the presence of Russian soldiers on their national soil and the centralized policy of Moscow. But even in this case, it would be a mistake to limit to single aspects the irredentist and centrifugal phenomena which have taken place in Russian-Soviet society throughout its existence, as they have deep and ideological roots. These roots have always conditioned Soviet politics, which, far from defending man in his “secular” and “popular” dimension, begun to persecute him because of his ideological beliefs, because of his inability to flatten himself on the position taken by the central government.

### **The myth of “*homo sovieticus*”**

The October Revolution overwhelmed Russia in the aftermath of Vladimir Lenin’s return in 1917. The highest theoretician of Marxism in Russia, universally recognized as “the new man” capable of freeing the people from the Tsarist oppression, which lasted just over three centuries, Lenin rode the popular discontent and prepared the Bolshevik party to rule the country, with or without the support of the many leftist souls scattered throughout the empire.

The weakness of Russia at that precise moment in history, after three years of a desperate war of survival against the Central Powers, was undoubtedly an unprecedented opportunity to launch an attack on the power of Tsar Nicholas II – an inexperienced and weak-willed sovereign, unable to reap the benefits of the policy of economic and social reforms which had begun in 1905-1906 and had lasted little more than a decade. The political debate had undoubtedly undergone an epochal turning point with the birth of pluralism granted by the October Manifesto of 1905, in which the Tsar, for the first time, bestowed on his people the right to elect a State Duma and admitted the birth of party organizations. Despite this, Russian society appeared impermeable to the development of a political debate able to get the reformist project off the ground. Just two years later, the amendment of the electoral law and the tightening of censorship and police control blocked the timid

constitutionalism and slowly precipitated the Tsar’s popularity among the masses. The revolutionary forces that had never stopped attacking power on every occasion that came along – from bomb attacks on regime politicians to the fomentation of popular uprisings, almost always repressed in blood by the Tsarist police – took advantage of the situation.

Lenin, a victim of the Tsarist persecutions like other revolutionaries of the time, had been forced to shelter abroad; in the many years of his exile, however, he was able to maintain relations with the political leaders of the left-wing parties in Russia. His return to the homeland had given new impetus to the anti-Tsarist forces to unite and to overthrow the monarchy and the “government of the bourgeoisie.” Thus, from February to October 1917, Russia was the stage a long tug-of-war between the Provisional Government – which in the meantime had deposed the Tsar – and the Soviets, which had sprung up in significant numbers in many centres of the empire and which represented – or claimed to represent – the joint demands of the proletarians and the peasants. This situation soon led to the ousting of Alexander Kerensky’s Provisional Government and the coming to power of the Bolshevik party. This group found itself in a clear minority after the free elections of December 1917, despite having played a pivotal role in the coup of the previous autumn. As a result, Lenin resolved to close by force the “democratic” phase of the revolution, to dissolve the Constituent Assembly, and to proclaim the concentration of “all power to the Soviets” and the birth of the new Socialist Federative Republic in Russia.

From here on, the political language of Bolshevism tried to shape a new model of the citizen, a “new” man, the *homo sovieticus*, not in Zinoviev’s sociological sense, but the sense of a social type with profoundly different characteristics from the Tsarist subject. Being Soviet meant abandoning any form of religious subjection, dedicating oneself entirely to the communist ideology with a deep faith in the Bolshevik party, repudiating any social title and privilege, and waging unending war to the masters and *kulaks* – landowners who had become rich during the era of economic liberalism started in Russia with the privatizations of the Stolypinian era (1906-1910). This condition disrupted the fragile balance of the Russian society of the time, already fractured and blood-stained by the events of the Civil War against the White Armies.

The country had a predominantly agricultural social profile, while the proletarian world had just entered the gates of history with the intense industrialization started in the former Tsarist empire towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>. The Great War, with its pressing need for arms production, had reduced the people to hunger – a result of the blockage of the Turkish Straits, the main route through which the Allies' merchant ships approached the Russian shores, and the consequent draining of food resources in favour of the troops fighting at the front. Therefore, riding the feeling of popular anger against a war as incomprehensible as it was bloody, the Bolsheviks were able to go straight to the emotions of the common man, managing to transform anger into revenge and redemption, and "faith" in religion into "faith" in human action. They operated a profound restyling of the pyramid of values, overturning the imperial-era *Weltanschauung* and operating a Copernican revolution on the scale of human priorities. If in the past, the highest step was occupied by God and his direct earthly emanation, the Tsar, after which the respect of the institutions and family values came in order, with the advent of Communism at the top of the mountain was put the duty to defend the state, its communist constitution and its right to existence, values that came before the individuals themselves or the good of their families.

People were encouraged to betray friends and relatives if they were acting, in any possible way, as "enemies of the people," but betraying the party – that meant the utmost chastening. The name to be used to address other people was *tovarish* or "comrade," a formula that everyone had to adopt in the name of indispensable and vital equality for a communist state. Anyone who tried to subvert this order would be called a "saboteur," a "counterrevolutionary," and put in the public pillory.

Human and social relations soon gave way to a suspicious and distrustful society, where everyone could consider himself an honest citizen only by accepting to delegate his happiness totally to the state, to feel fulfilled only in the satisfaction of the party that invoked to itself any right to decide on the fate of "comrades." This society, thus shaped, defined the prototype of *homo sovieticus* and marked its destiny for over 70 years, a period during which significant transformations took place within the Russian-Soviet world.

Perhaps the most lasting change took place when Joseph Stalin succeeded Lenin as head of the party, the latter having died in January 1924 after an excruciating illness. The leader of the Bolshevik Revolution had laid the foundations for a society without classes, without injustices, and had done so with formally unassailable theoretical writings, as were, among other things, the works of Marx and Engels on socialism.

However, "as the needs of discipline and organization prevailed over the initially exalted virtues of 'revolutionary enthusiasm' and 'creative spontaneity,' the functioning of Soviet democracy came to a halt and the spirit of the Soviets emptied of its content" (Marabini, 1968, 74). The founder's Georgian successor, Stalin, slowly overshadowed the sovereign organs of Soviet power – the Congress, the Communist Party, the Central Committee and the Politburo –, placing at the centre of the political life of the country his very person and thus building a cult of personality according to which he himself would be regarded as the "greatest creator" in the USSR.

During this period of political and cultural annihilation, the figure of the *homo sovieticus* was forged. It soon became the symbol of a whole era of moral and intellectual decadence, for which the party was largely responsible. Just think of the long list of social duties and moral imperatives to which PCUS members were subjected: "You must attend meetings, pay your dues, attend Party schools, study its history and the works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin; you must read the newspapers published by the Party, explain its decisions to those who do not belong to it, put posters on the walls in the streets of the city; during electoral periods you must carry out a propaganda task, behave with discipline, as a model of behavior not to run into any social error, etc." (Marabini, 1968, 117).

Prescriptions, recommendations, and prohibitions that intervened in the lives of citizens by depriving them of those fundamental freedoms bound, according to the Soviet Constitution of 1936, to the superior welfare and main interest of the Communist Party and the state. This meant the construction from scratch of a person whose greatest expression of happiness was to be the common welfare, which would soon translate into the welfare of a political elite made up of a handful of bureaucrats.

As long as the Stalinist system survived, the condition of the Soviet citizen was not perceived from within society as suffocating or

deprived of rights. Soviet propaganda had successfully demonized everything that came from the capitalist countries, a “clique” led by the United States, whose main goal was to destroy the climate of peaceful coexistence among the Soviet peoples and bring down Communism. This sentiment facilitated, over time, the task of the Soviet elite to channel social resentment towards the West, where democracies were painted as fictitious, and the bourgeoisie ruled over the enslaved proletarian masses. Only the Soviet people could put an end to all exploitation and oppression, opening the way to the noble revolutionary ideals of equality and brotherhood.

This kind of social self-deception survived and flourished for several decades, at least until the political rhetoric of Stalinism came to an end with the phase of destalinization initiated by Khrushchev at the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress in 1956. In October of that year, the Hungarian uprising against the dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi, a member of the Stalinist “old guard,” and against the Soviet presence in Hungary posed a serious dilemma in the circles of European communists, struggling with the disavowal of Soviet intervention within a country belonging to the Warsaw Pact. From this moment on, even the Soviet intelligentsia began to question itself from within about the degree of “happiness” shared by the peoples who had embraced Communism under the aegis of Moscow.

In *The Soviet Man*, a bestseller published in the late 1950s, the German journalist Klaus Mehnert, a profound connoisseur of Soviet reality, retraced his 12 trips to the USSR between 1929 and 1957, highlighting the apolitical character of the Soviet citizen: an individual more interested in his own survival than in the political life, because Lenin’s homeland had changed profoundly over 40 years and men had lost faith in the utopia that had kept them in a state of emotional intoxication for decades. According to Mehnert, the promise of a classless society had been deeply disregarded, the worker and peasant protagonists of the revolution and builders of socialism had found themselves in a state of privation and submission, while the *nomenklatura* enjoyed great privileges and an above-average standard of living.

From these denunciations and the phases of destalinization and Thaw, social research banned by Soviet society in the post-revolutionary years regained vigour. The ones riding this new climate, favorable to an unexpected opening of

government circles to new social bodies, were scientists, sociologists, and political thinkers of the calibre of Mikhail Voslensky, Alexander Zinoviev, and Yuri Levada, protagonists of a new era of Soviet intellectual life that opened up to international contributions.

In a particular way, the Russian philosopher and writer Zinoviev, with his book *Gomo soveticus* (*Homo sovieticus*, 1982), highlighted the negative qualities of this human prototype, son of the generation that came out of the Stalinist period, and made a summary devaluation of traditional collective images. This conception would be inherited by a group of social scientists from Moscow, led by Levada. Zinoviev had already in the past used biting satire referring to communist ideology, resembling, in this, the comic and satirical journalism of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. *Gomo sovieticus* was rich in radical, subversive contents, ranging from criticism to Soviet society as a whole to the profound conviction that to arrive at the truth, one must enter into a discussion with oneself (Zinoviev, 1983). In the book, the author tries to paint a portrait of the invisible man of Soviet society, a man born with the Bolshevik Revolution who carries within himself all the contradictions that this society transmits to him: he is envious and contemptuous, trusting and fearful, pessimistic and hopeful, amoral and judgmental, cunning and stupid, with a mania for omniscience but also tormented by doubt.

The intellectual rejection of communist culture leads him to extreme positions, from which he tries to return after having visited the West and having contributed to writing important pages of political dissidence abroad. The latter has a long tradition in Russia, but its existence in the Soviet era has been buried for decades in the archives of the KGB. The walls of Lubyanka have preserved the secrets of many intellectuals such as Osip Mandelstam, Pavel Florensky, Isaak Babel, Mikhail Bulgakov, and many others, whose “ideological death” deprived the country of artists whose fame was international. In his magnificent book *La Parole ressuscitée* (1993), Vitaly Shentalinsky wrote that the Soviet power “destroyed the forms of its material and spiritual life, attacked its conscience and its most fundamental good: its own language [...] Those strata of the population that were both custodians and creators of the Russian language were exterminated: the peasants and intellectuals; the vocabulary was impoverished, reducing it to a sort



of Soviet manual made of slogans and phrases [...] and instead of the free and musical breath so natural: *Russia*, they put an RSFSR splinter in our mouths” (Shentalinsky, 1993, 171).

Regarding the Cold War with the West, however, Zinoviev affirmed the military supremacy of the Soviet bloc over the Atlantic bloc and added: “The West has imposed so many restrictions on itself that its hands are irrevocably tied: humanism, democracy, human rights and so on... Now I dream of living in a good old police state in which left-wing parties are banned, demonstrations are suppressed and strikes suppressed – in a word, down with democracy!”. A strong remark, that makes one reflect again on the perception that Russian scholars have of themselves, on their identity crisis that passes through the description of a Soviet human type through which everything is questioned, even the superiority of the Soviet model over the Tsarist or Western model. This kind of contradictions pervaded the entire Soviet society of the Brezhnevian era, that will bequeath to the *perestroika* of Mikhail Gorbachev – the last possibility of mediation with the communist tradition –, the vain attempt to snatch *homo sovieticus* from his ineluctable destiny, from his inevitable social failure.

But for some, this symbol of the communist past never died. In fact, Faustino

Ferrari affirms that “this *homo sovieticus* is a source of nostalgia. Nostalgia – this fundamental element that impregnates the Slavic soul... The ranks of those who regret the good old days are growing wider and wider. When the minimum life expectancy was assured. When the streets were not full of potholes, and there was work in the factories. When the land was not abandoned and uncultivated. And, above all, when there was no corruption. This *homo sovieticus* is the one who wallows in corruption and bribes and is the one who, with his behavior, foments the nostalgia of the past golden age. The processes that are triggered are those of return, with ever more evident restrictions on individual and collective freedoms. The Golden Age never existed, but living in an increasingly concentrated climate gives the impression of being back in an egalitarian context, where limited rights are more shared” (Ferrari, 2017). Obviously, Ferrari does not think about the prototype described by Zinoviev, but what is certain is that in the wake of that tradition found their place many diverse subjects with similar characteristics, and all derived from the first *homo sovieticus* par excellence, the one who takes off the clothes of the Tsarist subject to wear those of the party member, bringing with him unresolved problems with his sense of freedom and his perception of happiness.

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## IMAGES OF GOTHIC DEATH IN THE ROMANIAN FILM AND LITERATURE

Mihaela GRANCEA

Professor, PhD

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu

E-mail: mihaela\_grancea2004@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *The article aims at revealing the imaginary of Gothic death in a selection of representative Romanian texts. Though the selection process may be seen as subjective, we chose those that inspired other works throughout the historical periods. The imaginary of death in Romanian culture is less fertile than it was in other cultures, especially in the case of the Gothic death. In scholarly culture, arts and literature, the motif gains prominence in Belle Epoque and after the First World War. A relative cultural synchronicity takes place in Romania, linked to the collective trauma provoked by the Great War, contributing to modernist and avant-garde exercises. Representations and sensibilities concerning death seem similar with those from the western culture for a short period of time. Furthermore, the Romanian post-communist films explore timidly the cultural register of the horror film. Our paper analyses the most interesting images of terrible death in the Romanian film and literature.*

**Keywords:** *Gothic death, death imaginary, Romanian film and literature, cursed places, ghosts and living dead*

**Rezumat:** *Am încercat, în studiul de față, să surprindem ceea ce ni s-a părut relevant vizavi de imaginarul Morții Gotice. Selecția textelor și imaginilor reprezentative pentru imaginarul românesc al Morții a fost un proces dificil și subiectiv. Ne-am oprit asupra acelor reprezentări iconice care au făcut carieră culturală, au inspirat și au fost retransmise cu fidelitate sau metamorfozate în funcție de contextele istorice. Imaginarul Morții în cultura românească este mai puțin fertil decât cel manifestat în alte culturi, dacă este vorba, mai ales, de reprezentările Morții Gotice. În cultura savantă, în literatură și artă, el explodează în La Belle Epoque și după Primul Război Mondial, în perioada interbelică. O relative sincronicitate culturală, precum și trauma colectivă provocată de Marele Carnagiu, vor încuraja exercițiile avangardiste, moderniste. Pentru o scurtă perioadă de timp și uneori tangențial, sensibilitățile și reprezentările legate de Moarte par similare cu cele din cultura occidentală. Filmul românesc postcomunist explorează, și el, cu timiditate registrele culturii filmice horror. Noi am încercat să surprindem, cele mai interesante imagini ale Morții teribile în literatura și în filmul românesc.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *moartea gotică, imaginarul morții, filmul și literatura română, cadavru, locuri blestemate, fantome și morți vii.*

### **Maledictus loca**

Cursed places are part of the Gothic death repository. These places offer hints regarding the events that will follow and/or are the background for the terrible events or death itself. Cursed places are antechambers of death. Some of these spaces are dominated by nature and olfactory elements that precede death. The most known smell is the one of decomposition. Thus, in Cezar Petrescu's *Aranca, știma lacurilor* (*Aranka, Pixie of the Lakes*; Petrescu 1927), the Gothic atmosphere is abundant on the

count's domain and his medieval castle. The smells, the shadows reconstitute a dominant space of evilness, a tenebrous atmosphere preparing the set for the violent death. In the castle, the spider nets cover the drapes, along with a greenish dust, while mice sneak up along the walls, in the moldy air. The stiff and rusty windows and locks, the opening doors of the wardrobes, the suffocating smell of the labyrinthine corridors, as well as the unbearable silence complete the image:

*“Deadly smell came out of the secular chairs. The painting of the walls gazed with an inhuman fixedness. The drapes were teetering when passing by, the locks were gnashing terribly”* (Petrescu 1973, 188-190).

Among the swamps of his domain, the hero of the narration enters a macabre world, struck the stench of germinations, the sulphurous mud full of toads that were jumping unexpectedly, among the putrid vines, there were lurking small stinky creatures. The young man felt surrounded by a fast sinister and pestilential reality in the endless swamp, the tarred channels, among the flying death’s-head hawk moths. Even the beauty was degraded – white and yellow water lilies were “fleshy and putrid” like ulcerated wound. The ghost Aranka and the man with the goiter watched him closely, contributing to his anxiety. Aranka died under mysterious circumstances and her body was lost; thus, Aranka’s ghost wanted the body to be found, while the man with the goiter was her supposed killer. After finding the woman’s body, the ghost disappeared, while the story clears as in early Gothic narrations (see Radcliffe 1789). In the vision of the locals, the place was cursed because of the owner’s attraction to occult practices, while two countesses died in the swamps and others got ill.

Moscu’s mansion from Mircea Eliade’s *Domnișoara Christina* (*Miss Christina*; Eliade, 1936) is a relic of the impoverished elite because of the 1921 reform. The residence and the domain are a space of the crepuscular past and a sort of passage between past and death, a portal between the worlds. After finding the place where Miss Christina was buried, the woman-ghost, the normalcy is installed. The narration reinvents one of the oldest motives of the Romanian imaginary regarding death (Grancea 1998, 74-85; Grancea 2020, 50-53).

In his confessional prose and poetry, Max Blecher wrote about the attempts of living under the terrible circumstances of illness, about the psychology of dying or, the “apprenticeship of a sick” as he named it. Although expected, death as the ending of a tormented living is atrocious and, paradoxically, natural. The author/victim is capable of irony despite all his physical tortures and dehumanizing

humiliations, as it is evident in *Inimi cicatrizate* (*Scarred Hearts*; Blecher 1938). The book is actually a fictionalized diary of a terrible physical pain. While dying is a complex process, the one described by Max Blecher is anti-creational.

Sometimes, death of the sick people from the sanatorium happens unexpectedly, while at times it is awfully postponed. It is only seldom when the sick heals and leaves the world of the sanatorium. The system of death keeps them all captive, even those healed. The relatives of the sick consider the sanatorium a comfortable place. As does death. The illusion of healing that enlivens the sick is nothing but a stage of dying. The sanatorium is a locus of the sick, a passage between worlds, a purgatory in which the sick people’s heroism who experience the path from the denial of their own death to dehumanization and ego decomposition. If that was a fictional world, we would name it a Kafkian universe. Even the town near the sanatorium seems a place of the doomed, a “Mecca of the bone tuberculosis.” Dying supposes the change of the image, a profoundly tragic phenomenon. Emmanuel became the prisoner of a box after being put into cast. He describes the process of medication, a ridiculous operation to reduce the man to a mass of flesh and bones supported by the rigidity of a profile of metal and cast. The multifunctional guard where the patient lies becomes the materialization of incapacity, on the one hand, and of the attempt to survive, on the other, whilst the patient learns to eat, sleep and even have sex in that hypostasis close to a paralytic. Emanuel considers himself a living dead, becoming intimate with death. The author offers a unique image in literature, the one of the church as a ship of death, a humble ship built by sailors. Emanuel pictures the ship floating on the waves of the ocean, carrying all the patients in a unique and ultimate journey through the night to shipwreck and apocalypse. Thus, such an allegory of death is unique in the Romanian literature (Blecher 1995, 84).

The film *Scarred Hearts*, directed by Radu Jude, 2016, is a personal and political interpretation of the novel. One might notice the longevity of dying expecting healing or personal death. Death is a constant presence in the

hospital with the patients of bone tuberculosis. The hospital appears as an entity to Emanuel in his sleep: the head of a dead horse that shines in the dark and is instilled in dreams and while being awake in the mind of the one who is about to die. In Blecher's *Vizuina luminată* (*Enlightened Den*, published posthumously in 1971), the diary of his sufferings, the great writer presents the condition of someone who is living clearly his dying process. In his case, a suffering of ten years. The patient is a hero of suffering. Death offers him the necessary term to meditate on his options and on dying (Becher 2009).

### ***Imago Mortis***

The macabre in the Romanian folk culture, as well as in the scholar one is a rare phenomenon. There are only a few representations in the Middle Ages and Pre-modernity – the image of the corpse or of the skeleton with the sickle is rarely present in frescoes of the churches. Death is rather anthropologized. The attributed objects are the sickle and the satchel (Bogdan 2017, 188-198). For example, in rural Greek-Catholic spaces, death holds in its left hand the sickle; a traditional image is the one at the entrance of the Merry Cemetery in Săpânța (a black creature that threatens the viewer with a huge sickle).

On the other hand, the Romanian literature of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is abundant in poems and short stories that introduce the reader in the universe of death. Among the most famous there is George Coșbuc's poem *Groparul* (*The Grave Digger*, in Coșbuc 1896). The poem describes the way in which death kills those who are disrespectful toward her. This is the case of the grave digger who disrespects the human remains found in the cemetery while digging a new grave. A skull warns the digger of his imminent meeting with death prompted by his attitude. The warning is followed by impressive and terrifying verses. Armed with a useless axe, the grave digger chases the guest from the afterlife. The effect is lethal, as the offense attracts a true march of revenge – the man sees lots of skeletons approaching his house as if the cemeteries were emptied of its dead.

Terrified, the grave digger dies of fear (Coșbuc 2015, 219-221).

The macabre became widely spread in the Romanian culture before the Great War (see especially the influences of Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly and Oscar Wilde) and in the inter war period. The fantastic and/or macabre represents the influence of the western cultural movements (theosophy, onirism, spiritism and psychoanalytical vulgata) that become areas of interest for the urban Romanian society. Though the Romanian film of that period is not open to the Expressionist experiment, literature reacts to this influence. The Romanian tradition uses aplenty pre-Christian images and beliefs that fueled literary creations.

Miss Christina was a cruel and frivolous woman during her short life, who was involved with the overseer of her estate that treated the peasants brutally. During the 1907 rebellion, she offered herself to the peasants who came to ask for justice, an act that attracted her lover's jealousy and ultimately her murder. As her corpse wasn't found, Christina's ghost-vampire wandered throughout the domain, searching for victims. The painter Egor is bewitched by the woman from the painting that dominates the mansion, but the vampire's seductive attempts stop when the painter notices a wound on Christina's body. Moreover, the painter managed to find the corpse and to perform the ritual to de-vampirize it, liberating thus the community from her malefic influence (Eliade 1936, 1993).

The fantastic prose, with Gothic influences, is populated with materializations of the dead. The ghost of a drowned woman that wanders on the land of the noble Kemény Andor (Iacobeni, Sibiu county) in Cezar Petrescu's aforementioned literary work. This may be the best Romanian novel of the Gothic genre. A ghost unable to find peace, Aranka, disappeared in unclear circumstances after the Great War, and communicates with a young man who arrived on the estate to evaluate the family patrimony after count's death in 1927. The castle was a sinister place, with a library resembling a crypt, set in a world of fetid swamps. Like in Gothic texts, the contact with the ghost is facilitated by a portrait of a young woman with hypnotic eyes. The narrator got

drunk with Tokay wine and defied the ghost that led him through the swamp to the decayed body. The road to the place where the countess was killed is tenebrous – he was running after the ghost, chased by the man with the goiter with a fierce look. The killer stopped the young man once, hitting his head. Two weeks later, the countess' corpse was found, near a ruffle as a sign of the fact that she went hunting (Petrescu 1973, 196-212).

The romantic image of love and psychoanalytical preoccupations of the human condition are linked to the fantastical mystery of the noir films in Alexandru Philippide's *Floarea de prăpastie* (*The Cliff Flower*, 1942). The oneiric existence stirs the youthful instincts of Ștefan Budu. The first dream for this engineer dominated by his frigid wife is the debut of awakening the sleeping manhood. In his daily life, Budu is abulic. He did not dream at all and psychoanalysis was a non-science, as he lives schizoid till meeting the exotic Mara-Dar, a woman who prostituted herself at her husband's request. Her victims are an ex-minister and Budu. The narration focused on the analysis of oneiric states and the mechanisms of the dream. In fact, Budu starts to perceive himself only after his first dream. Thus, his world is turned upside down. The first dream had thanatic significance; the game between real and para-real is getting deeper when he enters new social contexts, meets people with extravagant preoccupations (see the demonstration of collective hypnosis at the residence of the ex-minister). Ștefan Budu's first dream is organized on three main motives: Dream, Eros and Death. Budu met an alter ego, but the axis of his oneiric world was a white and mysterious woman that combines features from the real life women he met. She is the beautified Death. Thus, the abulic Budu is transformed into a lover who dares to come closer to the object of his desire, even if this desire leads to death. Coralia, a pretended medium and ex-minister's lover, shot Budu by accident, after his meeting with Mara-Dor, because she confused him for her lover who cheated on her with Mara-Dor. Unexpectedly, both women regret Budu's death; each of them would have preferred the ex-minister to have taken the bullet. The simple Budu, dominated by his wife is transformed by death into a new man, a hero that protected his

lover. In this micro-novel, women are representations of the Fatum.

Death in the inter war literature is ubiquitous. Sometimes this is the late effect of the war trauma; this is also the case of Camil Petrescu, Cezar Petrescu, Gib Mihăescu.

The necrophiliac woman is a manifestation/representation of death. In the European culture, since the Renaissance painting to the funerary art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, death, greedy skeleton, is in love with her victims. That is why she kidnaps them. Death is usually represented in the paintings of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century as a beautiful demon (from the image of a winged Thanatos to the myth of death in vacation)<sup>1</sup>.

Tudor Arghezi offers all the clues to confirm the theory of Death materialization in a feminine image. In Arghezi's novel *Cimitirul Buna-Vestire* (*The Annunciation Cemetery*, 1968), the pale lady comes out of the cemetery and then steps out of a black limousine. Although she has no one buried in the cemetery, the lady assists obsessively to all funerals and especially pays visits to the bodies displayed in the chapel. She said to the intendant that she considered the dead beautiful, that she came to the cemetery with pleasure and that she envied the women who took care of the last bath of the deceased. The lady always wears gloves, pretends to be a pianist and has no relatives, while the existence of a husband seems absurd to her. The description offered by the narrator is telling: "Her eyes, impossibly green, were lighting and dimming from dozens of points, like beads lit by huge caterpillars of the quince trees when they hump on their movements on the branches" (Arghezi 1968, 182).

Ion Ozun, the hero of Cezar Petrescu's novel *Calea Victoriei* (Petrescu 1956), has the vision of death when he recovers his conscience after a serious pneumonia. Death is a mysterious woman, a suicide in greyish clothes that knocked his forehead with her bony finger. She is followed by black bugs with repulsive bellies that suffocated him during his illness. All the

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<sup>1</sup> See also the theatre play *La Morte in Vacanza* by Alberto Casella, 1924 and then the film adaptation *Death Takes a Holiday*, 1934, with Frederic March in the main role of death in love with a mortal woman.

sounds after the illness seem beautiful to him, as he returned from a

*“stifling and dark world where everything passed by growing in huge silent shadows. Only woman’s finger was aching on his forehead: toc-toc! Then the army of black bugs was growing from every corner. And everything went down with him, in that darkness of the bottom of the lake where he balanced as a drowned man among the others.”* (Petrescu 1956, 215-217)

Death is not a macabre appearance in Radu Stanca’s poem; death is just a character with an extravagant mask and a frivolous and playful behaviour; under the monocle, death hides one pink eye and another is yellow, his hair is violet and his lips are black: “I am the most beautiful in this town!” – reads the first and the last lines of the poem *Corydon* (Stanca 1980, 115-117).

### **The living dead in the Romanian film**

During the communist period, the myth of the ghost was a forbidden topic. That is why the post-communist culture revitalized such abandoned cultural motives. Reprinting and adapting to screen literary works that stir the interest of the public is quickly reconfigured. The popularity of Eliade’s prose is also evident in the film adaptation of the short story *Miss Christina* (script and directed by Alexandru Maftai; actors: Maia Morgenstern, Tudor Istodor, Ioana Anastasia Anton, 2013). It was considered the first Romanian horror film and this was the way it was promoted in the media. The film is mediocre and obsolete, as it abuses of all the classic clichés of the genre, being suffocated by the typical music.

On the other hand, the 1992 film adaptation of the novel is notable for its historical reconstitution and great actors’ play. The 1992 film is directed by Viorel Sergovici and Maria Buruiană plays the part of Miss Christina, while the painter is Adrian Pintea. The absence of music, with a few exceptions, shaped the film into a thriller and a fantastic film. Actually, directors of both film adaptations did not know how to build the specific thrill of this genre. None of these adaptations escapes the

“tyranny” of Eliade’s text, as both of them follow the same script and remain conventional.

While in the 1992 film, there was too much talking, confusion of the late Gothic novel dominates the 2013 film, without the explicit and rationalist ending. As a rule, the tension grows gradually in the horror film, sometimes only suggesting something macabre and frightening. But these films do not exploit the open ending of the original text. Moreover, the films are prudish, ignoring the explicit eroticism of the short story. And the myth of the vampire is not only a myth of macabre immortality, but also an erotic one. Compared to the scarce music of the first film adaptation, the music of the second one is troubling and exceptional, but too dense for such an arrhythmic film. These films are rather linked to the tradition of the classic soft horror films, not the nowadays scary movies (Mitchievici 2020, 46-48).

The film *Nunta mută* (*The Silent Wedding*, 2008), directed by Horațiu Mălăieles, may be considered a mix of genres (political, fantastic, comedy), but it contains a thanatic feeling. The script has the starting point in a true event from 1953 in a Romanian village. Stalin’s death and the subsequent mourning period instituted in the entire communist block transform a wedding into a silent one. But, as the wedding participants cannot help but celebrate, they are deported to Siberia. The village is destroyed and leveled with the ground. Among the ruins, in the post-communist period, a TV crew arrives to search for paranormal activity, based on rumors that there is a living dead, an alienated young woman who lost her mind after her groom left and Soviet soldiers raped and killed her. The village is haunted by the images of widows dressed for burial, the widows of the deported men. A real wedding is transformed into a wedding of death, reminding of the Romanian folk ballad *Miorița*.

### **The corpse**

In the spirit of the aesthetics of ugliness, Arghezi describes the beauty of the corpse, of the frozen nostalgia in the eyes of a beautiful, yet putrid body. The naturalistic description is typical for the verses of the volume *Flori de mucigai* (*Musty Flowers*), which was published in 1931. The poem *Ion* describes the body of a

man eaten by rats in a cellar, while his eyes still retain the “light of the village where he was born” (Arghezi 1971, 125).

On the other hand, Cezar Petrescu uses a different approach on death – the trivial death. He chooses the representative image of the deceased. Teofil Steriu’s death, the great writer in *Calea Victoriei*, was unexpectedly common. Steriu was found dead, eyes wide open, in the chair, at the desk, by the German servant. He wasn’t fighting with death, lying as if he expected it. The author suggests that Steriu lost any interest for the show of life, falling asleep at any event so that death became for him the grand sleep. He died in a simple and discreet manner. On other occasions, Cezar Petrescu describes the corpse like a pathologist. This is the case of a description of a young prostitute who threw herself in front of the train. The episode takes place in the first chapter of the same novel, warning the young provincial people who come to Bucharest of the malefic nature of the great city. The corpse lying on the railroad tracks is avidly viewed by the travellers:

“unveiled by the tore clothes, it showed a non-prudish nakedness of an unreal whiteness, with all the blood drained, with the intimate femininity exposed to all the viewers, round intact breasts, getting out of the ripped out blouse. [...]” (Petrescu 1956, 31)

As the narrator shows, no one felt any pity for the young woman pushed to suicide by her unbearable life.

In Geo Bogza’s avant-garde poems, death is materialized in the corpse that becomes source of deeply rooted terror. The expressionist poem *Teroare olfactivă* (*Olfactory Terror*, Bogza 2010) describes the effect of an eviscerated and festering corpse of a driller who died in an explosion on the poet-witness who cannot escape the smell of burnt and decaying flesh that entered in his olfactory memory. The verses expose photograms of a violent, tragic and ugly death:

“If you, Nicolae Ilie, knew my nights/  
where/ all the olfactory terror festers/  
my eyes, brains/ when each wind blow/

*brings who knows what unearthly/ ponds/  
the smell of alcohol and pumpkin of feces/  
that follow me everywhere as olfactory  
ghosts/ penetrating my daily food/ making  
the desirable bread/ nauseating/ and  
incapable my youth hereafter in life/ of my  
body always weakening/ because of your  
corpse.”* (Bogza 2010, 182).

Another poet, George Bacovia, was obsessed by the fetid smell that permeated the crypts in the city (see the poem *Cuptor/ Oven*, published in 1916). Morbidity becomes shortly a general phenomenon that invades his intimate life: “There are several dead in the city, my love”; “Slowly the corpses decompose”; “There’s a smell of corpses, my love” (Bacovia 1972, 184).

A different case is Ion Vinea who oscillates between the aesthetic of ugliness/surrealist macabre and the black humour in the poem *Visul spânzuratului* (*Hangman’s Dream*):

“The bruised hangman in the garden/ full of  
dew and new leaves/ circles in his axis of  
light/ fearing no snow or rain./ The  
hangman dangled on the same though/ till  
morning/ hanged by the starts with a  
thread,/ relieved of love and life, feeling  
unchanged./” (Vinea 1971, 130)

Whereas for the poets the exposure/description of the body is an image of the organically accepted death, Emil Cioran manifests a frenetic fear of decomposition. He considers that such a fate is avoided only by those who have an interior music close to saints – only such a state of grace leaves a fragrant corpse (Cioran 2008).

The Romanian author with significant descriptions of interments is Max Blecher, the author who lived in intimacy with death before even being ill in sanatoriums. He presents the Other’s death as a traumatic event, *memento mori*. Out of the many burials of the novel *Scarred Hearts*, the description of a child’s death is the most touching. Placed in a small coffin on two chairs, in front of the photo camera, the child of itinerant street photographers represent the beauty of the deceased as an effect of hazard. The background of the picture was a park with Italian terraces



and marble columns so that the standardized beauty had a merely kitsch effect over the small corpse, hands crossed on his chest, dressed for a celebration and immersed in bliss. However, the poor burial erased the bliss of the photography. Another description is merely serene of the dying and buried grandfather of the author. Blecher paid him visits in his chamber, while his grandfather was saying his prayers. The deceased's grooming comprises hilarious sequences, but the burial in the Jewish tradition follows the archaic rules. In a very hot day, when people's gestures seemed more exaggerated than in reality, the dead is prepared for his eternal entrance:

*"The humid grave aspires the dead in coolness and darkness that seemed to him eternal happiness. The clods fell heavily on the planks, while people kept living their imperious lives in their dusty clothes, all sweaty and exhausted"* (Blecher 1996, 186-187).

In the world of the administrator of the cemetery *Buna Vestire/Annunciation*, a fictional world articulated by inexorable machinery, the miracle of redemption appears suddenly. The novel is a hybrid writing, almost chameleonic, a poetic narration with unexpected twists of register that involve the pamphlet, the culture of macabre and psalm-like fragments. Pompiliu Constantinescu considers Arghezi's work "the most beautiful fantastic novel of the Romanian literature" that sublimates the pamphlet through mystical symbols (Apud Simion 2006, 1-6). The description of the corpse's incineration that weighed "a ton of knitted fat" is in naturalistic manner:

*"The incineration is done primitively and wildly as if the family would take the dead's leg and push him into the oven. The eyes pop, the skin swells and bursts like a small coat, the physiological oils burn with a big flame. I came here, in this kitchen where the corpse exploded only after raising in a seated position."* (Arghezi 1968, 198)

This is the first fragment of this kind in the Romanian literature, a portrait of the terrifying decomposition of the flesh.

While the classical and romantic writers were dominated by the theme of the lonely burial place, the cemetery becomes increasingly interesting in the literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century either we talk about the classical or avant-garde poets. Whereas for the represented peasants by Coşbuc the cemetery is the expression of the right to the social recognition (Coşbuc 1984), the cemetery is the image of the final destination for symbolist poets. Bacovia's poem *Plumb (Lead)* is memorable, as it inspired clichés and manifestations of a collective neurosis visible in the popular culture (see the folk song *Deschide, gropare, mormântul/ Digger man, open the grave*, which was sung at private parties and even weddings in the inter war and communist period). In the same period, the Hungarians were listening to a similar song, entitled *Szomorú vasárnap/Gloomy Sunday* composed by Rezső Seress (1933).

Bacovia's aforementioned poem uses the keyword "lead" as a repetitive metaphor, suggesting absolute death, irreversible falling and paralysis. The cold crypt is the expression of definitive loneliness (Bacovia 1925, 24). The cemetery as common place becomes the neurotic image of the inter war period. The snow in the cemetery, a sort of apocalypse, is the expression of the absolute finale, where the world of the living became a cemetery:

*"The town sits in darkness/ As if it's snowing in the cemetery./ My lover plays a funerary march,/ while I am wondering perplexed:/ Why would she play a funerary march.../ And it is snowing in the cemetery."* (Bacovia 1972, 182)

In George Lesnea's poetry, necropolis is the definitive place of the dead that are decomposing under the ground although at the surface the cemetery resembles a garden. This is the apparent appearance. Such a vision imposes a counter-vision regarding the classic status of the cemetery as locus, garden of serenity. The first sign of the appearance is the careful glance of the grave diggers who see the "client", deceased to be in every living man:

*"Have you seen how strange the grave diggers look upon the living?/ All people that walk rushing or carelessly,/ Are nothing*

*but corpses and skeletons to them,/ In which the snakes of gloom would nest their offspring/ They dig and dig for ever, anxious bodies,/ And dug up graves are plugged at once./ The graveyard awaits – a greedy giant - / For all the living from the city to come dead.”* (Lesnea 1964, 89)

Whereas to Lesnea the cemetery is the image of the last certainty, to Marin Sorescu, death is a component of the community, an imagined village as matrix of the being. The poem *La liliesci/ At the Bats* defines the space of the cemetery as the axis of a re-imagined village:

*“It’s cooler in the shadow of the old church that had stood here since the village had been forest and outlaws came here to eat stealthily./ The cuckoo sings, the grave yard is in complete agreement with itself.”* (Sorescu 1986, 106-107)

Disasters were considered taboo subjects in the communist period, like micro-apocalypses, repetitions of the divine plan. At the end of the relative liberalization in the communist Romania, during the dreadful floods of the 1970s, especially in Transylvania and Dobrudja, Iosef Demian, Stere Gulea, Dan Pița, Mircea Veroiu, Felicia Pătrașcu and Nicolae Mărgineanu filmed the documentary *Apa ca un bivoli negru* (*Water as a Black Bull*, 1971). The film is set in a dark human universe touched by tragedy. The soundtrack is ensured by the people’s voices that talk about their troubles and those of the entire community. In the communist period, death of the people subdued by the natural disasters was opposite to the heroic collective death. Nevertheless, there is a shocking scene in the documentary of recovering a body of a soldier who died during the rescue mission. The image of the naked unidentified body would be surpassed, in our opinion, only by the image of the aborted fetus in Cristian Mungiu’s film *Patru luni, trei săptămâni și două zile* (*Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days*, 2007). People’s resignation and calm are the expression of despair facing the unconquerable forces of nature. Such a state of mind is also present in the ending of Constantin Țoiu’s novel on the

collective burial after the earthquake of 1977 (Țoiu 1981).

Sorescu’s theatre play – *Matca/ The Womb* (1973) – is also inspired by the tragedy of the flood of 1970, but the writer overcomes the determinist vision and builds a plea for the biological continuity. The end of the play is revealing, as death is confound with birth, the “uplift of the newborn over the waters is paid by the mother’s submersion under the waters of the flood”. The life-death symmetry is linked to the human condition and that is an unparalleled representation in the Romanian literature of the communist period (Sorescu 2019, 89-137).

In the register of traditional images, the motif of death’s kidnapping is explicitly conveyed, yet in a clumsy manner in an epitaph, in a Romanian cemetery:

*“[...] The woman with the sickle on her shoulder/ Has chosen my number from the black row/ I look death in the eyes/ As I see no reason to avoid her glance./ There is no blind submission in face of death/ As it was meant to be/ The black destiny awaits us all/ Rejoice that you are not sharing mine”* (fragment from an epitaph-poem of the young Valentin-Silviu Lulușa, 1958-1979, Municipal Cemetery *Calea Lipovei*, Timișoara).

The theme of death as cunning abductor is frequently seen in urban Romanian cemeteries. Such a relatively romantic image is also present in the epitaphs of the Romanian provinces of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The funerary art also resonates with the ubiquity of such a cultural motif. According to the funerary inscriptions, though all this illusory and comforting conception is partially accepted by the Church, death remains the same “cruel” and “untamed” force that separates the man from the life’s clothing, the man from his/her beloved.

For the poet Ștefan Augustin-Doinaș, death is represented by the black rose, the effect of obsessive search of the absolute beauty. The black rose has a beautiful, yet lethal effect, signifying knowledge as sterile sacrifice:

*“[...] It is only then that the magi perceived/ that the black rose, so eagerly yearned for/ was growing slowly, coming of nostrils and*

mouth/ out of the pure skull of a drowned man." (Augustin-Doinaş 2013).

In Ştefan Augustin-Doinaş's poem *Mistreţul cu colţi de argint/The Wild Boar with Silver Fangs*, an apparently terrestrial creature, a wild boar with silver fangs, is the materialization of death that will kill the hunter who became the hunted. This is the case of the Prince of the Levant obsessed by hunting death that he sees everywhere:

"But alas! Under the pale stars of the sky/  
as he sits in the dawn at the spring,/ a giant  
wild boar came, and with fangs/ hauled him  
wildly through the reddish dust."  
(Augustin-Doinaş 1979, 73)

Alexandru Macedonski offers us insights into an atypical relationship with death. The strange connection is certified by a significant number of poems dedicated to death. The poem *Cu morţii/ With the Dead* is the reaction of a bizarre personality and the expression of the attachment developed by a misanthrope poet toward the world of death. The poet reaches a slightly necrophile familiarity with death, with the silent dead, amidst colorful images and perfumes, in a world where "there are no villains" (Macedonski 2011, 56).

### **From the individual toward the collective death**

Marin Sorescu seems to have the most relaxed attitude towards death of all Romanian writers, resorting to colloquial and cynical tones. Thus, in his poems of the cycle *La liliaci*, we assist to the desecration of death by using parody and humour (see the poem *Spânzuratul/The Hang Man* in Sorescu 1973, 44-47). The villager Mitrele pretends to hang himself whenever he gets into a fight with his wife. The entire community is actively involved in the show, while the only victims are the trees that assist at the play on the verge of death. Conversely, the poems in the volume *Apă vie, apă moartă/Living Water, Dead Water*, use the mix of grave and ironic tone. The representative poem that uses a relatively used image of the mirror as the limit/passage between dimensions

focuses on the definitive departing of the old man:

"You set your cane and diopters/ And as in  
a deep and slippery water/ Like a child you  
wander through the house./ And slowly  
leave... to not come back again." (Sorescu  
1987, 168)

Despite the clear differences between the two types of representation expressed in the aforementioned volumes, we may safely affirm that death is one of the great themes of Marin Sorescu's poetry. He is extremely convincing in his plays when touching upon the subjects of sacrifice, death and human condition. In *Iona/Jonah, Paracliserul/The Sexton* and *Matca/The Womb*, the author approaches major themes as the biblical metamorphosis in recent histories and the issue of the evolution of the human species. In 1988, the writer starts publishing the play *Luptătorul pe două fronturi/The Fighter on Two Fronts* (Sorescu 1993). Different facets of the same author are exposed in his plays, in a very grave register when it comes to tragic paradoxical events that are inexplicable from the logical perspective. The aforementioned play is thought-provoking, as history is conceived as a harsh boxing match. The man is the fighter that does not perceive the reason of his fighting after being involved in the battles of Troy, Susa, Constantinople etc. After conquering and destroying civilizations, after suffering in the name of blind and false ideologies, everything seems the same.

While in *Jonas* and *The Womb* we find connections between episodes of biblical mythology, *The Fighter...* offers clues concerning the issue of the historic time that becomes relative and deceiving. The fighter is assisted by a coach, a draw, centurions and it is accompanied by the choir of the elders, witnesses of the human history, characters that are holders of a painful collective memory. At a certain point, both the collective memory and the fighter speculate regarding the evolution of the species and its propensity for suicide and apocalypse. The naïve fighter talks about the curve of history, the ascendant evolution of history, about the decisive point of the fight. History seems a permanent oscillation between

destruction and rebuilt, between war and peace. The end of the species becomes an issue of an unresolved ambiguity. We may appreciate that Sorescu is the most chameleonic Romanian writer after reading his writings linked to the theme of death.

The generation of the 1980s had a special evasive system during the communist period, as well as an indifference toward death, which was reimagined as a traditional entity:

*"We were young as fir trees cut for the Christmas, but death hasn't yet paid us visits/ with her shining sickle, we were young and we were swearing on kafka/ dostoyevsky and nietzsche – only rarely on camus, a philosopher/ for the final classes, but wonderful writer [...] we were young and we lost our voices in long polemics, voices up/ several octaves about rolling or beatles, about dylan or cohen [...] an absurd optimism transformed all our losses in victories"* (Antonesei 2018, 21-26).

### Messengers of death

Constantin Țoiu's novel *Însoțitorul/ The Attendant* has an interesting structure – by the end of the narration the reader finds out the secret event of two friends, Udrescu and Pavelescu, who committed a murder 40 years ago in self-defense. Death sends two messengers in their dream and then in reality – a driver that smells like a corpse. Pavelescu recognizes the driver from his dream, a messenger that pertains to the oneiric imagery of the urban life. The second messenger is a woodcutter who wanders on the Bucharest streets, offering his services, but undergoing physical metamorphoses (Țoiu 1981, 349). In this case, the woodcutter is an archaic reflection, a materialization of death that warns and waits. Pavelescu, a character haunted by images and ghosts will be one of the victims of the earthquake of 1977.

A film that has a fabula built of two dimensions is situated in the same register as the previously mentioned novel – *Concurs/The Contest*, directed by Dan Pița (1982). This is a story of a contest of touristic guidance in the woods, a form of contest encouraged during the communist period, whereas, in fact, this is a

journey with no return. The film's two dimensions are the real one and the mystical one, with tensed episodes. The hikers from an institution participate in a contest in the woods that were to be cut during the same day to build a factory. The apocalypse of the woods does not affect emotionally any of the members of the group. A young man that appeared out of nowhere becomes the guide and then the leader of the group even though he looked as lost at the beginning. Terrified by the approaching hour of the explosion, some people deny the existence of the young man, while others fear to seem ridiculous when screams are heard in the woods. The young man finds the body of a woman who cried for help after he met a white frightened horse, symbol of death. The last sequences of the film offer the keys to understanding it. All the hikers follow hypnotically the young man into the woods of death when he comes out of the smoke of explosions on a bike bearing pennants. He is not a stalker in the Tarkovskian sense, but an angel of death.

Tudor Arghezi's world of the cemetery is utterly troubled in the poem in prose or micro-novel *The Annunciation Cemetery* by the apocalypse that is carried out following an unpredictable script. It starts with the crisis of death. No one dies and no one is brought to the cemetery. Moreover, the dead revive, but the Church rejects vehemently the miracle of resurrection. In its opinion, there were no preceding signs. Furthermore, the prosecutor tries desperately to apply the penal code as the "resurrected" numbers increase and they occupy the land of the living. Finally, the army shoots the shadows in the cemetery, but to no avail. Arghezi problematizes the topic of the afterworld and resurrection of the dead. Although the dead revived, according to the dogma, this phenomenon is not followed by redemption. From this perspective, it seems a micro-apocalypse of the Christian universe. Death imposed as a cosmic force and everything is vanity of vanities. Everyone is abulic, disinterested in their lives, be it the living or the resurrected dead. The living seem devoid of the breath of life. In the end, when the famous resurrected are accused of usurping the norms, a miniature Jesus appears to forgive everyone. The book ends with the resurrection of the dead and

the living, of all those who believe in God, praising him as a choir.

On the other hand, Emil Cioran left to posterity the image of a thinker obsessed with death, given the fact that this is the axial theme of his entire work. Though his personal life was of a relative comfort, Cioran mimed suffering and depression. In his perception, even lucidity was a major source of suffering. The destiny decomposed his lucidity through the Alzheimer condition, plunging him into oblivion of the human primary behaviour, into darkness. Cioran was not a thanatophile, he seemed to imagine his own death, individualizing it. In *A Short History of Decay* (1949, French edition) he builds the image of the hegemonic death. The author is convinced that death manifests as a false binder despite the fact that it is the most intimate and invisible dimension of the living. As a matter of fact, to the thinker, death shares humanity between the man that has the feeling of death and the one that lacks it, humanity being divided in two irreducible orders. According to him, the one who knows may reach the voluptuousness of anguish and even to the craving to live one's own death (Cioran 1992, 19-22). In our opinion, such a vision was the post-traumatic effect of the war and of the Bolshevism that Cioran escaped. Published in Romania only after December

1989, the thinker triggered bookish passions and the fashion of Cioran's thinking patterns.

### **Conclusion**

The history of death is not only a history of death per se, but the living history. As a fundamental dimension of humanity, due to the universality of the theme, and the way it encompasses manifestations of some phenomena and peculiar beliefs, death has been a protean reality, a sum of representations, attitudes and sensibilities that edifies regarding the nature of any civilization. That is especially true when referring to the way in which it preserves throughout eras, major themes, forms of assuming or rejecting paradoxical rhetoric regardless of the mutations in sensibility. The imaginary of death in the Romanian culture is less fertile than that manifested in other cultures. In culture, literature and art, the imaginary of death explodes in La Belle Epoque and after the First World War. The collective trauma of the Great War, as well as the relative cultural synchronicity encouraged the new artistic ways of expression. For a short period in the Romanian history, sensibilities and representations of death seem similar with the western ones.

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# GENDER AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION IN AFRICA: NIGER DELTA AREA IN FOCUS

**Emmanuel Osewe AKUBOR**

Lecturer, PhD.

Department of History,  
Faculty of Arts (Humanities Complex)  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife  
E-mail: oseweakubor@gmail.com

**Beatrice Amili AKUBOR**

Master Graduate

Department of Crop Protection and Production  
Faculty of Agriculture,  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife  
E-mail: beatriceakubor@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *Women's dignity has not often been acknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented. They have often been relegated to the margins of the society. This have often prevented women from being themselves. Women have contributed to history as much as men and more often than not, they did so in much difficult conditions, sadly very little of women's achievements in history can be registered by the science of history. This paper is therefore an attempt to examine the role of women in the struggle for economic liberation in the harsh environment of the Niger Delta area of southern part of Nigeria, as well as the dangers this has exposed them to overtime. It is the how, why and effect of this, that the paper intends to interrogate. The qualitative method is used for this particular research. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out the study with an analytical and narrative historical approach. This includes historical, descriptive and analytical approaches based on gathered evidence. The primary source for this research is based on field investigations conducted in the area and surrounding territories. Among other things, the data collection process includes semi-structured interviews with individuals. The research also uses historical documents from the national archives, relying on previous research conducted on issues of the women and developmental issues in the Niger Delta area in addition to documentary data taken from newspaper accounts, diaries, letters and verbal reports.*

**Keywords:** *gender, environment degradation, economic deprivation, Niger Delta.*

**Rezumat:** *Demnitatea femeilor nu a fost adesea recunoscută, în timp ce prerogativele lor au fost reprezentate în mod eronat. Ele au fost adesea împinse la marginea societății, ceea ce le-a împiedicat de la a fi ele însele. Femeile au contribuit la istorie la fel de mult ca bărbații și de cele mai multe ori în condiții mai mult decât dificile. Cu toate acestea, prea puține dintre realizările femeilor au fost înregistrate în istorie. Acest studio reprezintă o încercare de a examina rolul femeilor în lupta pentru eliberare economică în zona Deltei Nigerului din partea sudică a Nigeriei, precum și pericolele la care s-au expus de-a lungul timpului. Articolul intenționează să interogheze modul, cauzele și efectele acestui proces. Metoda calitativă a fost folosită cu precădere în acest studio. Datele obținute de la sursele primare și secundare au fost folosite pentru a conduce studiul cu o abordare analitică și istorică narativă. Aceasta include abordări istorice, descriptive și analitice bazate pe dovezi. Sursa primară este bazată pe investigații de teren din zona menționată. Printre altele, procesul colectării de date include și interviuri semi-structurate. Studio de asemenea utilizează documente istorice de la arhivele naționale, precum și studii focalizate asupra femeilor și problemelor dezvoltării din Delta Nigerului alături de date documentare din ziare, jurnale, scrisori și interviuri.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *gender, degradarea mediului înconjurător, deprivare economică, Delta Niger*

## Introduction

A critical analysis of most historical works especially Africa and Nigerian history in particular, have often portray history and

historical processes as the sum total of the activities of the men folks. In this way, historical writings have not often been gender sensitive, as such there has been the deliberate perpetuation in



historical writings the masculine centered view of history, with women relegated to the background or the dustbin of history. It was therefore not surprising in 1989, which in the document Gender and History, this position was made clear thus;

*For men, one of the great privileges of being in a superior position is being allowed to take that position for granted, to take that identity as the norm and take that hierarchy as natural. This is as true for the study of history as it is for the historical past itself. Since, it is men who have, by and large been responsible for the doing and the writing of history, it is their definition of the legitimate historical project, which has prevailed.(...)*

In a similar manner, Amazigbo U., unequivocally stated thus;

*(...) Until recently, traditional attitudes towards the respective sex role of women and men wrongly permeated the entire system of this country reinforcing the false belief that women....are to a large extent unimportant;...national development are described as being the consequences of raising of the level of social consciousness of man. Unfortunately, the false impression that a woman is at best a counterfeit man underlies society's lack of appreciation of women. To a large extent woman as a group has failed to lead advantages comparable to those of men. Women were relegated to the status of manpower reserve which is tapped only in the case of necessity. (Amazigbo, 1992)*

It is therefore, with the above in mind, that this paper is of the view that, for a meaningful discuss of the topic, there is the need for a total grasp of the meaning of some of the key concepts as applied in this work.

### **Conceptual definition and clarification**

Gender as applied in this paper is the socially constructed aspects of differences between women and men. Symbolically, it connotes cultural ideas and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity i.e, it is a form of social representation that under-values what are considered feminine attributes thereby denying recognition to women (Tomasevski 1993; Okin 1998; Solomon, Schoeman 1998; Green 1999; Mahdi 2006). The Marxist school of thought has also been a powerful tool in the hands of freedom fighters against the exploitation of a given class in the society including women. The school's

advocates better account for women's status and functions. It further argues thus:

*That sexism is a manifestation of the unjust structure of the society. It is the way our society is arranged that is responsible for the discrimination women suffer in the society and that unless we remove these problems by attending to the economy, political and social structures, women would not be free from discriminations. These discriminations, they claimed, could be seen in how women are given the most boring and low paying jobs; how women's domestic work is trivialized as not real work. They claim that capital is the primary oppressor of women as workers; and men, at most, the secondary oppressor of women as women. (Pope John Paul II, 1995)*

Environmental Degradation is used in this paper to refer to the level of pollution and hazard which the environment in the area has been subjected to since the beginning of oil drilling activities in the area. For example during exploration, drill cuttings, drill muds and fluids are used for stimulating production. The Delta is a low-lying area, where oil spills can spread rapidly through the fresh water swamps, mangrove swamps, lagoon marshes and tidal channels and the complex water flows can make controlling and cleaning spills more difficult. The water-saturated soil enables spilt oil to sink into aquifers. As a result, local communities have to deal with polluted drinking water. Various researches highlights the water deficiency in the delta where around half of people had access to potable water in 2005, below the national average of 54% (Baumüller *et al.*, 2011).

On the other hand, Economic Deprivation refers to the sum total of impediments, which in one way or the other have deprived the people to full realization of the economic potentials as provided especially by the environment. Available evidence indicates that there has been loss of land over the years in the Niger Delta area as oil drilling has turned it into one of the most oil-polluted places on Earth with more than 6,800 recorded oil spills, accounting for anywhere from 9 million to 13 million barrels of oil spilled. In a 2009 report, Amnesty cited independent environmental and oil experts in estimating that between 9 million and 13 million of barrels had leaked in the five decades of oil operations in the Delta. It also quoted U.N. figures of more than 6,800 recorded spills between 1976 and 2001. Closely related to this is the case of Bodo fishing community which had a large chunk of her farm land (oil spills) destroyed by the activities of Shell

Petroleum Company in 2008 and 2009. Considering the importance of this to the economic life of the people, they recently dragged Shell to court alleging it the oil spill destroyed the environment and ruined the livelihoods of 69,000 people (Baumüller *et al.*, 2011).

### **Nigeria and the Niger Delta area: geographical definition**

Nigeria is located in the western corner of Africa. Nigeria is often referred to as the “Giant of Africa”. This is perhaps with reference to her population which dwarfs other nations’ populations in Africa. In terms of human and material resources, it also surpasses other African countries, on the face value. Nigerian is the tenth most populous country in the world and the largest in sub-Sahara Africa. Nigeria is one of the fastest growing nations in the world. Presently, the United Nations Population Commission estimated the Nigerian population to be about 170million (Africa is said to have 1 billion people) (F.R.C., 2011). The percentage of each ethnic group in the national total is the subject of intense political contestation. Virtually all post-colonial censuses have produced contested results. The 1963 census, gives an idea of the 12 largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The three ethnic majority groups make up about 54 percent of the population. Scholars are of the view that there are ‘about 400’ language groups in Nigeria and suggests that, minus the 9 largest groups, the remaining 390 languages are spoken by 20 percent of the population, with over 300 ‘minor’ languages spoken by only 7 percent of the population. The numerical and political preponderance of the three majority ethnic groups and the tendency for many ethnic minority groups to cluster – politically, linguistically and culturally - around the big three have given Nigeria a tripolar ethnic characteristic (Agheyisi, 1984; Bangura, \*\*\*; Mustapha, 2003).

Geographically, Nigeria has been divided into eight ecological zones, with the Niger Delta constituting the sixth zone. The report described the Niger Delta as the southern recess of the country and the coastal part. It specifically captioned the area as “Ultra Humid (flood) Zone”, based on the fact that it is situated at the ridges of the Atlantic Ocean. The region is less than seven percent of the country’s land mass. It is the most fragile ecological zone in the entire nation, with about ninety five percent of the nation’s income accruing from the zone (Nigerian National Report for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED NNR, 1992; CPC, 1992; Khan, 1994, 12; Mbendi, 2004,

2). According to World Bank, 1995, the Niger Delta environment could be best defined and described as an area consisting of vast plain of alluvial sedimentary deposits, exposed to flooding and crisscrossed by a lot of rivers and creeks whose banks are made of levees bordered by areas mainly consisting of black swamps of equatorial forest and numerous lake-like water logged depressions; where heavy rainfall and surface flow can hardly be drained by gravity.

The discovery of oil in Niger Delta area, have been argued to represent the beginning of squalor and death in the area as it did not bring tangible benefits; instead it ushered in high degradation of the Niger Delta environment with concomitant poverty and much strife to the region. This is based on the fact that a long chunk of the population, are extreme poverty, poisoned rivers, destroyed occupation, devastated environment, lack of pipe-borne water, electricity, quality education, access to sound health care delivery, as well as stunted growth of youths consequent upon chemical poisoning, indignities and degraded personalities.

Ordinarily, in the absence of oil, the major occupation of the people remains agriculture (both aquatic and land). However, this has been made impossible, because over 3000 kilometres of pipeline lie across the landscape of the Delta, linking 275 flow stations to various export facilities; apart from this, the area has about 606 oil fields, of which 360 are onshore and 246 off-shore (Aboribo, Umukoro, 2007). It is from all these that the area is able to produce (as at 2001), more than 2.5million barrels per day, seems to be of the view that the starting point can be pegged from 1958, when the country first produced 5100 barrel per day, raking in more than 300 billion dollars from oil in the past 40 years. The result is that although the area has the greatest need for infrastructure for rapid and meaningful socio-economic development; but what is found in the area are few congested urban locations, with most of the communities in the Niger Delta lacking basic amenities like potable water, electricity and transportation infrastructure. Thus the people of the Niger Delta live in abject poverty. This situation in the area has been promptly captured by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which disclosed that 70% of the population lives below the poverty line with a high disease burden, very high mortality rate, very low level of sound business enterprise and industry development (Aboribo, Umukoro, 2007).

### **Woman and struggle for survival: analysis of gender and historical process in related works**

As earlier argued, writers of history and historical processes over the years, have perpetuated only the masculine center view of history. The global figure of the world's 800 million illustrates 3 out of 5 (i.e. 480 million) are women. It has been established that out that although women form 50% of the world's population and women work two thirds of all work hours in the world and are responsible for 50% of world food production, yet they receive only 10% of world income and own a derisory 1% of world property. In the case of Africa, it has been argued that women carry out, 60-80% of all agricultural work, 50% of animal husbandry and close on 100% of food processing. He argues that women's subordination has both economic, political and cultural aspects since third world societies of today are mixture of traditional and modern, internal and external influences and all these can be sources of inequality (Muthien, \*\*\*; Enemue, 1999; Roger, 2001).

In line with the above, it has been established that women do two third of the world's work. They produce 60 to 80% of African and Asia's food, 40% of Latin Americas. Yet they earn only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. They are among the poorest of the worlds poorest. There is paucity of data on the level of poverty among different groups in the area. However, there are some clear indices, women fall into poverty longer and face additional obstacles when trying to walk their way out of it. They are likely to be single parents (Single mothers and young widows) or elderly person living alone, inadequate health and educational facilities as well as traditional believes pull them further down the poverty line (Baumüller *et al.*, 2011).

In her analysis of the plight of women in Nigeria, Batubo (Batubo, 1992) posited that no matter how hard the women try, that are not recognized in the society and have been relegated to the background. Using the cases of Rivers State in the Niger Delta area, Batubo wrote;

*The more the women try their best to accomplish the task set for them by the male folks the more they are suppressed and discriminated against. The village woman is described as dirty; and in some areas the men will not as much as shake hands with them. Yet it is the same hands that the women use in curdling and caressing them in bed, as well as cook the meals the men lick up very hungrily.* (Batubo, 1992)

She continued:

*In the urban area, the educated women struggles her best to attain the same heights as men, only to be wedged halfway by the men in authority;....the Rivers State government once disallowed any married woman from buying a landed property from the government if the husband has got one. Is a woman not an individual with inalienable rights? During studies, she is a separate being a must read for herself, her husband's qualifications cannot be passed onto her, during her work, she accomplishes her own duties and is paid a separate salary, when it comes to investing on a landed property – NO!!* (Batubo, 1992)

Sani H. (Sani, 2001) contended that in spite of women's contribution to economic growth and development of their country, they are not recognized. That most works that women do in the domestic sphere like house-work, gathering of firewood for use as fuel, drawing of water, handicrafts and child-care, and in agriculture such as subsistence food production, food processing and preparation especially for the family, remained economically undervalued. They did all these without payment, yet, subjected to over-labour. In addition to this, in small scale industries where their services abound, women are faced with low income and economic abuse. This tended to reduce their ability to obtain credit facilities from the Banks or other organizations in order to empower themselves economically.

According to Ololade O. (Ololade, 2009), women in the Niger Delta perform certain economic responsibilities within the family as wives, mothers, farmers and breadwinners. They are the principal care giver of the children and the aged. Even though they are food producers, harvesters and cook, they are also expected to function of wage earners. This is because the intra housing income distribution pattern and the rise of matriarchal household in the country, coupled with poverty, force them to take active financial role in their families. Since most of them are uneducated and therefore unemployed outside the home, their major source of livelihood is subsistence farming as they comprises 60 to 80% of the agricultural labour force and account for 90% of family food supply. This is in corroboration of Enemuo, F. (Enemue, 1999) in which the author argued that Nigeria women have always played five key roles of mother, producer, home maker, manager, community organizer cultural and political activities. Yet society has ascribed the subordinate position to them. The

most contemporary societies are male dominated and as such in varying degrees. They harbour beliefs, mores and practices which objectively permit or promote the economic exploration of women and their political marginalization. In his analysis, the scholar, argued that even at that, the customary practices of many contemporary societies are biased against women and serve to subjugate them to men and to undermine their individual self-esteem.

Historically, women in Nigeria have always contributed to the making of history just like the male folks. For instance, it is on record that the pre-colonial Nigeria women played various important roles in the palace administration. In the Alafinate, the women of the palace were called in general *ayaba*, but they were of various ranks and grades. Highest in rank were those of the grade *iya afin*, who were usually wives of the preceding *alafin*, next the *ayaba* of the present *alafin*, then the female *ilari* (slave officials), and then the ordinary slave women (Akinjogbin, Ayandele, 1980; Adepoju, 1997; Oluyemi-Kusa, 2006).

Among the Igala people of Central Nigeria, available historical documents hold that the Igala kingdom was founded by a woman, *Ebele Ejaunu*. There were also female sovereigns in Northern Nigeria, prominent among who was Queen Amina of Zauzau in the fifteenth century, who extended her influence as far as the Nupe, built many cities and is still held to have been responsible for introducing the kola nut to the region (Last, 1980; Kani, 1987; Sa'ad, 1992; Oyedele, 2008).

In other societies, however, there was much greater sex differentiation. When this sex differentiation resulted in women forming their own strong organizations, as among the Igbo and Ibibio, women controlled their own affairs and possessed political influence on the basis of their collective strength. Where such female organization was lacking, as among the Ijo, Kalabari, Efik, Edo, and Itsekiri women, their political power as a collectivity was negligible, though individual women of high status could exercise political power as a collectivity (Afigbo, 1980; Alagoa, 1980). Though, individual women of high status could exercise political power either through the office of the queen mother (Benin) or through their personal relationships with the male rulers. In socially stratified societies, women who were considered to have contributed meaningfully to the society and have risen to a considerable status among her peers always occupied a higher social status position than the "commoner" men as well as women.

However, in Yoruba and Riverine Igbo societies, not only the individual high status women but also women as a collective possessed political power through their organizations and through their representatives, the Igbo *omu* and the Yoruba *iyalode*. An analysis of Yoruba history indicates that during the period of wars, the society demanded extraordinary services from both men and women; in most cases where women were able to rise to the occasion, they were rewarded with greater political responsibility as in case of the Egba and Ibadan *iyalode* (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2006). The disturbances and dislocation in Efik and Itsekiri societies at mid-century enabled two women to wield unprecedented political power, while the *omu* of Onitsha in the 1880's tried to capitalize on her office to support the new Christian religion in Onitsha. Pre-colonial African women occupied a position complementary, rather than subordinate to the men (Adepoju, 1997).

In line with the above, Perham Margery posited that Igbo women had their organizations that controlled certain spheres of community life such as priestesses that headed traditional spiritual orders – this role was also only attained after rigorous initiation. According to her, Igbo women, as most other African women, were able to attain social standing by successfully trading, farming and weaving as many Igbo sub-tribes are matrilineal. Though, Igbo women generally did not engage in physical combat they were key advisors in war strategies and their place in society was honored as such (Perhem, 1937).

The above document specifically highlighted the role of one particular warrant chief that went by the name Okugo. It was noted that as a result of Okugo's insistence that the women pay taxes, the women organized themselves in masses and went to all the houses of the chiefs to verify that this law in fact was mandated in all provinces. It was this that led to the famous Aba Women Rebellion. The author reported that although the women warned against the new tax law, the chief's insistent to continue with the new tax and the molestation of Nwayeruwa (a woman by one of the chief's servant) led to the Rebellion. According to Perham:

*It was at this point that the women were noted for starting their rebellion. Shortly following this incident, masses of women from the countryside come to the town of Oloko to protest Okugo's treatment of Nwayeruwa.,...All night they danced round his house singing a song quickly invented to meet the situation. Growing hourly more*

*excited, they went on to Okugo's compound where his own people tried to defend him with sticks and bird arrows. The crowd mobbed him, damaged his house, demanded his cap of office, and charged him with assault before the district office of Bende. This vigilante behavior, without full comprehension of the consequences of their behavior, would be exhibited in many other anti-colonial movements around Africa...many to meet the same fate as the market women of Eastern Nigeria. After many months of organized demonstrations, the market women's movement was increasing getting stronger and was estimated to have included about fifteen hundred women demonstrating at one time. Their demands for justice were also increasing in militancy and as a result mandated military involvement. (Perhem, 1937)*

On the bloody incident that occurred on December 17, 1929, Perham reported thus:

*...[the women] made threatening and obscene gestures toward the troops, called them sons of pigs, and said they knew the soldiers would not fire at them. At last they struck at the district officer with their sticks. The lieutenant caught the blows, made signs to the district officer as to whether he should fire (for it was impossible to make himself heard in the uproar) and, just as the fence began to give way before the rush of women, shot the leader through the head with his revolver. Two volleys were then fired on the crowd which broke and fled, leaving thirty two dead and dying, and thirty-one wounded (Perhem, 1937)*

On the significance of the Aba Women's Market Rebellion of 1929, Perham wrote;

*Although, the Aba Women's Market Rebellion of 1929 ended in bloodshed, there were many achievements attained. For one, a flood gate had opened for the plights of African women under colonial rule and it? The law (provide detail for 'it') was to be revised in 1947 in the Egba Women's War – which was spearheaded by Yoruba women in Southwestern Nigeria predicated by similar triggers of taxation, lack of political representation, the oppressive excesses of the warrant chiefs, court clerks and the police. Another major achievement of the Aba Women's Market Rebellion of 1929 was the abolition of the warrant chief system in the Igbo region. The warrant chiefs were replaced by Ezeala, or sacred authority holders of their communities, and the process of identifying these Ezealas was a democratic system that*

*involved the input of the women – who were also now allowed to serve as members of the Native Court (a restorative justice court system that was rooted in indigenous beliefs of justice). The taxation, however, remained. (Perhem, 1937)*

However, in spite of these contributions to both local and international developments, the women folks have always been at the receiving end during crises. They have been relegated to the background and like stock in the market; they have become article of trade and exchange. This situation has become even more worrisome when seen in the light of what the women go through in the Niger Delta area as a result of the senseless war of resource control. They and the children especially the young girls have been used to settle rift, they have been kidnapped, sexual harassed, traded into prostitution and left with the gift of children who may never know their father.

### **Women and economic survival amidst environmental degradation in the Niger Delta**

Traditionally, the occupation of the people of the Niger Delta is agriculture. This is done for both consumption as well as provision of raw materials for the cottage industries. Agricultural land in the Niger Delta area over the years has as a result of oil drilling turned into one of the most oil-polluted places on Earth with more than 6,800 recorded oil spills, accounting for anywhere from 9 million to 13 million barrels of oil spilled. In most of these areas, freshwater is obtained from wells dug with antiquated technology by the villagers or obtained from streams or creeks. This makes the inhabitants of this region particularly vulnerable to environmental pollution. Ground, fresh and marine water in many ways is the final meeting point of other forms of pollution - particularly air, land, and soil pollution. Land pollution either from oil spills or from leaching or erosion from soil or acid rain, often finds its way into creeks, streams and rivers, which ultimately contaminate marine bodies and seep into ground water.

It is in this type of situation that the women who are mostly farmers are made to irk a living for the family. This has been the practice from time. Explaining further Batuba wrote:

*In the area most men marry not because they are in love and cannot bear to live apart from their loved one's but because of a few 'important' reasons. When a man attains a certain age, he moves out of his parent's home, may be in search of work. Then he discovers he cannot cope with the house work.*

*He is unable to do the marketing, keep his home clean and cook the type of palatable meals his mother used to prepare. Also, a man gets a higher status in the society, when he shows how responsible he is by getting married. To crown it all, in Rivers state, a man shows his worth, proves his masculinity by the number of children he has got. Therefore a breeding machine must be acquired at the right age. Combining the above reasons many bids can be killed with one stone – marriage. This marriage has a different meaning from the universal one. In some areas in the state where polygamy is practiced, some wives toil day in, day out to provide for themselves and their numerous children, as well as compete among themselves to feed and please a common husband who idles away drinking palm wine. (Batubo, 1992)*

Thus it is under the above situation coupled with the rudimentary nature of the technology available to the majority of the Niger Delta women that a continuous battle is fought against environmental degradation in the context of high population growth rate and increasing demand by the family for fertile agricultural land. Because of the environmental degradation in the area, women and their children have been saddled with an increased work load associated with the search for food, water and fuel wood. For the woman the task of managing an increasingly deteriorating environment, worsened by hazards such as constant destruction of her crops by oil spillage, flood, drought among others and making it yield some sustenance for the family is fast becoming a daunting complex affair; it is challenging their ingenuity and all the resources at their disposal, periodically occasioning massive losses of resources and displacing whole families and communities. Makinwa, pointed this out, when he pointed out that in Nigeria, women's contributions span all aspects of farming. According to the scholar, in Nigeria's Imo and Anambra states, women increasingly perform all farming tasks, including those pertaining to land preparation (clearing, stamping, burning and removal of burnt stakes) that were traditionally considered men's job. In fact, in Imo state more women are farmers than men (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1985; Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1988).

The above has been corroborated by the then Imo State Agricultural Development Project, which reported that women in the area contribute more to food production and family labour than men. According to this position, it is estimated that 95% of the rural women are small scale farmers who produce most of the food and bear the burden of day to day family subsistence. Both Saro-Wiwa Ken, Gininwa G.N.K. and Nigeria Environmental Action Study Team (NEST), in reference to the situation in Ogoni land wrote:

*Since Shell began drilling oil in Ogoniland in 1958, the people of Ogoniland have had pipelines built across their farmlands and in front of their homes, suffered endemic oil leaks from these very pipelines, been forced to live with the constant flaring of gas. This environmental assault has smothered land with oil, killed masses of fish and other aquatic life, and introduced devastating acid rain to the land of the Ogoni. For the Ogoni, a people dependent upon farming and fishing, the poisoning of the land and water has had devastating economic and health consequences. (N.E.A.S.T., 1991; Saro-Wiwa, 1992; Gininwa, 1994)*

The situation has always pitched the Niger Delta women against the state on the one hand and the multinational corporations on the other. This is because most often as the spillage from the operations of the oil drills has negatively affected yields from her farms. This is captured by Gininwa G.N.K. when he wrote:

*When crude oil touches the leaf of a yam or cassava, or whatever economic trees we have, it dries immediately, it's so dangerous and somebody who was coming from, say, Shell was arguing with me so I told him that you're an engineer, you have been trained, you went to the university, I did not go to the university, but I know that what you have been saying in the university sleeps with me here so you cannot be more qualified in crude oil than myself who sleeps with crude oil. (Gininwa, 1994)*

The table below gives a clear illustration of the confrontation with the state over attempt to seek redress for damages done to their land, agricultural resource and livelihood in general.

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## TABLES

**Table 1.** Women Protest against Environment Degradation /Economic Deprivation in Niger Delta

Table 1. Women Protest against Environment Degradation /Economic Deprivation in Niger Delta

s/no	Date	Event	Firms/Bodies	Demands	Outcome
1.	1984	Ogharefa Women Protest	US Pan Ocean (Chevron)	Improvement of economic and social condition of the people	US Oil Company paid compensation for land taken as well as for pollution
2.	1986	Ogharefa Women Protest	„	The women demanded for the clan up of the environment	Demands were met.
3.	1986	Ekpan Women Uprising	Oil Companies activities	Protest against over flooding of farm land and destruction of produce caused by oil leakage	Demands partially met.
4.	1991	Okutukutu Women Protest	„	„	„
5.	1991	Etegwe Women Protest	„	„	„
6.	1992	Obunagha Community Protest	Shell	Protested against the destruction of their soil leading to low farm yield, ask for clean up of the environment, provision of safe drinking water, hospital and clean up of the rivers and streams.	„
7.	1993	Biara Village Protest	Shell/Wilbros	Protest the bulldozing of their farm crops to give way for pipe laying	Wilbros opened fire on unarmed protesters; some died, while others were injured. A one million naira compensation was later paid to the victims-both injured and dead.
8.	1999	Niger Delta Women Protest in London and Nigeria	US Pan Ocean	Improvement of economic and social condition of the people	„
9.	2001	Niger Delta youths including women	National Assembly	To submit a petition on Violation of their right	They were tear gassed by armed policemen at the gate fired canisters of tear-

					gas
10.	2002	Women Protest	Chevron Texaco	Against environmental Pollution especially farm lands	The women over 700 Chevron workers on hostage
11.	2002	Ijaw, Illaje and Itsekiri Women Protest	Oil Companies	Over environmental degradation by oil companies and Lack for amenities in the community	Over 800 women were injured by the police in an attempt to disperse the group.
12.	2003	Iri Isoko South Council Women Protest	Traditional Rule and Agip Oil	Land belonging to the community was illegally sold to Agip Oil	Over 10 women were killed and properties destroyed
13.	2004	Ojobo Community Women Protest	Oil Companies	Environmental pollution and non provision of amenities and job opportunities	About 12 women were killed.
14.	2010	Itsekiri Women of Ugborodo Community	The Nigeria Government and Chevron	Lack of life sustaining facilities despite years of drilling of oil in the area	The women seized the workers equipment

The above table, which is a compilation of several cases of women protest against environmental degradation and economic deprivation in the Niger Delta area, gives credence to the position maintained by Wokoma, who argued that the activities of major oil companies, such as Shell, Chevron-Texaco, Elf, Agip and Mobil, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have severely damaged the environment on which the host communities depend for their livelihood. The oil extraction process has decimated the ecosystem and adversely affected the lives and livelihood of the people of the Niger Delta. Lands and streams have been polluted by oil spills and well blowouts; nitrous oxide, sulphur oxide and other gases from gas flaring have poisoned the air. Flora and fauna have been destroyed, and the communities contend with endemic poverty, the absence of basic social amenities, and, at best, primitive health and educational facilities. It is therefore in line with this that more formidable women organisations have emerged over the years to confront both environmental degradation, economic deprivation and other related ills in the society especially as it relates to the Niger Delta area. Some of these Women's organizations include, Federation of Ogoni Women's Organisations (FOWO), the Niger Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ), the EGI Women's Movement and the Ijaw Women's Organization for Human Rights, have built a strong grassroots base for resistance, and engaged in demonstrations, festivals and peaceful occupations to further their demands. These stratagems have achieved varying degrees of success. As a result of their resilience, the women have received the support of the Council of Youth, who now see them as defenders of the people, as opposed to the traditional

ruler and his Council of Chiefs who were discredited and seen as having sold out to the oil company.

It is important to note that it is not in all cases that the women succeeded in their demands; this is because in some instance the oil firms in collaboration with law enforcement agencies carry out brutal attacks against the women leading to loss of lives and properties. For example in the confrontation of May 14, 2009, the government deployed sophisticated weaponry against the hapless resident of Gbaramatu Kingdom made up of 163 communities. The weaponry deployed to the area included four helicopter gunboats for aerial bombing, two Naval ships; NNS Obula and NNS Nwanba and a large troop of soldiers. In the case of the Odi attack, it was reported that close to 2,873 civilians lost their lives, majority of them women and children (Ogege 2007). Also on December 23, 2004, over a hundred houses were ransacked, women raped and property running into millions of naira destroyed when youths in Ogbe-Osewa and Ogbe-Illo quarters in Asaba clashed. In some other instance, during raids, the women were turned into sex machines and left with children who up till date do not know their fathers ( a typical example is the cases of over 250,000 children born to soldiers, who participated in the ECOMOG operations from Nigeria).

A critical analysis indicates that although the government have declared in Article 13 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women that state parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same right; it is

however obvious that this still remains as lip service as far as the government and the multinational companies operating in the area are concern. As long as this continues both in Nigeria and elsewhere, the fundamental rights of the women folks will remain relegated to the background.

Conclusively, from the foregoing discuss, it is clear the both history, historians and activities of major oil companies, such as Shell, Chevron-Texaco, Elf, Agip and Mobil, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, i.e. oil exploration in the Niger Delta area have not been fair to women especially when considered in line with their contribution to the historical processes. The argument therefore, is that history have always given undue recognition to the men folks even when it is clear that the women (as in the case of the Niger Delta area) have always been at the forefront of the fight against environmental degradation and economic liberation of the area.in the course of this struggle they have been exposed to various levels of dangers, yet they have been relegated to the background of history (). Apart from the loss of farm land which is the main source of livelihood, these women have lost their husbands, children and at the end of the day are left at the mercy of the in laws who (after making the woman to go through the compulsory mourning rites) either cart away the family properties or are made to start life all over again.



## **C. REVIEWS**



**THE STATE, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND COLLABORATION IN THE HOLOCAUST: THE  
BORDERLANDS OF ROMANIA AND THE SOVIET UNION BY DIANA DUMITRU  
(REVIEW)**

**Valeria CHELARU**

Postdoctoral Researcher

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

Faculty of History and Philosophy, The Doctoral School „Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură”

E-mail: valeria.a.chelaru@gmail.com

When the Romanian military leader Ion Antonescu gave his famous order: “Soldiers: I command you: cross the Prut [River]!”, the Romanian Army along with German and its allies attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Having joined the Axis powers in the Second World War, Antonescu hoped to restore the Romanian territories lost in 1940 to the detriment of Hungary and the Soviet Union. Once Bessarabia’s conquest had been successfully accomplished, throughout a period of three years, Romania extended its political power way further to the River Bug. There, on the Transnistrian soil, a new page would be written in the history of the Holocaust.

From such a broader historical perspective, it could be said that Diana Dumitru’s prolific work, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: the Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*<sup>1</sup>, adds to the previous studies on the Romanian Holocaust, along with Jean Ancel, Radu Ioanid, Dennis Deletant, Vladimir Solonari, etc. Their thorough and vast analyses have provided a deep insight of the origins, content, and implementation of the policies of annihilation under the leadership of the dictator Ion Antonescu. Likewise, they built a vivid picture of the conditions in which the Jews had died or survived in Transnistria. Nevertheless, as Diana Dumitru has noticed, these works offered also plenty food for thought concerning the popular attitudes towards the Jews in the occupied areas in which the Shoah had taken place. As the book’s title suggests – *Neighbours in the time of troubles* – the novelty of the current work derives from the

fact that it brings to light the vast array of the relationships between the Jews and the Gentiles in the Romanian occupied territories during the Second World War. Oral history sources were employed in parallel with reach archival materials so that the author offers a vigorous and authentic narrative undeservedly unexplored until recently.

Moreover, the two case studies here analysed – Bessarabia and Transnistria – are intrinsically valuable for such a research owing to their common history within the Russian Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, their understanding of the Tsarist anti-Semitism, as well as their similar amount of the Jewish population dwelling among their non-Jewish neighbours, constitute an outstanding chance to study closely two multiethnic population under the altering socio-political circumstances. Compared to Bessarabia, Transnistria, – or better said its approximate territory – as part of the USSR in the interwar years, experienced a programme of reforms from which its Jewish population benefitted greatly in terms of ethnic integration and philo-Semitism. In the meantime, Bessarabia became part of the Greater Romania in 1918 and due to its numerous Jewish population, undergone a severe process of anti-Semitic policies in the context of the Romanian state’s nationalising campaign (van Moeurs 2015, 186). During the Second World War, when the two provinces were united again under the Romanian administration as ally of the Nazi Germany, the civil population was supported, and even instigated by the Romanian state to exploit and abuse the Jewish ethnic group. Thus, the marked difference in the history of Transnistria and Bessarabia of that period is represented by the few years in which the former, as part of the USSR, promoted the policies of integration of the Jewish minorities and counteracted the

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Dumitru, *Vecini în vremuri de restriște: Stat, anti-Semitism și Holocaust în Basarabia și Transnistria*. Iași: Polirom, 2019. 275p.

ethnic discrimination. Based on this theoretical approach and the multiple facts which corroborate the evidence, Diana Dumitru's book demonstrates that the Soviet citizens, which had been used to integrative and inclusive treatment of the Jews, were lesser prone to ill-treat and rather helped the latter, in contrast to the majority ethnic groups of other territories.

Such a perspective on the Jewish history during the Second World War calls into question the role of the state policies in influencing the interaction between the Jews and the non-Jews. *The State, Anti-Semitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust...* depicts the relationship as fluid, and at the same time, highly dependent on the state's rhetoric. It also shows that owing to the Soviet state's integrative policies during the interwar years, the attitudes towards the Jewish population maintained among the Gentiles even when the USSR administration retreated from Transnistria between 1941 and 1944.

There had been three types of massive socio-political changes implemented by the Soviet authorities and the Communist Party in order to spur the interethnic cooperation and modernise the young Soviet state. In line with the country's effort to level social classes, and due to its strategic move to attract the multiple ethnic groups in building the socialist society, all Soviet citizens were granted absolute equality. For Jews in particular, it meant an unprecedented chance in terms of education and professional affirmation. By contrast, their counterparts in Bessarabia, along with other minority groups in Romania, underwent discriminatory and abusive campaigns on the part of the state. The public discourse accompanied such policies in both states and constituted the second distinctive element. In the Soviet Union the ban on anti-Semitic public discourse went hand in hand with the new and positive image of the Jews in the society. Most importantly, the fight on anti-Semitism was rather carried out through intellectual enlightenment and the mobilisation of thoughts, and to a lesser extent, through legal penalties. Ultimately, the Jewish question was politicised by the state, having forced its citizens to choose between "socialist" and "counter-revolutionary" behaviour.

However, as Diana Dumitru argues, it would be a gross exaggeration to think that the anti-Semitism had been totally eradicated by

the Soviet state. Stalin's nationalities policies in the 1930s added fresh negative nuances in order to shape new anti-Semitic forms. Nevertheless, as never before in Tsarist Russia, in the interwar years, the discrimination against the Jewish population was actively counteracted and the ethnic group was successfully integrated within the social structures of the state. From this vantage point, the book also explores an understudied, and at the same time, thorny issue: the degree to which the Soviet population had internalised the "progressive" values, and the way in which the attitudes changed, as a consequence of socialization, inside a regime based on the mass mobilisation. In this sense, the work of Diana Dumitru aligns itself with the studies which reassess the minimalist view on the communist regime as just an oppressive power constantly having sought to subdue the individual sentiments of the Soviet citizens.

In line with the previous studies concerning the Soviet nationalities issue, *The State, Anti-Semitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust...* explores various aspects which have been overlooked so far. Its detailed examination of the subject fits in the theoretical recontextualisation of the Soviet policy related to the nationality question, much in tone with Terry Martin's paradigm of the "affirmative ethnic empire" (Martin 2001). In contrast with the previous dominant narrative on the Soviet nationalism, based on the vertical relation between the centre and the periphery, the current approach underscores the various contingencies and interethnic dynamics at the horizontal level. As it follows, the latter are not considered descriptive, fixed realities, but rather confluences produced as a consequence of state policies of inclusion and exclusion.

The structure of the book comprises three sections which describe the common history of Bessarabia and Transnistria within the Russian Empire. They present the different evolution of the regions in the interwar period, and also compare and explain the relations between the Jews and the non-Jews in both regions throughout the Holocaust years. In the first chapter, the author analyses the relationship between the Jews and their ethnic neighbours in pre-war Transnistria and Bessarabia, while both territories were part of the so-called *Cherta osedlosti* (the Pale of Settlement) – the specially designated area for the Jewish population inside Tsarist Russia.



The second chapter of the book examines the evolution of the relationship between the Jews and the non-Jews in Bessarabia after 1918. It is argued that the degree of anti-Semitism grew in the newly-annexed province as a consequence of Romania's efforts to consolidate its ethno-national state. In the same way, the third chapter is focused on closely studying the content, the implementation, and the effects of the Soviet integrative policies in Transnistria. It underlines that in contrast to the previous Tsarist regime, the Soviet authorities managed, due to radical campaigns, to integrate the Jewish population into the Soviet society. Hence, anti-Semitism sharply decreased in the Soviet Union. In the following three chapters (four, five, and six) less known aspects – the attitudes of the population towards the Jews in Transnistria and Bessarabia during the Holocaust – are exposed and thoroughly scrutinized. Based on ample evidence and argumentation, Diana Dumitru demonstrates that in both Bessarabia and Transnistria, the Romanian policies aimed explicitly to annihilate the most part of the local Jewry, and confine the rest of it in the camps and ghettos in Transnistria. The behavior of the Bessarabian civilian population towards the Jews is reassessed in the chapter four in light with the retreat of the Red Army, after which the Romanian and German troops entered the region. A wave of pitiless attacks and atrocities were registered as a consequence. Likewise, in chapter five, there is evidence that in Transnistria the local population reacted differently in similar circumstances. They proved to be compassionate not only towards the local Jewish population, but also towards the Jews

deported from Bessarabia and Bukovina. Despite the abject poverty of the rural population in those times, a significant number of the Transnistrian peasants helped the Jews.

Regardless of its unbiased discourse throughout the entire research, Diana Dumitru points out an unavoidable truth as a supreme tribute to both her book and the victims of the Holocaust. As Jan T. Gross suggested in his arresting and disturbing book *Neighbours*, – a masterpiece concerning the Polish Holocaust – the truth about the participation of the Polish people in murdering the Jews must be looked for in the immemorial tradition of the Polish anti-Semitism, and not in the Nazi or Soviet orders (Gross 2002). Despite the fact that the force of the argument in *Neighbours* is slightly obscured by the author's approach on anti-Semitism as a consequence of the microscopic processes of history, the core message of the book has a common ground with *The State, Anti-Semitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust....*

In her book Diana Dumitru provides a revealing insight into the way the Romanian state dealt with its Jewish population in Bessarabia and Transnistria. The novelty of this episode in the history of the Holocaust, as Charles King remarks, derives from the fact that it took place outside the territories under the German administration (King 2019, 167). Nowadays the topic is still sensitive and de-emphasised. From this perspective, Diana Dumitru's book may have paved the way for new heated debates on the issue, yet fruitful scholarly contributions within this area of research.

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**NO GODS, NO PRIESTS. HISTORY OF THE INQUISITION, THE CONVENTS, THE JESUITS  
(NI DIEUX, NI PRÊTRES. HISTOIRE DE L'INQUISITION, LES COUVENTS, LES JÉSUITES)  
BY MAURICE LACHÂTRE  
TEXTS CHOSEN, INTRODUCED AND ANNOTATED BY FRANÇOIS GAUDIN (REVIEW)**

**Ecaterina LUNG**

Professor, PhD.

Faculty of History, University of Bucharest

E-mail: ecaterina.lung@gmail.com

François Gaudin, Professor of Language Sciences at the University of Rouen and known through his research in socio-linguistics, has also been interested in the cultural history of the dictionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, further linked to the study of the world of authors and editors of this kind of encyclopedic knowledge, especially with the multi-dimensional personality of Maurice Lachâtre (1814-1900).

In the present volume, François Gaudin proposes, under the suggestive title *Ni dieux, ni prêtres*<sup>1</sup>, three texts that testify the anticlerical commitment of their author, Maurice Lachâtre, during the years 1842-1880. The first evokes the *Inquisition* in Spain, France, and Italy, with its various tortures. The activities of the General Inquisitors were presented there, supported by numerous figures (which nowadays historians are allowed to doubt). Similarly, the dark side of the *Jésuites* was subject to quantitative analysis, as episodes of their black legend were traced, with their influence presented as having held back the nations under their influence. The third text (*Les Couvents*), consisting of various accusations against monasteries and their inhabitants, warned the readers of the danger posed by the "monastic legions".

These three texts were first disseminated in a composite work called *Les Mystères du confessionnal* (The Mysteries of the Confessional), which also included a trilogy of treatises intended to be used for the formation of priests, in particular a *Manuel des confesseurs* (Handbook for the Confessors) written by Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans.

Different editions of this work exist, including also other texts, authored both by men of the Church and by enemies of it, the grouping of the texts aimed at better combating the institution by discrediting it.

François Gaudin chose these three texts from many other possibilities, therefore making it possible for him to give editorial coherence to this kind of anti-clerical pamphlets.

A legitimate question could be why to re-publish in 2019 some writings of a forgotten author whose combative tone against the Church belongs to another era. The editor offers us convincing motivations in the comprehensive *Introduction* to the volume. In this introductory study, François Gaudin places Maurice Lachâtre as editor and author in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century France, characterized by intense and repeated political and ideological struggles.

Firstly, he sketched the biography of Maurice Lachâtre, who was born in 1814 in Issoudun as the son of a Colonel, Baron of the Napoleonic Empire. After entering the military school (*Prytanée*) de la Flèche, he joined the reputed École militaire of Saint-Cyr to become an officer. But in 1831, at only 17 years, he was expelled for participating in an anti-royalist and anti-clerical demonstration. He enrolled in the army and took part in the fighting against Abd-el-Kader, the leader of the Algerian tribes' insurrection. After that, the young Maurice left the army to work for a carpenter in the south of France, before settling in Paris to work for an editor. In 1839, he opened his own workshop as a bookseller-publisher and also co-founded, with a friend, an ephemeral bank, "Société Delachâtre et Rivail". This period is marked by his interest in the ideas of Saint-Simon and Fourier and also in occultism and magnetism.

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Lachâtre, *Ni Dieux, ni prêtres. Histoire de l'Inquisition, Les Couvents, Les Jésuites*, 1880. Textes choisis, introduits et annotés par François Gaudin, Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2019, 141 p.

The titles of the books he chose to publish speak about his political allegiances, but also about his financial flair. He published *Crimes célèbres* written by Alexandre Dumas, *Fourier et son système*, by Zoé Gatti de Gamond and *Organisation du travail* by Louis Blanc. He was 29 years old when he achieved the publication of his monumental *History of popes* (*Histoire des Papes, Mystères d'iniquités de la cour de Rome*), in 10 volumes (1842-1843). This was one of his most successful works and was reprinted many times and translated in other languages.

His financial success allowed him to buy from the ruined Balzac a property in Jardies, in 1845 and a year later, 100 ha of land in Arbants, Bordelais region. What is interesting, Maurice Lachâtre's friendship with Proudhon and other socialist thinkers of this period inspired him to found a kind of phalanstery, in 1852, by dividing and selling for small prices his land in Arbants to more than 100 families. The model community he founded also had a communal bank, a mutual fund, two schools, a medical center.

François Gaudin notes that Lachâtre's editorial work and political involvement are very coherent and that he used the printing press and his bookshop in order to disseminate his progressive views. In the 1840s, he authored and published books called *Histoire de la Bastille*, *Le Donjon de Vincennes*, *Les prisons de l'Europe*, *Histoire universelle des Religions*, *Le siècle de Napoléon*, *Les Fastes de Versailles*, *Vingt ans de règne*. His involvement in the 1848 revolution led him to publish two short-lived journals, *La Tribune de la Gironde* and *Le Peuple souverain* and he begun to publish *Mystères du peuple* written by Eugène Sue.

After the failure of the revolution, he continued to support his political views and published, as an editor, a major work announced in 1851 as *Dictionnaire du peuple* and finally called *Dictionnaire universel* (1854-1856). This Dictionary had entries related to democracy, feminism, mutualism, homeopathy, mesmerism, Fourierism, the beginnings of spiritualism, socialism, (poorly distinguished from communism). As François Gaudin notices, Lachâtre praised men for their contribution and not for their fame; progress was accepted in a not always coherent melange. It was a book of incredible audacity, which aimed at emancipation, resistance to

imperial power, expression of minority opinions. The examples that have been given often targeted kings, popes, despots, the police, religion, the exploitation of workers.

The atmosphere of the 1850s was not at all favorable to the freedom of expression and the works he published finally fell victims to censorship. In 1857, he was found guilty for the ideas published in / printing the *Mystères du peuple*, and the book was seized and destroyed; the same fate befell his *Dictionnaire universel* in 1858 and his *Dictionnaire français illustré* in 1859. Maurice Lachâtre was forced to emigrate to Barcelona, where he lived for 6 years and rebuilt his fortune. Following his return to France in 1864, he created the *Docks de la librairie et du commerce* and continued to publish and to sell different kinds of commercial products. He fought for the Commune in 1870 and was the first to publish Karl Marx's *The Capital* in French. Once again, he had to go in exile, first to Spain, then to Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy, once—again publishing books that attracted aggressive reactions from the conservative governments. During his first exile in Spain, in 1861, hundreds of the books he had printed had been publicly burned, in the last *auto-da-fé* in the history of the Spanish Inquisition. Another Middle Ages-inspired ceremony led to his exposition in effigy in Belgium, in 1877, always because of his editorial and printing activity. The political amnesty allowed him to come back to France in 1879 and to continue his work of political and social propaganda.

It is in this context, of the 1880s, when the texts grouped by the editor of the present volume had been published. They have to be placed in the era of Lachâtre's continuous fight against the values traditionally transmitted by the social and family environment from which he had come. These texts define him as anti-royalist and republican, with communist beliefs of a future new, egalitarian society. They especially display Lachâtre's radical anticlericalism and his desire to free society from religious influence.

As stated by Gaudin, the interest of Lachâtre's writings lies in a juxtaposition, unusual for his time, of opposed or marginal currents. Their study presents a vision of certain unknown aspects of the history of the mid-nineteenth century: the actions of free-thinkers, the encounter between utopianism

and socialism, the mutualist attempts, the criticism of the "exploiters" from Marxist and non-Marxist perspectives etc.

For nowadays historians, the value of the information on the Church provided by the works edited by Gaudin under the title *Ni dieux, ni prêtres* is almost non-existent. We cannot study today the Inquisition or the catholic monasticism using the data available in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and "arranged" in the form of pamphlets by a radical anti-clerical thinker and political activist. But, using a cultural history perspective, we can and we have to study the society and the political and intellectual

context that gave birth to such kind of texts. They offer us a key for understanding the difficult birth of the secular and republican society in a France which was, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the avant-garde of progress.

The great value of the texts published by François Gaudin lies precisely in providing access to a certain kind of publications which no doubt appear outdated, but which are proof of the struggles fought during an era which is also the foundation of a new modernity.

## CULTURAL CODIFICATIONS, SOCIAL INFLECTIONS BY ANDI MIHALACHE (REVIEW)

Gheorghe NEGUSTOR

PhD

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

Faculty of History and Philosophy, The Doctoral School „Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură”

E-mail: gnegustor@gmail.com

The historian Andi Mihalache is one of the most representative researchers in the Romanian historiographical landscape of the last two decades. His passion for discourse analysis, for cultural history and history of representations, for the modern cultural patrimony and historical conscience in the Romanian society has imposed his remarkable profile in the new wave of Romanian historiography with western valences. Numerous publications of the last years offer a new critical vision in the local historical writing. They are the result of an interdisciplinary approach that had been perfected by the young historian in his many research travels in Budapest, Paris or Munchen. Andi Mihalache's PhD thesis, coordinated by the well-known historian Alexandru Zub and published in 2003 - *Istorie și practici discursive în România <democratic-populară>/ Discursive Practices in (democratic-popular) Romania* – inaugurates the list of books that distinguish by the analytical and reflexive spirit of the author. The reviewed book is the last one in this list, offering the readers a unique approach for the cultural historical writing in Romania.

The book *Cultural Codifications, Social Inflections*<sup>1</sup> has been recently published by two appreciated publishing houses of Cluj-Napoca – Argonaut and MEGA. The book is part of ANIMA MUNDI collection, launched recently in the Romanian cultural space by an energetic historian from the same generation, Nicolae Mihai. The coordinators of the collection - Astrid Cambose, Laura Jiga-Iliescu, Andi Mihalache, Nicolae Mihai – intend to publish

interdisciplinary books that would enliven not only the historiographic, but also the cultural milieu. The debut of this collection is impressive and promising indeed.

From the first pages of the book, Andi Mihalache approaches the issue of image and reality, the symbol and representations, the imaginary and interpretation, offering clues toward the subject of research entitled “cultural codifications.” In his perspective, photography is a visual object full of coded significances for those unaware; the author unveils, with the help of famous writers' arguments, the process in which a simple vintage photography gains profound cultural valences when it is endowed with significance. The process becomes possible by decodings of everything the image signifies and transmits. The decodifying process of a text or an image involves visualization, temporal framework, interpretation, explanation. This path may be done by specialists that reconstitute a reality by understanding the symbols and significances that pass unnoticed. The interpretative example of the image from the front cover is welcome, as the decyphering process is more than a historian's work. It is a detective's enquiry that makes a simple photography reveal a multitude of aspects about the reality of a given historical period. The author is a traveller undercover, transforming into archival sources, images, real characters that help the reader understand the mechanisms of a distant reality that come closer through the “cultural” deciphering of the book.

The six parts of the book - *În primul rând/ First and Foremost, Moduri de a privi/ Ways of Regarding, Povestea unui viitor remanent/The Story of a Remanent Future, Cauzalități fictive, efecte imaginare/ Fictitious*

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<sup>1</sup> Andi Mihalache, *Codificări culturale, inflexiuni sociale*. Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2020, 272 p.

*Causalities, Imaginary Effects, Estetica retrospectiei/ The Aesthetics of Retrospection* and *În cele din urmă/ Lastly* – may seem different research topics, but the working hypothesis operates over the topics and confers uniqueness to the main demonstration. This is the object of the historical analytical investigation, in which imagination and imaginary covers the 20th century, uncovering the reality of the present by relating to the interrogative self. Interrogation of the retrospective type is the key that ensures the unity of Mihalache's demarche. We refer to different periods, people, ethnicities, but the author's restitutio brings them into a reality of which the reader is part while reading the pages of the book. Thus, in line with Aldref Bulai's argumentation, the author states that: "Once textualised, a probable reality took the place of the one installed long time ago; it is not fictionalising, but offering a prognosis. The anticipation is here more of a far-reaching statement, with prescriptive, descriptive and explanatory proclivities." (Mihalache 2020, 78)

Therefore, we face an innovative approach for the historical Romanian culture, assumed by the young historian from the beginning and which brings consistency to the Romanian historical writing, reaching a new dimension. Unfortunately, the recent Romanian historiography lacks reflexive interrogations, while imaginary is largely avoided due to various reasons, leading to less than satisfying results. That is why the present book represents a consistent breakthrough not only for the Romanian historiography, but also for the interdisciplinary cultural approaches. This is a laudatory demarche for the manner of decryption of symbols and imaginary, shortcutting the path toward the truth. The readers of the book will face a challenging task due to the less common style while discovering, together with the author, the power of the reflexive self in knowing the reality. The final interrogations, subtly expressed in conclusive explanations, stir any conscience attracted by the knowledge of the past and present reality: "But you, reader, how do you approach the figments in which the truth disguises? Can you look yourself in the mirror and see with your own,

not stranger's eyes? With your own fear and others' suspicion?" (Mihalache 2020, 256)

**THE HISTORY OF CURSIVE SELF: TESTIMONIES, IDENTITIES, PATRIMONIES BY ANDI MIHALACHE (REVIEW)**

**Ioana-Cornelia REPEDE**

PhD Student

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca,

Faculty of History and Philosophy

E-mail: ioana.repede@yahoo.com

Andi Mihalache is a well-known author, researcher and publisher. His main field of specialization is cultural history, but his research directions include: the history of historiography, the cultural history of communism and post-communism and the genesis of patrimonial consciousness in Romanian culture. He is the author of several books, including the one entitled *History and discursive practices in popular-democrat Romania*, which is also his doctoral thesis.

The volume entitled *The History of the Cursive Self: Testimonies, Identities, Patrimonies*<sup>1</sup> appeared in the ANIMA MUNDI collection that includes research that combines history with different fields such as: anthropology, sociology, ethnology and so on. The coordinators of this collection are: Ileana Benga from Cluj-Napoca, Nicolae Mihai from Craiova and Andi Mihalache from Iaşi.

As the author states inside this book, the title of the book was inspired by Petru Cimpoeşu's preoccupation with the cursive self. This volume consists of two parts, each part comprising several subchapters and an index at the end of the book. Both parts and the subchapters have suggestive titles for the content.

In the first part of *The History of Cursive Self*, the author captures various examples of recollection. The remembrance takes place with the help of various objects that we encounter daily. A good example in this particular matter are the pictures or household items we usually have around home. In the case of the pictures, one example that I particularly

liked was the one of Queen Marie of Romania who was surrounded only by portraits depicting herself, without images of her family members. I particularly liked this example because the fragment in exposing this information comes from Martha Bibescu's journal and captures the hostilities between them. At the same time, we can see the difference in the opinion of the two characters regarding the genealogical role of the pictures.

The second part of this book refers to Walter Benjamin's book *Berlin Childhood in 1900* (Benjamin 2010). The reference to this book is noticeable from the title of the second part of Andi Mihalache's writing. This part is called *Postscriptum: adjacent spaces in the Benjaminian imaginary*, which analyzes Benjamin's book and images from his childhood. Andi Mihalache's opinion is that Benjamin's memories are pseudorecollections and that Benjamin projects some representation of the present in the past.

A very useful aspect for any researcher is the index of the book, which makes it easier to search for a specific author mentioned in the book.

From the very beginning of this book, the reader is informed that this volume is a part of the aforementioned collection that has high-level multidisciplinary reflections. Therefore, the language is elevated, so that an uninitiated public in this field would have difficulties in reading this paper.

*The History of the Cursive Self: Testimonies, Identities, Patrimonies* contains many footnotes. These annotations have the role of giving additional explanations and highlighting auxiliary sources that can clarify aspects that were treated briefly.

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<sup>1</sup> Andi Mihalache, *Istoria eului cursiv: mărturii, identităţi, patrimonii*. Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019, 190 p.



Analyzing how the information is presented, we notice that the author uses numerous annotations that sometimes extend over several consecutive pages. Thus, the main text is often summarized in a few paragraphs and the rest of the page is being occupied by annotations. Reading is difficult even for an audience familiar with the ideas presented because the string of information is lost and the reader always needs to return to the main text. The annotations are certainly important, for example: Laurier Turgeon's four directions of material culture research. Also, these annotations can certainly clarify the information but the size and the fact that they continue from one page to another can make it difficult to read and understand.

A pleasantly surprising aspect for my reading experience is at the end of this book and it is represented by the open ending - a question that refers to the past and that engages the readers into thinking. I consider that the question deserves to be mentioned here as well: *and yet, who remembers what was his first memory?; where does my memory start? what about yours?* (Mihalache 2019, 17)

All in all, *The History of Cursive Self* is a high-quality study in its field. The book is complex and well structured and with an extensive bibliography. Readers will find an original approach, with various information that can be used later in their writings and research.

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## THE STAVROGIN SYNDROME BY ALINA PAVELESCU (REVIEW-INTERVIEW OF A TOPICAL HISTORICAL NOVEL)

Mihai COTEA

Graduate of Faculty of History  
"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu  
E-mail: coteamihai@gmail.com

*The Stavrogin Syndrome*<sup>1</sup> is the second novel and the latest literature book by Alina Pavelescu.

Published by Humanitas in 2019, the bold volume, admirable for its approach and for its complex construction, offers a fresco of the current Romanian society and the main guidelines that marks some defects of the nowadays society. The book revolves around a seemingly good and harmless character, meant to reproduce the true subject of the book - the Banality of Evil, famous formula by Hanna Arendt for expressing the nature of the totalitarian evil.

Reading the novel, driven by the curiosity behind the idea and behind the vision of a professional historian who writes literature, even an historical novel, such as Mrs. Alina Pavelescu, I proceeded to interview the writer, who revealed some interesting aspects about the book, as well as behind the scenes of its writing.

Septimiu Făcăleanu, former militiaman and past guard of the penitentiary in S., the provincial town where he resides in the reality of the novel, is, at first sight, another ordinary retired man from the current Romanian landscape. An aspiring writer, marked by the rediscovery of God, which he had lost at a key moment in his biography, somewhere on the verge of maturity, Mr. Făcăleanu allows himself to live, at the beginning of the novel, that moment of "and yet" in the last lines of the biography of a man.

One last stop given to him after a sinuous and always hesitant biographical journey.

As the author confessed in the interview, the idea behind the writing of the novel *The Stavrogin Syndrome* appeared in 2011, when

she was watching a TV report about the case of a former militiaman who repented of his abuses.

*"And I thought he was a curious character, because, beyond the words that expressed his regret, beyond the deeds he confessed, I read a lot of pride in his repentance. Then I could not understand how a pride of repentance was even possible. I felt the need to explain somehow this curious psychological mechanism. I haven't encountered another similar case and I hope it will remain singular. After all, it's about imposture. A grotesque imposture, because it mixes real crimes with false ones and repentance with pride. If you ask me, any repentance should be authentic. Otherwise, I don't think you can talk about repentance. Yes, torturer's repentance could be genuine too. I assume that you can realize that it is authentic if you see it manifesting itself discreetly, as an intimate experience, not as a show and if it is obvious that it puts the repentant torturer to a hard inner test. Like I said, I don't see how you can repent with a smile on your face or with pride."*

Or, in the words from the novel: "That was his real punishment: that between the difficulty of life and its indifference, he could not decide what he should have chosen." (Pavelescu 2019, 12).

Courted by Mr. Eugen, the head of the S. newspaper, *The Window of Democracy*, who wanted to bring to light a hot topic to conquer the market, Mr. Făcăleanu, pretending to be a communist torturer, does not hesitate to show his alleged remorse, authentic stigmas in the eyes of the readers of the provincial paper. And it works great for him, lying nonchalantly, interview after interview, word for word, all sipped by the tape recorder of the docile Adelina, a young journalist of Mr. Eugen's newspaper, her misogynist and tyrannical boss

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<sup>1</sup> Alina Pavelescu, *Sindromul Stavroghin*. București: Humanitas, 2019, 196 p.

to whom the girl would be willing to sacrifice almost anything.

By virtue of the democratic and capitalist exercise, competition probably represents the lifeblood with which the wheels of this mechanism, yet uncompletely elucidated, are best anointed and maintained, in a society over which half a century of communism has been thrown. At this point, another quality of Mrs. Pavelescu's novel enters the scene, the accurate rendering of the trend of public lustrations on the Romanian televisions. "And yet", finding themselves in front of this significant challenge, our protagonists decide to take the next step - seeing their story presented on TV. At this moment, the peaceable Septimiu Făcăleanu lives a turning point, "because it is not hatred that makes man the enemy of man, but indifference" (Pavelescu 2019, 39), seeing himself in front of his "victim", the former prisoner Fane Burtă and assuming the disgrace of the viewers who enjoy every moment of this reunion well directed and exploited on the television of Mr. Miron, the mogul of a provincial city.

The big fish swallows the small one, this is one of the cynical rules, and perhaps the most accurate picture of what capitalism and survival mean on the hot asphalt of the jungle that smells like meritocracy, democracy or some other form of "-cracy".

But who is, in fact, Mr. Septimiu Făcăleanu? A monster? No way. As I said, the man is well wrapped in the coat of banality and has too many similar signs to many of those around us. Evil has a hideous look only in a naive aesthetic of its representation. And then, is Mr. Septimiu a profiteer? A negative character? Neither, nor, as in life, the negative character of the book is hidden in the dim light of the facts and choices of others, pulling the strings of an entire system of negation, the eternal puppeteer. Last but not least, what tells us the association between Septimiu Făcăleanu and the Dostoevsky character, Stavrogin? We find the answer in author's words:

*"The association has been imposed on me since I saw the real character and I tried to explain it to myself. It was the first thing that came to mind: Stavrogin, Dostoevsky's character who has a conscience divided between the evil that dominates him and the good that he is able to recognize, but unable to accomplish. And he is the one to commit*

*suicide, in the end, fearing the Golgotha that should be the true repentance."*

Făcăleanu is Stavrogin by construction, crushed by his own inner struggle and by the memories relived in this forceful stunt of regrets; he brilliantly becomes the perfect victim. Switching imperceptibly from the position of torturer, the result of his delirium, to that of a victim, offering the sacrifice of his own life, in fact. Blind even in front of the necessary spectacle of consciousness, given by Adelina in the core of the book in the television studio which, as she says, sells confirmations to both executioners and victims, both united by the same loop – the pride.

Mr. Septimiu is great in one thing, in the magnitude of his naivety, which he doesn't even suspect, a clear sign of a great writer, who manages to succumb, cliché after cliché, all that is thought to be familiar about the world around. And that is the very fact that the world is divided into black and white. Nevertheless, Mr. Făcăleanu is a character constructed in shades of gray, contradicting a creed born with the Bible.

In the end, as a reader, I wondered if there is a possibility that a character like Adelina, the true hero of the book, could exist in today's reality. And if she existed, managing to demystify at least part of the mechanisms of our society, would we believe her? Or, at least, would we listen to her? Alina Pavelescu considers that

*"First of all, it takes a lot of courage to live according to your principles in the real life. Very few people have it until the end and, most often, those people are considered a little crazy, or even really crazy, depending on how inflexible they are in their principles. Man is made of doubts, you cannot always be the master of some inflexible certainties. But there should be a point in everyone's life beyond which you feel that any concession becomes unacceptable, that you can no longer live in peace with yourself. This is what actually happens to Adelina - who isn't inflexible, but is still innocent - and this happens to each of us at least once in our lives. If we are not damaged to the core. I think that the world doesn't need us completely spoiled".*

Professional historian and archivist, Alina Pavelescu is the author of several

publications and studies dedicated to the research of the history of Romanian communism. Among them: "The Romanian Communist Party and the reconfiguration of the cultural field (1944 - 1965)", in *Studii si Materiale de Istorie Contemporană*, vol. III, 2004; "Gheorghiu-Dej's succession: power transfer techniques", in *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, year XII, No. 42-43 (1-2)/2004; "The coming to power of Ceaușescu and the renewal of the elites in the Romanian Communist Party (1965-1969)", in Nicolas Bauquet, François Bocholier (eds.), *Le communisme et les élites en Europe Centrale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2006. We also mention "Politics, memory, history: the historiography of Romanian communism after 1989", in *Revista istorică*, vol. XVII, 2006; "Post-totalitarian reconciliation with the past in the realm of public history - the relationship between archivists and historians in Romania", in Sergiu Musteață, Igor Cașu, eds., *Fără termen de prescripție. Aspecte ale investigării crimelor comunismului în Europa*, Chișinău, Editura CARTIER, 2011.

**PAST IN DISPUTE. THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN ROMANIA IN HISTORICAL LITERATURE  
FROM 1990-2015 BY ELEONORA-MARIA POPA (REVIEW)**

**Alin BURLEC**

PhD Candidate

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu

E-mail: alinburlec@yahoo.com

There were a lot of discussions in the Western countries about the communist regime in Romania during its existence, especially in the last part of the '80s, and even more inside Romania after the fall of the regime in 1989. During the first decade a half after the Revolution, the public discourse was centered around the regime's repressive side. However, since around 2005, we can see a rift between the discourse of historians and that of the general public. The first group largely continued to emphasize aspects regarding the prison system, the dissidence, the personality cult of Ceaușescu and other such topics, while within the second group, a strong sense of nostalgia began to appear.

This book<sup>1</sup> tackles the topic of reviewing some works of several known authors who wrote about the political history of the regime and which appeared in the period 1990-2015 (with two notable exceptions). As such, a rather small number of studies are reviewed in Popa's publication. This can be viewed as a downside, but we believe that it is not the case, because the current study would have been burdened by an abundance of writings on different topics and, thus, the reader would have been assaulted by a large number of new information difficult to contextualize. The chosen timeframe is also welcomed because it allows the reader to see the transition from the early works, which have a rather passionate tone, to those in the later years, which are nuanced, even if the theme is still the same. Another important aspect is that the author does

not include Romanian historians only, but also some from outside the country who became interested in the history of the communist regime in Romania.

Popa's study doesn't start with a historiographical analysis but rather with some terminological considerations on the main event that made the appearance of critical studies about communism possible, namely the Revolution from 1989. The violent end of the Ceaușescu regime prompted historians, political scientists, other intellectuals, or politicians to describe the uncertain events of that December using terms such as revolution, coup, or a hybrid between the two. At first glance, this is a talking point that has little to do with the main objective of the book. Still, by having different understandings of those events, historians are influenced in writing about the demise of communism, which sometimes prompts them to make comparisons with other Eastern European countries.

The next step is a short history regarding Romanian intellectuals and the phases of ideological control that constrained their activity. The author uses Gabriel Moisa's system of describing the different political and cultural phases of the regime. Moisa's approach relies on the overlapping of the stages of historical discourse and the political phases of communism in Romania. An interesting aspect here, which is mentioned incidentally, is that the Dej regime wanted to publish a history of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and a History of Romania. The second project came to fruition in the following years, but the first plan did not materialize. In this regard, it is somehow ironic that the first history of RCP was made by its opponents.

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonora-Maria Popa, *Trecuturi în dispută. Regimul comunist din România în literatura istorică din perioada 1990-2015*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2020, 307 p.

The third part of the book analyzes the different motivations of different authors whose works are considered important by Popa. She highlights various reasons for what determined those intellectuals to write about the political machinations which happened largely behind closed doors. Thus, she establishes some categories in which certain authors can be framed: the intellectuals who went into exile before '48, the persons who were forced to leave Romania, the dissidents, and the foreign historians that entered the country, with different scholarships, before 1989. A welcome development here is that we are acquainted with the personal reasons behind their works. For example, the background of Vladimir Tismăneanu and his parents are made known to the reader, and thus we can see how the son of two communists became an ardent critic of the regime. On the other hand, Popa paints a clear picture of those foreign-born historians that travelled to Romania before 1989 and became interested in Romanian culture and, after a while, in the political regime. It must be noted that their area of interest is much larger than communist studies.

The last part of the book might be the one of greatest interest to the reader, because it explores the central theme of the author's work. Here, Popa reviews the main studies of the writers mentioned in the preceding part, insisting on the patterns and the historiographical traditions that they are shaping. In this part, she builds upon the periodization used in the second segment regarding the intellectual life in communist Romania, based on Moisa's

timeframe. She presents the opinions of other historians, such as Boia, Zub, or Mihalache, concerning a periodization of Romanian historical writing during the years from 1948 and up until 1989. In the final subchapter of her book, Popa goes through the most important studies regarding the political history of the regime and tries to establish some patterns and to show how different writers approached their topics.

After the Revolution (a subject that frequently appears in her study), Romanian historians and those foreign-born ones who were interested in Romanian history began to make up for the lost ground of the previous period and to rekindle connections with the scientific community around Europe and North America. The start was rather slow because only the studies which were written outside the country were published, along with interviews and memoirs of dissidents and political prisoners. A breakthrough came when the archives were opened, and researchers started to plough through the newly made available documents from CNSAS. However, the downside was that this field of research became rather fragmented, with studies based on very specialized archival material being widely published. Other important steps made after 2000 were the establishment of different cultural institutes tasked with research in this field and, of course, with the drafting of the Tismăneanu Report. In this context, Eleonora-Maria Popa's work is a welcome addition thanks to her effort in tackling the relatively uncharted waters of the historiography of post-communist Romania.

**WITCHCRAFT IN TRANSYLVANIA IN THE 13<sup>TH</sup>-18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES BY ȘAROLTA SOLCAN  
(REVIEW)**

**Konrad-Harris GERGELY-KISZELLA**

Student, “Babeș-Bolyai” University  
Faculty of History and Philosophy  
E-mail: ghkonrad15@gmail.com

From an anthropological point of view, human communities are shaped by the mentalities that make up the cultural profile of their society. Historians tend to base their interpretation of how human mentalities changed or influenced the historical narrative by examining documents that might offer us an understanding – subjective, nonetheless – of how certain events were perceived by contemporaries. These images, corroborated with our academic understanding of the past, could in turn help us paint a picture of the social and cultural dynamics that characterised the period in question. In her book, Romanian historian Șarolta Solcan explores how the concept of witchcraft was seen by the populace of Transylvania during the late medieval period and the pre- and early modern era.

Șarolta Solcan is a Professor at the University of Bucharest, specialized in the demographic, social and cultural history of the Romanian-speaking principalities during the 13<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The main focus of her research is the medieval family and the status of women in past societies. Some of her more prominent papers include *Family in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Romanian principalities* (*Familia în secolul al XVII-lea în Țările române*, 1995), *Făgăraș-Patterns of Central and East european Life* (1997), *The Problem of Illegitimate Couples in the Extra Carpathian Area during the 17th Century*, in “*Concubinage, Illegitimacy and Morality*” (2005), *Child Mortality in București During the First Years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, in the Romanian Journal of Population Studies (2012) and *Women in Medieval Moldova, Transylvania and Wallachia* (*Femeile din Moldova, Transilvania și Țara Românească în Evul Mediu*, 2005), the latter of which being awarded the prestigious “Nicolae Iorga” Prize for Historical Studies and Archaeology by the Romanian Academy.

*Witchcraft in Transylvania in the 13<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries*<sup>1</sup>, published in 2019 by the University of Bucharest publishing house, approaches the topic of witchcraft from the perspective of documents related to witch trials, written sources that explore both the legal and personal dimension of the phenomenon.

The book has several chapters that treat the subject from a general, regional perspective, then focusing on the Romanian ethnic element of the topic. The first chapter, *The situation in Transylvania* (*Situația în Transilvania*) presents a general picture of life in the province. Due to the *scapegoat* nature of those considered guilty of witchcraft, the surge of witch hunts and trials in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century is linked in Solcan’s view to the worsening of everyday living conditions, due to climatic changes that rendered harvests unusable and natural disasters more frequent. On top of ravaging diseases, the region was plagued by political instability (following the collapse of a central authority in the Kingdom of Hungary), prolonged military conflict, which in turn meant demographic and economic decline. This perspective connects the general hardships of life to the need to find comfort in spirituality or resolve to healers and mysticism. The second part of the chapter treats the medical condition of the Transylvanian populace in greater detail, revealing the extend of death and suffering caused by disease, but also what medical procedure and physicians recommended. The numerous references to personal accounts enable the reader to understand how the decease of one’s close relative(s) due to one of the many *plagues* would deeply impact him/her. Șarolta Solcan argues that the general feeling of hopelessness made them appeal to so-called *healers* and

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<sup>1</sup> Șarolta Solcan, *Vrăjitoria în Transilvania în secolele XIII-XVIII*. Editura Universității din București, 2019, 405 p.



quacks, which could easily – given many other circumstances discussed in later chapters – fall into the category of witches. Furthermore, the failure of such a healer (unversed in any serious medical knowledge) would attract the accusation of witchcraft, which, as the author explained in the introduction, was perceived as malevolent and associated with the devil. The reasoning in this perspective is based on the understanding of the medieval mindset, implying a strong psychological input in the matter addressed. I find this approach inspired, in the sense that it accustoms the reader with the basic mental traits that explain the inner-working of a mentality of a past and – may I add – it proves that, while immediate solutions have changed, basic human tendencies are still in place.

The second chapter, *Witchcraft trials in Transylvania (Procese de vrăjitoarie în Transilvania)* deals with the topic itself by analysing the judicial framework regarding such trials, the social background of those tried, as well as the image of the witch in the popular mindset. While virtually no one (regardless of age, status, profession, religion or ethnic origin) was excluded from such accusation, it was far more frequent for women, particularly middle or old-age widows to be considered witches. This was due to the fact that they constituted the greater majority of midwives and healers. Their knowledge of local herbs and traditional spells would incriminate them far more easily. Solcan brings forward a series of cases described by official documents and personal testimonies, thus forming a very wide perspective of the phenomenon, ranging in motivation from the passing of a loved one to the sudden death of domestic animals and in outcome from execution by courts' ruling to the murder of the suspect by the vindictive accusers.

The last chapter of the book, *The daily life (Viața cotidiană)* is as important as the former ones, due to the manner in which it explores – based on the documents regarding witchcraft trials – basic traits of everyday life in the Transylvanian society. Family and the relationship between its members (husband and wife, parents and children, the nuclear family and other relatives) is the main focus of the chapter. Another important role is played by the community and the way its dynamics shaped by the mentalities and social practices of the time.

Professor Solcan's book is a comprehensive and accessible study of a phenomenon that was not restricted only to the boundaries of the western-European Inquisitions, but a mark of medieval thinking that manifested in Transylvania as well. The analysis encompasses numerous cases, whose wide-ranging circumstances testify its complexity. The author's merit does not reside only in the selection of documented cases, but also in the establishment of a correlation between complex factors that favour the perpetuation of the 'witchcraft stigma' in the medieval and early-modern society plagued by increased suffering.

