

**History Revived by Language
A. T. Laurian's Romanticist Meta-History**

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Abstract

The present article discusses the problem of language in the historical works of August Treboniu Laurian, an important man of culture and a revolutionary from the middle of the 19th century. The paper analyses the stylistic elements, contextualizing the presence and conformation of these indicators, often varying from one work to the other. The paper discusses elements of spelling, vocabulary, and historical terminology, which is Laurian's case take on a Latinist form, standing as evidence for his purist conviction appearing in most of his works. Moreover, these aspects are also treated from the perspective of their contribution to the historiographic expression of the 19th century. A major point of the article is the attempt to place the structure of Laurian's work in Hayden White's famous scheme for 19th century historians (presented in his *Metahistory*), in which the consideration and relating of a historical construction follows the direction of formal argument, structure, ideological implication, and basic stylistic devices.

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A. T. Laurian (1810-1881), a mentor of the last generation of Latinists, promoter of the idea of a language with an educational and national value, and responsible for a set of famous exaggerations of a Latinist nature, was also a teacher at the "Sfântul Sava" National College, co-editor of Nicolae Bălcescu of the *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia* (A historical magazine for Dacia), leader of the 1848 Revolution, inspector of Moldavian schools, tutor/administrator of schools, first Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, secretary and president of the Romanian Academic Society and director

of the Academy Library,¹ as well as the Romanian language teacher of Prince Carol I.² His work was partly addressed to a wide audience as regards his more or less famous works of history, philology and geography, and partly to schoolchildren, as he was also a known author of school manuals. On the other hand, his work long been subordinated for a long time to a set of attributes: exaggerations, oversized Latinism, historical and linguistic utopia. In a modern exegesis,³ Laurian can be included into a radical Kantian trend, but, similarly to Simion Bărnuțiu, without accepting Kantian subjectivism; the Transylvanian professor and revolutionary does not emerge as the creator of a new conception, but by his attempt to strengthen the foundations of old theses with the help of relatively new historical disciplines and original material, studying for example the historical geography of Dacia and ancient inscriptions. The *Magazinul istoric pentru Dacia* (A historical magazine for Dacia), considered to be the first great Romanian historical source publication, has an outstanding importance for Laurian's enterprises, offering him the chance to prove his interest in sources and source publication, becoming thus the founder of Romanian epigraphy for ancient sources.

Laurian's place within Romanticist historiography has not yet been coherently defined. His role needs to be better reconstructed especially in connection to the beginnings of epistemology and methodology, on which aspects I have focused on other occasions.⁴

¹ The most important work dedicated to Laurian's life and work treating all these aspects: Ilie Popescu Teiușan, Vasile Netea, *August Treboniu Laurian*, București: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, 1970. For further readings, see Victor Tudor Roșu, „August Treboniu Laurian: traseele unei exegeze” (August Treboniu Laurian: ranges of an exegesis), in *Patrimonium Apulense*, VII, 2007.

² “Autobiography” (manuscript edited by Grigore Traian Pop), in *Ramuri* 7 (205), 1981: 16; see also the *Memoirs of King Carol I of Romania (by an eye witness)*. Edited and preface by Stelian Neagoe, vol. I., Bucharest: Scripta, 1992, p. 73; vol. II, 1993: p. 127.

³ See George Em. Marica, Iosif Hajós, Călina Mare, Constantin Rusu, *Ideologia generației române de la 1848 din Transilvania* (The ideology of the Romanian generation of the 1848 Revolution in Transylvania), București: Ed. Politică, 1968, passim.

⁴ See Victor-Tudor Roșu, „Conceptie și metodă istorică la A. T. Laurian. Episodul *Magazinului istoric pentru Dacia*” (Concept and historical method at A. T. Laurian. The episode of the *Historical magazine for Dacia*), in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, 9/1, 2005, pp. 65-82; Idem, „A. T. Laurian – exponent al editării izvoarelor istorice la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea” (A. T. Laurian – leader in the publication of historical sources in the middle of

Evidently influenced by the *Transylvanian School* (a Romanian intellectual movement of the late 18th- early 19th century), his work incorporates a rational element, as it is constructed in a multi-faceted manner, yet based on the intersection of philology and history. The principles he always followed, similarly to most of his contemporaries, such as Florian Aaron, Timotei Cipariu, Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, Ioan Maiorescu, Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian, etc., yet more indebted, in his case than in others', to Latinism and its ideology, did not change in time: cultural, ethnic, political and social regeneration of the Romanians, and profound identification with the evolutions and aspirations of Romanian society. At the same time, Laurian was also a product of modernity, which was to bring about the professionalization of the sciences and epistemological accumulations, and also obliged one to open an eye to foreign achievements, those of the West in particular. This closing-in was continuously done however in relation to the promoting of one's own merchandise, essential for nationalist ideology. Without further details, let us only mention Laurian's replica after he and his works had been mentioned in a Western periodical: "A small thing makes strangers remember us, a greater one would make them remember even more often. If the world forgets us, it is only our fault".¹ In concordance with the concerns of the age about the "democratization" of history, Laurian is preoccupied by the spreading of historical knowledge, making this one of his ultimate undertakings, in order for this type of knowledge and the values it determines to be accessible for the largest possible strata of the population. His initiatives in publishing the documents of the revolution in the *Magazinul istoric pentru Dacia*, or in his school manuals, display a specifically Romanticist writing and his "investment" in the past and the production of historical consciousness. In this direction, historical knowledge implies a prospective image, of a future built upon the values of the past, offering for the nation the background necessary for existence and development.

In what follows, let us focus on the element of language in Laurian's works, as the main object of this paper. In general, Laurian's use of language in his historical or linguistic works has mainly been

the 19th century), in *Acta Musei Brukenthal*, II, 1, 2007, pp. 264-286; Idem, „Concepte europene moderne în opera istorică a lui A. T. Laurian” (Modern European concepts in A. T. Laurian's historical works), in *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Historia*, Târgu Mureș, 7, 2007, pp. 49-72.

¹ A. T. Laurian, „Europa. Cronica lumii cultivate” (Europe. Chronicle of the cultivated world), in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, V, 1847-1848, p. 386-387.

viewed according to Nicolae Iorga's formulation, who saw the work of the revolutionary scholar as "an absurd linguistic fantasy",¹ "twisted words that nobody has ever said before", or charged him with "concise and dry exposition [...] without any poetical flexibility".² This is due to the conformation of Laurian's historiographic studies and articles, which are first and foremost characterized by accuracy and scientific attitude, proving the scholar's erudition. The precision of the information, the rigour and power of investigation are further features of Laurian's historiographic works. Concerned with the adequate rendering of the document, he was less prone to narrative extensions, which had probably attracted Iorga's reproaches. This concentration on the exposition of the naked facts, avoiding any commentary or interpretation, reminds of Leopold von Ranke and his rendering of the facts "as they were", being convinced that documents speak for themselves. Al. Papiu-Ilarian takes on the same attitude; nonetheless, it appears to a lesser degree in the case of Mihail Kogălniceanu, of whom it is said to have borrowed his historiographic stand from Ranke. Thus, for Laurian the source is the priority, of which, when required, he observes the plurality and the many ways it can be put to use, because any historical document "[...] besides its geographical interest also presents other kinds of scientific, or even legal interests".³ His relating to his source also largely determines his style, which is economical, analytic, and problematised. The metaphor appears thus to a lesser extent, consequently Laurian's works published, for instance, in the *Magazinul istoric pentru Dacia* do not enjoy the same favourable judgment than Nicoale Bălcescu's, although they are at least equally important for Romanian historiography. However, again in Iorga's words, "a historical work has four elements: matter, criticism,

¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Oameni cari au fost* (People who were), Vălenii de Munte: Neamul Românesc, 1911, p. 9-13. (The chapter "Un utopist: August Treboniu Laurian" (A utopist: August Treboniu Laurian).)

² Idem, *Istoria literaturii românești în veacul al XIX-lea* (The history of Romanian literature in the 19th century) vol. II, edited by Rodica Rotaru, București: Minerva, 1983, p. 144.

³ A. T. Laurian, "Discurs introductiv în istoria românilor" (An introductory discourse to the history of the Romanians), in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, I, 1845, p. 23.

organization, style. The first two determine its solidity and truth, the others its beauty.”¹ Therefore style is essential.

“We were waiting for it in the wooden café near the harbour, which was full of half naked Turks who drank their coffee and smoked their cigars. In their midst we saw a venerable old man clothed in white (although quite dirty) wearing a special turban and a long beard. [...] He was sitting on a sofa and smoked his cigar [...] he ordered the servants at once to bring us cigars and coffee. It was said and done. A Serbian who spoke an acceptable German served us as interpreter. [...] The European Padishahs can finally see for themselves that wars only bring about destruction everywhere [...] therefore they seek to solve their problems in the noiseless diplomatic way. [...] As we stepped in the house, he rose his head a little, and if he saw we were only insignificant *giaours*, he put his head back on his wooden pillow.”² Some researchers used this passage in an attempt to disprove Laurian’s “fanatism” in his language conception since it contained such a large number of words that he later excluded from his *Dicționarul limbii române* (Dictionary of the Romanian Language). Notwithstanding the fact that this passage seems rather to induce the idea of such a bigotry, it is highly relevant from a different perspective. Laurian makes use of words of a Turkish etymology in order to describe a site inhabited by Turks. The Serbian fellow in the same site serves as a “*tălmaci*” (interpreter), a word of Slavic origin. “European Padishahs finally see [...]”, with reference to the sovereigns of Europe, are Laurian’s words addressed to a Turk, and an exercise of empathy. “Insignificant *giaours*” (infidels) are only there in a Turk’s mind. The tableau rather depicts thus the author’s literary skills. Similarly, Laurian does not refuse the ability of foreign terms to express foreign reality, as best illustrated by the above fragment.

However, when he speaks about the Romanians, he employs terms of Latin origin such as: “*putinte*” (power) and “*potestate*” (domination), “*timpuri fatale*” (fatal times), “*lăcuiitori pacifici*” (peaceful inhabitants), “*împoporare*” (populate), “*îl cură cu toată diligența*” (cured with all diligence), the Dacians are “*amatori de libertate*” (amateurs

¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Generalități cu privire la studiile istorice* (Generalities regarding historical studies), București, 1944, p. 41.

² A. T. Laurian, “Istriana (sau descrierea anticităților din pregiurul Dunării descoperite într-o călătorie din vara 1845)” (Istriana (or the description of antiquities along the Danube discovered in a journey in the summer in 1845)), in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, II, 1846, p. 116-118.

(lovers) of freedom), then of “iușitate” (rapidity), “poplate” (populated), “ginți circumvecine” (neighbouring peoples), “baptezare” (Baptism), “plațiile publice” (public spaces), “gesticulăciuni” (gesticulations), “afectătură” (affectation), “debilitate” (debility), “fercitate” (ferocity), “liberare de opresiuni” (liberation from oppression), “refutare” (refuting), “caresă” (smile), “morbitate” (morbidity), “limbă coruptă” (corrupted language), “vicisitudine” (vicissitude), “despotism arbitrar” (arbitrary despotism), “cerbicos” (stubborn), “mijlocul adversităților” (middle of adversities), “tormentele cele mai înfricoșate sau orribile” (the most frightening or horrible torments), “misericordie” (mercy), “perplexitate” (perplexity), speaking about those who “protecează libertatea universală” (protect universal freedom) or about others who are “insuperbiți de succese” (contemptuous with success), “malcontenți” (unsatisfied), but also about “adversari cerbicoși” (stubborn adversaries), or religion which „se propagă” (is propagated), “tierrani” (peasants), “republicani industrioși” (industrious republicans), or of “formos” (beauty), “constanță” (constancy), “letargie” (lethargy), “rumoare” (rumour), “torrente” (torrent), actions which “cășunează [...] tumult” (cause [...] tumult), “iertare plenară” (complete forgiveness), etc. Laurian explained this mass of neologisms of Latin provenance in a different place, but in the same period: “But every Romanian who tried to make a step in science had to feel the poverty we must face both with regard to ideas and the words which express these ideas. Hence the necessity to form a new word for each new idea [...] Therefore I was forced to introduce neologisms in the Romanian language [...]. But in their formation I guarded with great care the nature of the Romanian language, and I dared not follow in any place my caprices or unfounded delights.”¹

Especially following the complete adoption of Latin letters, Laurian’s choice is an etymological orthography, as initiated in his *Tentamen criticum*. This would offer an archaic stage of the Romanian language, and presuppose the reader’s effort of decoding the orthographical sign. The codification is based on the method of the “reconstruction of prototypes”, with Laurian pioneering in its

¹ A. Delavigne, *Manual de filozofie lucrat după programa Universității de la Paris din 1840*, (Manual of philosophy elaborated by the programme of the University of Paris from 1840), translated by A. Treb. Laurian, București, 1846, p. 8-9.

application.¹ From an orthographic point of view, however, the historical works published in the *Magazin* lack the accuracy of the *Tentamen* or later works, a situation explained by alphabetic transition interfering with the publication of the periodical, imposing again attempts rather than solutions. For instance, the word *țărani* ‘peasants’ takes on a complete set of graphic appearances throughout the five volumes of the magazine, from *ұрпани* to *țărani*, *țărrani*, *țerrani*, *tierrani* etc. Several forms appear even in the course of one single volume. Nevertheless, applying Laurian’s principles of orthoepy, or at least the rules of transition formulated in the magazine, the pronunciation remains the same: “țărani”. As I have mentioned in Chapter II., the *Magazinul istoric pentru Dacia*, during Laurian’s being its editor-in-chief, also represented a model of alphabetic transition. Apart from other publications, the transition from Cyrillic letters happened fast here, in merely two years, perhaps even faster than the editors had originally expected when proposing a moderate transfer. (In the case of other periodicals there was no transition period whatsoever, and the transfer happened abruptly). From volume to volume and from number to number the modifications grow ampler and the Latin letters become predominant. This situation is justified by the editors also pragmatically, as in the next few lines: “Because of the disturbing appearance of certain letters, and because they are two easily mixed up with others, it is changed: b for Б, f for ф, k for к, l for Л, r for р, ț for и, g for у”.² Beginning with page 179 of volume IV (no. 3), Latin characters completely dislocate Cyrillic ones; this radical change, motivated by the same explanations, meant the introduction of the last Latin letters: *â, ă, v, p, r, h, „ge, gi”, „ga, go, gu”, „ghe, ghi”, „ce, ci”, „ca, co, cu”, „che, chi”, „sce, sci” (șt), si (și), ti (ți)*. It was probably also Laurian’s initiative to adopt Latin letters in the review *Universul*, where he also collaborated in the first months of 1848.³

¹ A. T. Laurian, *Tentamen criticum in originem, derivationem et formam linguae romanae in utraque Dacia vigentis vulgo Valachicae*. New edition, with introduction and notes by Katalin Dumitrașcu, translated by Katalin and Emil Dumitrașcu, Craiova: Universitaria, 2002, p. 11-24.

² *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, III, 2, 1846, second cover.

³ Ioan Chindriș, “Publicistica științifică a lui August Treboniu Laurian” (August Treboniu Laurian’s scientific journalism), in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie*, Cluj-Napoca, XXII, 1979, p. 186-187.

It is not only neo-Latin neologisms and orthography that predominate in Laurian's works, but also, to some degree, archaic formulations. For instance, he constantly uses the plural of the relative pronoun "carii", employs the demonstratives in formulas such as: "urmele edifițelor celor vechi" (traces of the old buildings), "datele cele ordinare ale cartelor" (the data of the order of books), "ochilor celor mari și roșii" (to the big red eyes), "pretensiunile cele drepte și nedrepte" (just and unjust pretensions), "intervalul cel turburos" (the troubled period); and there are expressions like: "cu mai de amăruntul" (with more detail), "dice" (why), "pintre" (among), "pre" (on), "pumnariul" (the dagger), "a rumpe" (to tear), "să păț rău" (to feel sorry), "mumă" (mother), "otără" (anger) etc.

Laurian complains in a letter to Bariț of the "grammatical mistakes" of the inhabitants of Blaj and the Moldavians, yielding examples for the disaccord of possessive determiners: "«This horse is my», «These horses are the lord's», «These letters are the priest's». Romanians from here cannot stand these sentences. They say: «This horse is mine», «These horses are the lord's», and «These letters are the priest's». And rightfully so. Of these, forgive me for confessing it, you do not pay enough attention yourself: sometimes you have it right, sometimes wrong, in the Blaj way".¹ Notwithstanding all this, Laurian also exhibits a series of grammatical mistakes, especially in the agreement of verbs and possessives: "aceste scrieri era scrise în limba română" (these writings was written in Romanian), "se afla numai tractate" (there was only treatises), they "has", "aceștia punea" (they puts), "turcii vorbea" (the Turks speaks), Romanians "își avea ținuturile lor proprii" (has their own territories), "locuitorii făcea" (the inhabitants does), "românii era" (the Romanians was), Spain, Italy and Gaul "n-a păstrat" (does not keep), they "unindu-și sie" (uniting itselfs), the foreigners "se vor rușina de barbaria sa" (shall be ashamed of his barbarism), etc.

In the *Istriana*, as it is a work centred on the description of a journey, Laurian uses a less rigorous tone, which influences the tenses of verbs, imposing the use of simple perfect (a kind of present perfect simple tense) all over the description: "eu mă folosii", „eu visitai”, „eu vruî”, „trebui să las”, „n-avurăm”, „se făcu”, „mersăram”,

¹ *George Bariț și contemporanii săi* (George Bariț and his contemporaries), vol. I, edited by Ștefan Pascu, Iosif Pervain, Ioan Chindriș and Titus Moraru, București: Minerva, 1973, p. 127-128.

„purceserăm”.¹ The excessive use of the first person personal pronoun (I and we) as a subject appears in this same work and, to a lesser degree, in other works as well, even if its use in the preceding sentences would not make its repetition necessary; this impedes the fluency of the description, causing a somewhat erratic expression.

Figurative ways of expression. Evidently, Laurian's rigorous style has its effects over the number of epithets used, diminishing it. Although an adept of a scholarly approach, the author does not eliminate still the metaphorical value of the text. One reason of the relative absence of figures of speech may be that the historian does not expose, but demonstrates instead. The ideas are not listed in order to reconstruct only certain moments of the past, but to emphasize a line of development extended in the cause represented and fought for by the author. However, the frequent use of exclamation and interrogation marks (usually with a rhetorical function: “Where is Macedonia and where our Danube?”) indicates the historian's personal involvement with his subject.

On this occasion also, the *Istriana* displays specific figures, warmer in its descriptions and impregnated here and there by a sense of humour conceived as a familiarization or complicity between the author and the reader, as previously shown: “In front of the door of the altar [...] a large, overturned marble stone [...] which I naturally couldn't read because the people didn't want to break the floor of the church just to satisfy my curiosity”; “The Pasha's gesticulations were worth noting, with his big and red staring eyes, and even more his yawning and showing his rare, and one and a half fingers long teeth with which he approved of our sayings repeating several times *Pekei, Pekei*”; or “[...] we could hardly make the French and German language teacher to answer Yes or No in these languages for some easy questions that we had asked him”. The work contains yet other constructions which may seem surprising for Laurian's style, of which I will present a tableau built upon a double antithesis: “We entered this castle famous in History with utmost curiosity, hoping that we might see the brave old *Asimuntini* who had given such a memorable lesson to Attila's Huns in a time when the entire Byzantine Empire was trembling in front of these barbarians. But we saw nothing but some weak Turks who fought with the greatest want and dirt without feeling it enough [...] but our melancholic tenseness

¹ Approximately, in respective order: I have used, I have visited, I have wanted, I have had to leave, we have not had, it has been made, we have gone, we have purchased.

began to change a bit when we saw a multitude of very well dressed peasants around us”.

Among the most sophisticated figures of speech seen in Laurian's works, some stand out: personification – “when the capricious [river] Jiu will remember to turn right again and mock the most religious deed of human hands”, the river “flows as it pleases”; simple comparison – “soldiers ruled by fury and fanaticism, looking for danger and battle as lions and tigers”, “they tore each other up like tigers”; and comparison (or epithet – “a Herculean thing”) with reference to ancient history or mythology – Decebalus is the “second Hannibal”, “when they hear something about us they here through the ears of King Midas”; the metaphor – “the religious zeal was rather only a mantle he used to cover up his political ambitions with”, “the corroding teeth of time”; double epithet – “a weeping and confronting letter”.

In matter of tropes there is a rupture in Laurian's works between the introductory and conclusive parts on the one hand, and the exposition on the other. The contained part of the works is dominated by stereotypical epithets or appreciative adjectives: “supernatural blast”, “terrible army”, “restless diligence”, “a caressed state”, “the famous conqueror”, “a man with an unutterably large soul”, “a large and extremely strong castle”, the Danube is “a wonderful river”, roman Dacia was one of the “most beautiful provinces of the great Roman Empire”. These have a reductive, metonymical value, exactly as classical metonymy frequently present at Laurian: “ferocious men”, “the ferocious Decebalus”, “they matched their weapons”, “they grabbed their weapons again”, “prays gained by weapons”, “to confiscate by the power of weapons”, “they rose with the army”, “uprising of peasants”, the invasions “flooded Dacia”, “the Pannonian fields were flooded with Roman blood”, “legions of locusts”, “they left it for Gladiu's seed”, “the Hunniade did everything that courage and a man's arm is capable of”, “an army of horsemen turned their back on them”, “Buda was given to the flames”, “deprival of rights”, etc.

On the other hand, in the extremities of the works (and partially also of the divisions of the works) Laurian clearly intends a comprehensive, synthetic approach, perceivable also by the figurative style of an integrative value that he applies. Some of these formulae are the eternal present or sententious expressions – “Romanians! All good things for you come from the Empire, all the bad things from your despotic fellow-inhabitants!”, “the history of the Romanians especially is a tragedy”, etc. However, the predominant figure is the synecdoche, in

the widest sense of the word: “to enjoy the fruits of a pacifist government”, “when they look at us, they look through the eyeglasses which our neighbours place on their noses”, “the revolted nature in the bosom of the oppressed”, “Dacia was sighing all over under the Turkish yoke”, “[...] they threw the yoke on their neck”, “but in the continuing time experienced people new how to draw all the fire to their pot”, “the noiseless way of diplomacy”.

Translated by Emese G. Czintos