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EXILUL UNUI SCRITOR ÎN PEISAJ MARIN: DESPRE CRIZĂ, AGONIE ȘI POATE ALTĂ SOARTĂ...

Iuliana BARNA,
doctor, conferențiar universitar
Universitatea „Dunarea de Jos” Galați, Romania
ORCID: 0009-0003-8579-1883

Abstract. *Textul relevă un aspect al conceptului teoretico-didactic de „exilul literaturii/literatura în exil”. Este important să precizăm că, în această instanță conceptuală, este construit și aspectul didactic al studierii literaturii române în liceu privind viața și opera scriitorilor. Unul dintre ei îl reprezintă și Virgil Tănase, care este o personalitate proeminentă a diasporei românești din spațiul cultural francez, cu o activitate publicistică și profesională de excepție: prozator, dramaturg, regizor, ziarist și profesor în cadrul unor instituții prestigioase din Franța, doctor în sociologie și în semiologia artelor și literelor. În literatură, Virgil Tănase își asumă formula onirismului românesc ca un spațiu ficțional compensatoriu. Confesiunile scriitorului, făcute cu prilejul unor interviuri, cuprind discursul despre literatură și statutul artistului în era socialismului naționalist, și, totodată, dirijează metatextual spre identificarea unei „interiorități” literare asumate.*

În societatea actuală, când devine tot mai grea diferențierea valorilor de surrogate, Virgil Tănase formulează un ultim îndemn pentru creatorii de literatură, acela de a continua să scrie autentic, indiferent de timp sau spațiu. Scriitor prolific, Virgil Tănase va rămâne veșnic un spirit integrator, având aspirația și vocația de a surprinde totul: epoca în care trăiește, spiritul lumii din care provine, sufletul uman.

Cuvinte-cheie: diasporă, literatură, identitate, cenzură, onirism, exil.

A WRITER'S EXILE IN A SEASCAPE: ON CRISIS, AGONY AND PERHAPS ANOTHER FATE...

Abstract. *The text reveals an aspect of the theoretical-didactic concept of „exile of literature/literature in exile”. It is important to specify that, in this conceptual instance, the didactic aspect of studying Romanian literature in high school regarding the life and work of writers is also built. One of them is represented by Virgil Tănase, who is a prominent personality of the Romanian diaspora in the French cultural space, with an exceptional journalistic and professional activity: prose writer, playwright, director, journalist and professor in prestigious institutions in France, doctor in sociology and in the semiology of arts and letters. In literature, Virgil Tănase assumes the Romanian oneirism formula as a compensatory fictional space. The confessions of the writer, made on the occasion of some interviews, include the discourse on literature and the status of the artist in the era of Nationalist Socialism, and, at the same time, direct metatextually towards the identification of an assumed literary „interiority”.*

In today's society, when it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate values from surrogates, Virgil Tănase formulates a final exhortation for the creators of literature, that of continuing to write authentically, regardless of time or space. Prolific writer, Virgil Tănase will forever remain an integrative spirit, having the aspiration and vocation to capture everything: the era in which he lives, the spirit of the world from which he comes, the human soul.

Keywords: diaspora, literature, identity, censorship, oneirism, exile.

The first novel written in French, *Portrait d'homme à la faux dans un paysage marin* (*Portret de om cosind în peisaj marin – i.e. Portrait of a Man Scything in a Seascape*) [1], published in 1976 by Flammarion in Paris, triggered an initial reaction among Parisian literary critics. Gifted with originality and vision, he leaves the „alpine pastures of the Carpathians” and publishes his first surprising written piece in

France. This is how the young writer, Virgil Tănase, was received: „Il y tente, ni plus ni moins, de réconcilier Breton avec Valéry dans le superbe récit d'un périple autour d'une ville mystérieuse, enneigée. Il demeure de ce texte insolite, dépourvu de signification politique ou idéologique, où Eros et Thanatos se retrouvent au bout du chemin, le discours incantatoire et magique d'un poète” [3].

Inquired why his first novel appeared in a French translation before being published in Romanian, Virgil Tănase would reveal to us that he had the fate of the forbidden writer who deliberately integrated himself, because he felt a sense of belonging, into the literary movement of the '66 - '70s called *onirism*, a movement which at that time frightened the Romanian authorities. This fact will lead to all of his literary and artistic activity being *placed under the scrutiny* of the censorship commission. Once his first novel was published - a complex and opaque writing, in which we find a pure literary game, hidden in a metaphorical atmosphere, with symbols incomprehensible according to the logic of the Romanian political regime of that time - Virgil Tănase would be censored.

Trying to shape the Romanian literary *onirism*, Tănase perceives it as a special place where works belonging to the literature of the verisimilitude and of the implausibility fall under. For him the dream is symbolic, suggestive. Dream images refer to something else, they are the sign of something else, while the bare reality exists for its own sake. The dream literature ostentatiously displays its own transparency. „This current can be defined as the effort of a group of writers to respond to the ruse of *the realist common sense*” [2] (my emphasis).

We learn that *Portrait d'homme à la faux dans un paysage marin* is a special, mysterious story, „which comes and goes” (Journal de Genève, January 29th, 1977), which is lost among the dream, the memories and the reality. The novel deals with the theme of the return: *a man returns home on a winter's day to a small snow-covered town where his wife is waiting for him. Another interpretation tells the story of a warrior who returns home, haunted by war memories and visions that reflect the face of his wife. Or the whole story lurks in lost memories in an ever-destroyed time.* (my emphasis) Obviously, like any modern poetic text, which is difficult to assimilate, it cannot be „summarized” or paraphrased in a relevant way.

As we delve deeper into the space of the novel, we discover elements of subtlety combined with skill and dedication by a crafty jeweller of the literature. Consciousness becomes something like a cinema, where a multitude of films and images play, which the eye sometimes go through without understanding.

Starting from real places and objects or from memories (the train station, the clock, the fog, the war crimes, etc. - recurring elements of the novel), Virgil Tănase gives birth in his writing to signs and

symbols, rendered in the form of details, which are never pointless as they follow an internal logic. Everything resides in the form, in the thread of the story, dominated by a permanent tension and a rare beauty called transparency.

Portrait d'homme à la faux dans un paysage marin is based on the obsessive motif of the pursuit and on the impossibility of reaching an imprecise goal. „The formula of the novel is that of an incontinent monologue, within whose frame banal images of everyday life, seascapes and war scenes are crammed together. The world outlined by the prose writer is often a world of dissolution, in which the banal takes on monstrous appearances”... [6].

Looked at in depth, Virgil Tănase's literature is, in my opinion, truly „oneiric”, but analogous to a certain reality. Once we are introduced to his writing, we can notice a particular architecture, that is both poetic and disturbing at the same time, elevated by the variety of stylistic procedures. „Un livre à démonter comme une horlogerie subtile” [10], such is the perception of French literary critics. This statement prompts us to turn our attention once again to the author and his writing. Gifted with a penetrating spirit of observation, the writer renders through the narrator's eyes the veracity of his world, thus creating a well-assembled literary construction, occasionally disturbed by a series of hallucinatory scenes that become conversions of reality.

The text is a first epic exercise in the manner of the French New Novel [2], with an epic structure devoid of dialogue, the novel being, in my opinion, more of a retrospection of the narrator - character (with a double role: *autodiegetic*, but an *actant* as well), who also becomes a witness, as a fine observer of the narrated world. The sequences are projected by alternating the first person with the third person: „I leaned over and pressed my forehead to the window; he did the same, on the other side, standing alone there on the platform, halted before the white chimney, surrounded by figures...” (p.8); „He stood there for a moment, for some time, close to the lamppost or the pole, then went away again, probably thinking of nothing”... „Although the path continued on the other side of the road, I abandoned it, preferring to go on my way, on the sidewalk, hoping to find someone who would tell me which way to go, besides I would be able to look at the enameled signposts that were supposed to indicate names at the corner of each street”... (pp.14-15).

This glimpse into the past is obsessively and unrealistically unfolding in the narrator's subconscious mind, while he is dominated by an agonizing

state. In fact, we are witnessing a dreamlike performance staged by the director - novelist Virgil Tănase, and played as naturally as possible by a single actor, the other narrative presences being transitory and almost unreal. It is a literature built with a ruler and a compass, with a complicated writing architecture, but with pictorial and musical arrangements meant to impress the reader. However, speaking of this novel, the author tells us, „Looking back, I find this book too contrived, not vivid enough in black and white” [9] (my emphasis).

It is the New Novel perspective that also the French journalist Patrice Bollon embraces when he explores the epic techniques used by Virgil Tănase in his first unprecedented writing, „Portrait d'homme à la faux dans un paysage marin (translated as *Portrait of a Man Scything in a Seascape*), written under an utter freedom from the classicised norms, which followed nevertheless not a fashion but an inner necessity”. This is about „first and foremost, the deconstruction of the narrative. Then a construction after the parable of the Russian puppets: a story embedded in another story, itself embedded in another, and so on, the reader falling from one to another with such steadiness and speed that one may have the feeling of dizzying depth” [1].

The novel *Portrait d'homme à la faux dans un paysage marin (Portrait of a Man Scything in a Seascape)* is nothing more than a beautiful poetic novel, an inner monologue constructed by the haunting retelling of the same episodic stories, subject to different interpretation, following the memory and dream perspective. A careful analysis will reveal not even the shadow of an ideological suggestion.

The epic text offers the reader the story of a myth: Agamemnon's return, the warrior's return: „L' hiver. Un homme descend d'un train, sort d' une gare. Il revient de la guerre et se rend à sa femme par les rues enneigées” [8].

Some references ...

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The storyline structure of Virgil Tănase's narrative is built out of the endless stages of the search for an address, a search initiated in the first pages of the novel and remaining obscure until the end. Equiva-

lent to the stalemate itself, the stumbling time has as an aggravating consequence the inconsistency not only psychological, but even logical and physical of the character searching for the address. Is this about a destination, symbolically called Noren [3], or a perpetual search for the self or identity? (my emphasis). „Who are you, who could pass unharmed by so many dangers, to rid me of my curse and of my being as if shaking off some frost and rolling over three times, she turned into a goldfish and disappeared in the moving seaweed...” (p.105); „That is if I really am looking for a street. For, frankly, I doubt it, I was perhaps only looking for the town, though I never heard it being spoken of, I just caught sight of mere glimpses flickering behind the dark, grimy windows and the name inscribed in huge blackened letters in front of the station: Noren, which made me get off the train, naturally of course, recognising it as my destination, without remembering the reason and not being able to stop from watching...” (p.108). The life of a human being, their personal history, is never constituted in an *entity* [7]; on the contrary, everything rather acquires the character of an endless mixture, of a continuous addition of episodes, without all of them assembling and concluding in a unity.

We note that the novel is gradually built from gathered disordered recollections, which „mix up spaces and elude chronologies, by assembling heteroclitic scenarios, unfolding either in reality or in the dream world, in the world of the living and of the dead, in the realm of the verisimilitude and that of the fabulous” [4]. At the same time, from among the multitude of narrative collages, the novel offers us, in the most profound way, an existential vision of what the human condition means. The individual is a piece in a game of chance. Apparently, everything happens randomly, unpredictably; in reality we could say that there are predetermined paths.

„In fact, Virgil Tănase's novel is presented as a long grey monologue, where the same sentences are repeated, variably considered by means of their apparent belonging to some other context. The war scenes, the vague seascapes or scant urbane instances (a too conventional beach, an out of service railway station) are revolving or go up and down as items of a droning on „epic” merry-go-round, at the level of the only soliloquial plan, always making up the context that the proper text is being denied to. What substantiates such a prose is especially, to the borderline, the mastery of the writing of being insignificant and thereby, secretly poetical: the human mystery is replaced by the secrets of obedience,

not as suggestion, but as discretion, not as silence, but as greed" [5].

Virgil Tănase's novel, belongs to a kind of literature invented in the purest and the freest way, a literature in which we discover a world of artistic game, where words are given total freedom, going beyond the „artificial” aspect that the author himself claims. It is worth noting that the novel is subject to the risk of being perceived differently by the same reader, given that *Portrait of a man* ...remains locked away in the symbols' womb. Anytime the reader comes back to this novel, he tends to reclaim it, to change its perspective as he views it differently every time.

The poetic and symbolic play upon words opens everything for interpretation, so that the one who will seize the text message will hit the absurd of an „unintelligible and threatening reality”.

In a society willing to make out precise sense of all things and facts, even trying to impose a meaning by force as it seems obvious, legible „by itself” – and in this respect, we are entitled to talk about „totalitarianism” in the intellectual sense of the word – such a systematic fierceness to deconstruct (because we are talking about another kind of approach to writing) wasn't ever the sign of a radical rebellion?

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