

## UBI SUNT...

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Ubi sunt, a widespread theme in addressing the greatness of former times can be found in sacred books.<sup>1</sup> Taken up by great writers of the Greek-Latin antiquity (Cicero, *Filipice*, VIII, 23; Tibul, II, 3, 27; Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, XIII, 92; Plutarch, *Consolatione ad Apollonium*, 110 D) it was assimilated by universal patrology: Syrian patrology in the 4th century (St Ephrem of Nisibis, *Opera*, III, LI, 308-311; LIV, 316; III, 308-314; cf. III, 316; Baruch, *Libri veteris testamenti apocryphi syriace*, III, 16), Greek Patrology in the the 4-5th centuries (St Cyrill of Alexandria, *Homelia*, XIV, 1071-1090), Latin patrology (St Isidor of Seville, *Synonymorum*, II, 91) as well as early Arabic literature (Abi ben Zaid, Abou Bakr, Ibnal Gauzi, Turtusi and Muslim sermons collected in Togo or Camerun by C.H.Becker<sup>2</sup>).

Saint Bonaventure played an important role in literarising the biblical *Ubi sunt* by enumerating famous persons and moving the stress onto the fragility of women's beauty. Gilson quotes him: "Ubi Salomon sapientissimus? Ubi Alexander potentissimus? Ubi Samson fortissimus? Ubi Absalon speciosissimus? Ubi Assuerus Gloriosissimus? Ubi Caesares potentissimi? etc. (*Soliloquium*, ch. II, 4).<sup>3</sup> However, we observe that the initial enumeration is that of St John (15, 19) and quoted by Accarie<sup>4</sup> ("Ubi Salomon sapientissimus? Ubi Alexander potentissimus? Ubi samos fortissimus? Ubi Absalon speciosissimus? Ubi Caesares potentissimi?"). (We cannot agree with the hypothesis that the vanity of wisdom, power,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah (XXXIII, 18), Baruch (III, 16-19), Paul (the first letter addressed to the Corinthians, I, 19-20). Cf. E. Gilson, *Les Idées et les Lettres*, Paris, Vrin, 1932, p.13

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p.31-34

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p.18

<sup>4</sup> *Le théâtre sacré de la fin du moyen âge*, Genève, Droz, 1979, p.227, note

physical power, glory etc. expresses the equality of people, a concept of society which was unknown to the ancients.)

Acknowledging the irrecoverable disappearance of the golden age, the whole ancient and neo-testamentary meditation on the vanity of vanities accepted human destiny and developed a particular attitude towards time and its effect on man. Later on the *ubi sunt* theme was borrowed from philosophers and preachers and developed in the rich Latin poetry of the French Middle Ages under the direct influence of the biblical source and the mediated one of the famous theologians of that epoch.<sup>5</sup> A religious hymn (13th century, probably) proves the influence of 12th century profane literature: the vanity of talent (Plato, Porphyry, Virgil, Thales, Empedocles, Aristotle), the vanity of glory and wisdom (Alexander, Empedocles, David, Solomon), the vanity of beauty (Paris and Helen).<sup>6</sup>

Bernard de Morlas who also meditates on the “ubi sunt”<sup>7</sup> theme insists on the precariousness of existence, the nothing from which man is created and to which he returns so quickly; beauty, virtue and glory are suddenly reduced to an urn of ashes, the “urna favillae”. Man will be buried, ashes to ashes, dust to dust (“Pasta cibus, cibus es, caro, vermibus, atque putrescis.”) Bernard de Morlas associates the lividness of the dead and its senselessness with lost beauty and virility and the memory of the beloved woman. He writes a melancholic suite of rhetorical questions, scanning the vanity of delicious foods and fine drinks, of beauty used to corrupt beauty and of jewels; he addresses the vanity of the glory of ancestors (“Nunc ubi pocula...”). Flesh becomes the food of worms, man is the image of a dead

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<sup>5</sup> Saint Anselme of Cantorbéry (*Exhortatio ad contemptum temporalium et desiderium aeternum*), Prosper Tiro of Aquitaine (*Sententiarum ex operibus sancti Augustini delibatarum liber*), Pseudo-Augustine (*Sermones ad fratres in eremo*), Geoffroy Babion (*Sermon*), Alain de Lille (*De arte praedicatoria*, ch. 42), Saint Bonaventure (*Soliloquium*, II, 3), Dionysius Carthusianus (*De quattuor hominis novissimis*, I, 13). Cf. Gilson, E., op. cit. p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p.20-21. A variant of this hymn, *Super “Libera me, Domine” Tropus* insists on famous characters of ancient history (revealing first of all the vanity of glory and force) and of mythology (the vanity of beauty); in: *Poésie latine chrétienne du Moyen Age*, op. cit. p. 1380-1383.

<sup>7</sup> In *Poésie latine chrétienne du Moyen Age*, idem, op. cit. p.612-615.

body (“cadaveris es simulacrum”), glory falls prey to the wind and youth disappears with time or death (“Pulchra fugit modo tempore, postmodo morte, iuventus”): this is an implicit urge to fully enjoy life which is so short, it is a new *carpe diem* (its late correspondent is Baudelaire’s *La Charogne*).

Although Jacopone da Todi’s (Iacobus de Benedictis Tudertinus, 1230/36-1306) poem is entitled *De Vanitate Mundi Cantio* it contains the “ubi sunt” theme, memento for everybody; wisdom and splendour, force and beauty, mildness and glory, eloquence and genius, where are all these?

“Dic, ubi Salomon, olim tam nobilis,

Vel ubi Samson est, dux invincibilis

Vel pulcher Absalon, vultu mirabilis

Vel dulcis Ionathas, multum amabilis?...”<sup>8</sup> The “ubi sunt” theme does

not appear frequently in French medieval narrative literature, but sporadically, accompanied by a feeling of vanity. We can find it in Charlemagne’s emotional and rhetorical appeal to the dead (*La Chanson de Roland*): “Où êtes-vous, beau neveu? Où est l’archevêque? Où, le comte Olivier? Où est Gerin? et Gerier, son compagnon? Où est Oton? et le comte Bérengier? Ivon et Ivoire, que je chérissais tant? Qu’est devenu le Gascon Engelier le duc Samson? et le preux Anseis? Où est Gerard de Roussillon, le vieux? Où sont-ils, les douze pairs qu’ici j’avais laissés (...) Pas un ne répond.”<sup>9</sup>

We find it as a simple rhetorical picture, without philosophical or emotional implications, in the *Roman de Thèbes*, when the knight commits himself:

“Où sont les granz chevaleries,

Dont vous vantez a voz amies?

Où sont, seignor, les granz colées,

Dont vos vantez as cheminées?...”<sup>10</sup> Later on, at the beginning of the 15th

century Alain Chartier uses this theme (which is very frequent in poetry) to show, with vague melancholic emphasis, the natural course of things on earth, from the cradle to the grave: “...comme les enfants naiscent et

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 968-971

<sup>9</sup> In *Poètes et Romanciers du Moyen Age*, op. cit. p. 83

<sup>10</sup> *Roman de Thèbes*, op. cit. p. 88

croissent en hommes parfaiz et puis declinent a viellesce et a mort, ainsi ont seigneuries leur commencement, leur accroissement et leur declin. Ou est Ninive, la grant cité qui duroit trois journees de chemin? Qu'est devenue Babillone...?"etc.<sup>11</sup>

Medieval French poetry borrowed the "ubi sunt" theme which was adequate for displaying in a lyrical way the fear of the unknown, the consciousness of the fragility of the human being and its works before the destroying and indifferent time, before death, producing a large span of works; from the *Poeme sur Alexandre* by Albéric de Besançon to the 18th century satirical poems, from the ancient accents of Eustache Deschamps to the brilliance of François Villon.<sup>12</sup>

The author of the poem *Trop par est cist mondes cruaus* (13th century) uses the "ubi sunt" theme to highlight the cruelty of this world; the Jacobites and the Minor Friars left this world and became recluses because they were aware of the eternal transitoriness of everything: "Deus! ou sont ore li loiaus / Qui au pechié vuellent foir? / Li Jacobins en sont de ceaus, / Li Frere Menor sanz mentir. / Il sevent bien qu'il sont mortaus / Et que tuit morront, bons et maus, / Et haus et bas, tout covendra morir: / Por ce vuellent a cest siecle foir". (v.33-40).<sup>13</sup> The feeling it inspires is a calm and calculated resignation, foreign to the idea of *carpe diem*: the vanity of being is evident, but it does not suggest revolt or despair, but a stoical acceptance of reality and death.

Eustache Deschamps has many ballads in which he grieves the fate of man. The illustrious persons he mentions are mainly heroes of the Middle Ages or the Antiquity. As a preserver of Medieval French tradition Deschamps keeps the everlasting memory of the heroes from Roncevaux. When he evokes them with sobriety, he underlines the inevitability of death

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<sup>11</sup> *LeQuadriologue invectif*, Paris, Champion, 1923, p.3

<sup>12</sup> As E. Gilson points out, the theme is presented in world literature (poetry): Italian (Frate Stoppa), English (Thomas de Halles/ ~1200/, John Lydgate/1373-1460) Irish, later in German, Russian, Czech poetry. Op. cit. p.23-38.

<sup>13</sup> In *Chansons satiriques et bachiques du XIIIe siècle*, op. cit. p.17

but suggests only a stoical attitude: “Où est Oliviers et Rolans? / Advise qu’il te faut mourir.” (LXXIX)<sup>14</sup>

Heroism and courage are powerless in front of death: “Prince, où est or Oliviers et Rolans, / Alixandres, Charles li conquerans, / Artus, Cesar, Edouard d’Angleterre? / Ilz sont tous mors et si furent vaillans.” (CCXXX)<sup>15</sup> When they die they cannot take with them the conquered lands, the defeated armies and their virtues. Try to open their graves: you will find nothing more than a handful of earth. Deschamps stoically accepts the transience of human being: “Il sont tous mors; va leur sépulcre ouvrir: / Poudre y verras; tous nous convient pourrir.” (MCLXX)<sup>16</sup> The span of names widens, the famous women of the Bible (Judith, Esther), the antique mythology (Penelope, Dido, Pallas, Juno, Medea, Helen) and Medieval literature (Guenièvre, Yseult) are invoked.<sup>17</sup> Beauty, self-sacrifice and love are not a shield against death; they have also putrefied, in vain do we ask “where are they”.

In other cases Deschamps uses the “ubi sunt” theme as an antipode in a flashing enumeration of values: “Ou est Nembroth le grand jayant, / Qui premiers obtins seigneurie / Sur Babiloine? Ou est Priant, / Hector et toute sa lignie? Achillès et sa compaignie, / Troye, Carthaige et Romulus, / Athene, Alixandre, Remus, / Jullius Cesar et li sien? / Ilz sont tous cendre devenus: / Soufflez, nostre vie n’est rien.” etc.<sup>18</sup>

Jehan Regnier, prisoner in 1432, professes the same belief in the vanity of some heroes of the French Middle Ages (Arthur, Charlemagne), Greek or Latin Antiquity (Hector, Paris, Helen, Vespasian, Cato) or the European Middle Ages (Sallisbury and Boetius had the same destiny). The final pessimism<sup>19</sup> is elicited by the situation in France where sinister personages (Vanity, Envy, Avarice, Pleasure and Fraud) dominate. The poet suggests

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<sup>14</sup> E. Deschamps, *Ouvres complètes*, Paris, Didot, 1878-1903, t.I, p.181

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, t.III, p.34-35

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, t.VI, p.123

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, t.III, CCCLXVIII, p.113

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, t. VIII, p.149-150

<sup>19</sup> *Les Fortunes et Adversitez de Jehan Regnier, Ballade*, in: *Poètes et Romanciers du Moyen Age*, op. cit. p. 1130

humbleness and the bearing in mind that the day will come when everybody has to account for his deeds.

François Villon, the first poet of modern times (as he is often called) was profoundly influenced by the feeling of the ineluctable death which gives rise to feelings full of fear but also to the conscience of vanity. The famous ballads illustrate this: they are wonderful writings throbbing with life, reviving biblical and antique memories. What is the use of superhuman beauty (“plus qu’humaine”), boundless love or wisdom, glory or heroism? “Mais ou sont les neiges d’antan?”<sup>20</sup> Transient values like melting snow. What lesson of humbleness! And a tacit and implicit encouragement for enjoying the gifts of the present. Regrets are useless when time has wrinkled the face, turned the hair white, bent the round shoulders and hollowed the thighs of the beautiful Armourer (“La Belle Heaulmière”).

Used in such an original way the “ubi sunt” theme is not recognised by certain critics in “les neiges d’antan”. They think that Villon accepted death<sup>21</sup> and did not feel the fear which overwhelmed the poet when thinking of the final moment. Neither did they realise his courage as he tried to cheat us and get rid of his fear, showing derision and praying that God forgave his sins. He longs for our pity which is the guarantee of divine pity to calm his anguish (“Excusez nous, puis que sommes transsis, / Envers le fils de la Vierge Marie, / Que sa grâce ne soit pour nous tarie, / Nous preservant de l’infernale foudre.”)<sup>22</sup>

*La Ballade des dames du temps jadis* is part of a triptych (inserted in the *Testament* and meant to reveal the horror and inevitability of death, the vanity of all things) alongside the *Ballade des Seigneurs du temps jadis* and *Ballade en vieil langage franHoys*.

The feeling that The Ballad of Lords from Former Times is a sequel to The Ballad of Ladies from Former Times is confirmed by the transitory and provocative début: “Qui plus ou est le tiers Calixte, / dernier decedé de ce

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<sup>20</sup> *Ballade des dames du temps jadis*, in: *Poètes et Romanciers du Moyen Age*, idem, p.1155-1156: “

<sup>21</sup> “Il n’y a aucune ressemblance entre le *ubi sunt?* originel et *les neiges d’antan*. Et si le poète accepte la mort où tout s’assouvit, c’est en regrettant la vie, sa pauvre vie incomparable.” M.Accarie, op. cit. p.278

<sup>22</sup> In *Poètes et Romanciers du Moyen Age*, idem, p.1221

nom, / qui quatre ans tint le papaliste, / Alphonce, le roy d'Arragon, / Le gracieux duc de Bourbon, / Et Artus le duc de Bretagne; / Et Charles septiesme le bon? / Mais ou est le preux Charlemaigne?"...<sup>23</sup>

Leo Spitzer considers it a parody lacking poetic qualities, prosaic because of the repetitions, monotonous and pedantic like death itself, the horror of which it preaches with verbal virtuosity.<sup>24</sup> It is in fact an *anti-ballad* (as J. Dufournet states) on account of its tone - prosaic, parodic, ironic and its content - famous heroes from literature transposed into actuality or heroes as victims of horrible or vulgar death, demystification and mockery.

This identification with death (the absence of poetry and phantasy) is counterpointed by establishing a safe distance between death and the mortal man in *Ballade en vieil langage françoys*. The fate of man is generalised by the refrain: "Autant en emporte ly vens" ("Yet everybody is swept away by the wind").

Nothing is tantamount to the deep sadness suggested by the unforgettable memory of the young gallants, masters of speech and unrivalled in singing and full of good manners. Villon was attracted to them and followed their manners. They passed away just as everything does - dust to dust. These lines have the same effect on us as they had on the most hardhearted men at the end of the 15th century: "Ou sont les gracieux gallans / Que je suivoye ou temps jadis, / Si bien chantans, si bien parlans, / Si plaisans en faiz et en dis?"<sup>25</sup> The evident and deeply sensed answer contains the implicit regret for a lost youth spent unthinkingly.

Similarly, Lazarus speaks about the disappearance of youth and all its virtues (force, power, honour, mundane happiness) in *Passion d'Arras* by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p.1156

<sup>24</sup> "Et le critique de dénoncer la force massive du refrain sans aucune évocation ni rêverie, une énumération de noms sans gradation ni ordre, ni relief historique, le pédantisme d'un écolâtre balourd (...), la virtuosité verbale sans musicalité des rimes en -iste (...), la plate et pesante déclaration à la manière d'un prédicant médiéval (...), en sorte que l'on est en droit de se demander si Villon a voulu se parodier lui-même dans cette seconde poésie en détruisant l'incantation...", in: J. Dufournet, *Nouvelles recherches sur Villon*, op. cit. p.30

<sup>25</sup> In *Poètes et Romanciers du Moyen Age*, op. cit. p.1152

Eustache Marcadé: "Las! ou est ma belle jonesse / En laquelle me confioie, / Force, pooir, honneur, haultesse / qu'a mon vouloir je possessoie? / Las!ou est ma mondaine joie / Dont j'estoie du tout remplis?"<sup>26</sup>

The regret for lost youth as well as the regret for the disappearance of so many famous people suggests the feeling of vanity: vanitas, vanitatum, omnia vanitas...

Gilson who followed the dispersal of the "ubi sunt" theme in universal literature did not deal with old and classical Romanian literature which contains some interesting variants. It is not accidental that it was the chroniclers who were mostly attracted by the rhetorics of the theme in question, because they had a humanist education. In *Învățătură către fiul său Teodosie (Advises to His Son Theodosius)* (1654) Neagoe Basarab seems to be completely aware of the caducity of everything that exists and of beauty first of all. He writes a dialogue in which the obsessive question ("where is?", "where are?") is echoed by monotonous answers containing various synonyms of "to die": "Where is the beauty of the face? It has grown black. Where is the redness of the face and lips? They have withered. Where is the glance of the eyes? It has melted. Where is the beautiful and combed hair? It has fallen. Where are the neat necks? They have broken. Where is the quick tongue? It is silent. Where are those beautiful, white hands? They have crumbled to dust. Where are the precious clothes? They have been lost..."<sup>27</sup>

The *Divanul înțeleptului cu Lumea (The Divan of the Wise with the World)* by D. Cantemir is also written in the form of dialogue; the famous persons evoked are relevant from the point of view of the education of the author, of a Byzantine and antique influence: "Where is Kyros and Krisors? Where is Xerxes and Artaxerxis...?" (...) Where is Alexander the Great of Macedonia..."<sup>28</sup> or where is Constantin, Justinian, Diocletian, Maximian, Julianus, Theodosius the Great and Theodosius the Little, Leon Sofos, Romulus, Augustus... *Lumea (The World)* answers him with mild sarcasm that all have passed away, they are in a grave, covered by a cloth; they are poor like newborns.

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<sup>26</sup> M. Accarie, op. cit. p.282

<sup>27</sup> București, Tipografia Colegiului Sf. Sava, 1843, p.138

<sup>28</sup> D. Cantemir, *Divanul înțeleptului cu Lumea*, București, EPL, 1969, p.53-55



Miron Costin also writes about famous kings defeated by time in his *Viața lumii (The Way of the World)*: “Where are the kings of the world, where is Xerxes, / Alexander the Great and Artaxers, / August, Pompeius and Caesar? / All of them have died like foam.”<sup>29</sup> The image of the foam of the waves is shocking, it reveals how sudden and inevitable death is.

19th century poets who had an inclination towards melancholy, meditation and sadness, were sensible to the vanity of the world. Ioan Catină (1828-1851)<sup>30</sup> laughs sarcastically at the thought of the vanity of glory and fame of the titans of world literature: “Ha, ha, ha,ha! Another name!... Another vanity! / Homer, Dante, Byron, Hugo! a song in vain, / a grave among graves, a sarcasm in feasts!” C.D.Aricescu (1823-1886) is amazed at the thought of forgetting empires, peoples, heroes. Only their names remain which does not mean anything to some people: “Where is Rome, where is Athens? / Where is Palmira, where Carthage? / Where is Tyros, where is Sidon? / Where is Ecbatan and where Babylon? / Where are Caesar and Napoleon? / Where is Brutus, where Cato? / Where is Plato, where Socrates? / Where is Epaminonda and Hyppocrates?”<sup>31</sup> The glory of famous cities is preserved only by their ruins or the unknown place where they stood. The famous persons have died and their names remain full of significance. This strange enumeration is meant to suggest the fragility of the human being as compared to crude matter even if this was not the author’s intention or he was unconscious of it.

The same awareness of death inspires the scenery in *La băile Cleopatrei (At Cleopatra’s Spa)* by D.Bolintineanu: “But where is the beauty whose sweet rays / Enchanted August / That he did not dare to see me / For fear not to be charmed? / And where is my power, my pompous fortune / And my humble servants? / And you, gentle, gracious hearts, / My beautiful lovers? / Ah! All these goods sparkled in the morning / with a wonderful charm; / But the sad veil of death / Covered everything at sunset.”<sup>32</sup> In the last moments of her life Cleopatra sees with her mind’s eye her short,

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<sup>29</sup> Miron Costin, *Opere alese*, București, Edit. Științifică, 1967, p.165

<sup>30</sup> In G.Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române. Compendiu*, op. cit. p.104

<sup>31</sup> C.D. Aricescu, *Arpa română*, București, Tipografia Sfintei Mitropolii, 1852, p.24-25

<sup>32</sup> D. Bolintineanu, *Poezii*, București, Minerva, 1977, p.30

tumultuous life, spent as a day is spent and followed by night. She asks rhetorically where is all that made up her glory: beauty, power, richness, the humble servants, the lovers... Life is short and just as every day, it has a radiant morning followed inevitably by a sunset veiled by fog. Like the French romanticists Bolintineanu states that “man and his deeds pass away quickly” whereas nature (“young forever”) does not feel the passing of time and destruction; it regenerates itself miraculously: “What happened to the millions of people, / those generations who lived in this world? / Slaves and kings, they all lived for only a minute, / They were born only to become dust! / ... / Oh! All of them have died! Power, life and fame / Were also forgotten! / The black, forgotten graves are all that / These nations left in the world.”<sup>33</sup>

Alexandru Vlahuță rebels against the young generation of poets, the “sad poets who cry and sing imagined sorrows”, cowards and without elevated feelings, being so far from the image of the real artist. He asks with amazement: “Where are our enthusiastic dreamers and troubadours / To sing us the splendours of nature and the meaning of the world? / Where are the masters of generous words, / Magi protected by stars, forerunners, To bury old sufferings and to fill our hearts with love and joy / For our hopes are crushed and our laws are repealed / Where is their prophetic word / To tear the waves of darkness And lead us towards a new world.”<sup>34</sup> The “ubi sunt” theme serves as a starting point for drawing up the portrait of the genial artist and the ideal expressed by his work, an absence which, surprisingly, denies the presence: the dreamer who disappeared forever is a term of comparison for the unhappy present (“Who are these phantoms with gloomy eyes, / Sad poets...”); it sets up an incontestable system of values.

The romantic theme of the ruins is a starting point for a series of rhetorical questions on decayed values: “temples, elephants, Egyptian colossi, / Subterranean pagodas, Indian pagodas” raise many questions: “And tell me, where is the man who built them once? / Look at Memphis,

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<sup>33</sup> *Edessa*, ibidem, p.157

<sup>34</sup> *Unde ni sunt visătorii?...*, in: *Poezii*, București, EPL, 1968, p.149

Ephes, Babylon, / The gigantic fortresses in the Indies and Asia, / Whoever built them has long disappeared!”<sup>35</sup>

Lofty ideals have disappeared with the heroes who embodied them; negation takes the place of interrogation to express even more firmly the vanity of life: “The antique fury of Achilles is no more, / The mildly speaking Nestor is no more. / The ardent Ajax / Is dust and nothing more.” Eminescu returns to the traditional theme: “And where is Rome, mother of the world, / And where are the old and great Caesars? / Yellow Tigris, / Where is your majesty?”<sup>36</sup>

The classical use of the theme with the enumeration of the famous persons acquires an original interpretation in the play *Apus de soare* (*Sunset*) by Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea. The global enumeration (forefathers, parents) is followed by a detailed enumeration of the places where those heroes lived, along with a series of interesting historical resonances. These heroes were brave in their lives; they made Moldova victorious and were great in their deaths too. They bore their country on their Atlas-shoulders. A country with such heroes cannot perish: “Oh, young forest! Where are your forefathers? Scattered at Orbic, Chilia, Baia, Lipnic, Soci, Teleajen, Racova, Râzboieni... Where are your parents? At Cetatea-Albă, Cătlăbuci, Scheia, Cosmin, Lențești... Where is... the old Manuil and Goian, Stibor, Cânde, Dobrul, Iuga, Gangur, Gotcă, Mihai the sword bearer, Ilea Huru the stableman, Dajbog the turnkey, Oană, Gherman and the valiant Boldur? ... Dust!... And the earth of Moldova is in their bones as on the shoulders of giants...”<sup>37</sup>

Al.A. Philippide is closer to our modern consciousness. He longs “to steal the scythe of Time to get rid of death”. He longs for time measured by centuries (“not by years”) and looks for the “blue dreams”, the ideals (no more alive in the hearts of his contemporaries) in the miraculous horizons of the past. He wants to go back in time which he considers an emotional and elevating journey. He wants to escape from the world where “indolent

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<sup>35</sup> Cezar Boliac, *Cugetare*, in: *Opere*, București, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1956, p.114-115

<sup>36</sup> Mihai Eminescu, *În van căta-vreți...*, in: *Opere*, București, EPL, 1963, p.522-523

<sup>37</sup> București, Univers și Teatrul Național I.L. Caragiale, 1974, p.52

trumpets roar” offending the intimacy of the poet’s heart: “In the square of our feelings / Indolent trumpets roar / But where are the blue dreams / Old cellos which sang in our hearts?”<sup>38</sup>

Călinescu writes in an ironic mode, putting meditative-philosophical words in his character’s mouth, Herod, who is a lonely thinker and speaks about the vanity of being. This is eased by the short verse and the ridiculous images. Călinescu appeals to biblical tradition (in concordance with the character) which is denied by the chronological interference (the presence of some characters in contrast with any historical logic) and ridiculed by the direct appeal to heroes who have long disappeared: “Where are you, Aristotle, / Great astronomer / Where are you, Solomon, / Who reigned in Babylon? / Where is king Bonaparte, / The learned and clever, / Who died fighting with Achilles? / These misfortunes confuse my chronology.”<sup>39</sup>

The uniqueness of the lost moment is in harmony with the fallen leaves, the passing clouds, the river with its frozen surface. Love and suffering have disappeared: “where are the eyes once so dear as light? / The shadow of delicate eyelashes? It’s gone. / Where is the man I used to be? / Voice and soul have all gone.”<sup>40</sup> Ulysses’ return is impossible, “the waves whisper about oblivion”: “But where is Ulysses who was once so dear to you? And where is Troy, which dominates the seas?”<sup>41</sup> Nothing but the passing away... “Past snows fell tonight / Called by a famous verse.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Visuri în vuietul vremii*, București, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă “Regele Carol II”, 1939, p.7

<sup>39</sup> G. Călinescu, *Teatru*, București, EPL, 1965, p.213

<sup>40</sup> I. Pillat, *S-au pierdut*, in: *Poezii*, București, EPL, 1967, t.II, p.62

<sup>41</sup> *Cicladele*, ibidem, p.118

<sup>42</sup> R. Boureanu, *Doliul zăpezilor*, in: *Inimă desenată*, București, EPL, 1964, p.51-51. Voiculescu’s homage to Villon is also exciting: *Villon* - (“*Mais où sont les neiges*”...), in: *Poezii*, București, EPL, 1968, p. 148-149