

***Home, the Place of Life
(Fragments)***

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When you think of your parents, the *together* you always believed eternal, the past, gradually fragmented to ruminated moments, brightens your responsibilities as a survivor and make the break both endurable and enduring – easier to bear, but also resistant to tie as a cicatrix. As a snail shell. The witness of a pain which left you more vulnerable and stronger in an equal measure. More vulnerable to the rumours of death – a thing to be wondered at, for me, since the acceptance of death as a part of life is the best way towards a lucid, human living of the time of the world –, but also more indifferent to the trifles and caprices of the life-in-the-world. More definitely protected. The graves of the loved ones are a kind of roots: they fix you in *passing*.

Places have huge significance for me. The house, the garden, the school, the library, the parents themselves are *places* in function of which I grew up, and through which I define myself. Dwelling means for me, as the past years multiply, not only the warm house with the parents' gentle protection around me, but also a tree with shade and rustle, and hills that can be seen everywhere I turn my glance to. Being from Transylvania, having my roots in Maramureș and Sibiu, *at us* and *at home* means for me places encircled by woods and hills. They do not stop/hinder the eye, they are a support for it, reference points which help it to dream, in peace, of the distance. Smooth plains with the horizon lost in the mist of distance make me shiver. As soon as the train/the car descends from the mountains and comes near Ploiești, let's say, a childish wish fills me to return quickly *home*, to place myself back to shelter.

Memory, as the dream, puts into parentheses, suspends, defers present reality. Memory is always someone else's word. Re-living is interpretation, therefore the living otherwise, from another perspective, of a founding event. "If you remember who you are, that means, you are somebody" (Augustine). Being *somebody* means being *another*, the other, the one constructed on the account of the material furnished by individual or collective memory. In *Matter and Memory* Henri Bergson

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distinguishes two ways of surviving past events: on the one hand, by mechanical, automatic memory related to the instinct of the species; on the other hand, by independent and *constructed* memories, those which search in the past for answers to the questions and uneasiness of the present. I am inclined to think that my deep self depends on scents, recesses, misty sentiments, small vague experiences translated with the language *then* at hand. The first years pass in a thick texture of small coloured threads. You are caught as an insect in the spider's web. Your struggling temporarily frees you from the web of beginnings, but you will bear its memory/mark throughout your life. Space functions in the depth of some intrinsic connections which furnish us with the parameters of our "significant" activity in the world. We are born in a certain space and time and we grow in interaction both with other people and with the places we are placed into.

The greatest part of the first half of my life I spent among trees. My street in Agnita was called the Alley of Linden Trees. And it was indeed an alley guarded by huge and old linden and chestnut trees, and also a line of young and vigorous poplars on the edge of the water. Each house was surrounded by gardens, orchards and miniature vineyards. All around, hills. The Saxon fortress-church built in the 13th century was also a "hill", with its massive walls placed there for the eternity...

I was born in Chirpăr, Sibiu, *but* my father came from Maramureş and we lived for a long time in Agnita, not far from my mother's village, Nocrich. I want to say, therefore, that my birth and living in Sibiu area were "contaminated" by customs brought by my father from Ilba, from *his place*. Living together is mosaic-like. Few people can say that they had one and a *single place* for long generations. Personalized details of growing condense all these particulars of dwelling into something very special which determines the mode of existence of the later self. It is an individual processing of the determinants to which man's self-adaptability is also added – civilization means that man adapts himself not to nature, but rather to that which he has gathered/secreted around himself, to the objects with which he furnished himself (as a species) his surroundings and according to which he viewed the world. Unlike other beings man secretes his environment, he always modifies the scenery he lives in and then he adapts himself to his own secretions. Pure and simple nature remains a pestering asperity, a catastrophe, it receives more and more occult descriptions precisely because, after all, it stubbornly escapes human determination. Not created for man or with respect to him the cosmos has a kind of parallel existence with that which

could be called the human *habitat* – not as a place preferred in nature, but as a *scenery* filled more and more excessively with *objects* created by the human mind and imagination. Scenery, where the actor itself works permanently on himself and not only on the setting.

Several childhood houses are preserved in my memory as sequences of a single house, the oneiric house. *The parental home is the oneiric house*. “Real world becomes blurred all of a sudden when you go to live in the house of memory”, and “when you know to give the proper weight of dreams to all the *things*, to live *oneirically* is more than living in memory” (G. Bachelard).

The successive houses of my childhood do not disturb the last one, the one the construction of which I was present at and which was build around us by my parents laboriously and haltingly, but with the great joy of having finally *our own place*, though modest. The new house was peopled with the old *lares* from the *realm of immobile childhood*. Places are, undoubtedly, (and mainly) sentiments. The fear of something terrible remained in my mind in forgotten sequences from this wandering through the several improvised and provisory houses. The fear of *being* unlawfully in the event you were just experiencing, of not being where you had/would have had to be? Fear followed by the stubborn attempt to *find yourself* after a wandering, to realize yourself as autonomous and legitimate entity. We are beings formed from events, but some of them cannot be translated into understandable words. Sometimes your life is told “by an alien mouth”.

Therefore, the new house on the alley, the last and the *true* one. True, because it was constructed by my parents, as I have said, laboriously and with the wish to settle down. The smell of freshness never left it, its *making* lasted for years even after we had moved in, for there was always something to be finished on it. *Settling* did not mean petrification; the house was not ready-as-a-photography, as Eminescu would say, on the contrary, there were constructive powers in it. It fulfilled its role as our shelter, exactly by its unfinishedness, by the *place* it offered for unceasing improvisations, for successive improvements. You could see the passing of the years on the grapevine which clothed the house to its roof, on the chestnut tree planted in the first year which peeped above the eaves, on the small orchard full of fruit, on the thick and high hedge which transformed the yard in a closed/open and welcoming fortress. The ivy climbed from the street to a wall covered with green moss, the raspberry bushes turned into a small jungle. All these signalling that the house was inhabited for a long time, besides

other signs of an unceasing workmanship, characteristic to a household owned by an industrious master.

In my town, a bit anachronistically, all simple things were valued. Happiness could be attained beside a bough sprung from the barren, sunburnt rock not far from a water flow. "The consciousness of a sheltered being" functions only in your house, at your place. The house of the sunset, the houses on the *fields* between settlements seen from the running train as I was travelling towards home, therefore the houses in which *I do not live*, always seemed to me painfully sad – I consider them empty because my memory does not fill them. Any effort, always repeated in similar circumstances, of imagining an ordinary, therefore warm and sheltered life inside them is condemned to failure. I am filled, unwillingly, with an endless pity, I shed tears for those *forgotten* there. Forgotten by my own house... I recall Rilke and the house shining far in the night – hypnotized by loneliness and the sight of the lonely house.

A room of one's own – a sign of respect towards the person, you or another. Virginia Woolf believed that the emancipation of women is related to the fact of having a separate room for herself. A room to fill and a room which can hold her. The dwelling is a means of defence, but also a space of self-revealing. Everyone should have/should claim this right to "room".

Blocks of flats are crippled, non-whole, imperfect because they do not have attics and cellars; they are trees without crowns and without roots. Le Corbusier asked Salvador Dali how the house of the future will look like. Dali answered: "big and hairy". The need to remake interior life, *privacy* is more and more visible in contemporary world. Glass walls are "momentary amusement". Man can neither live in a glass case, nor in a snake hole. "Let us divide our life between the house and the market place, according to the right oscillation of our human condition." Any exaggeration towards the interior or the exterior ruins the balance. You have choice between squashing and explosion... You have your very personal life, which you hide in the *opera*, but you are ready to reveal it exactly in order to prove its existence and to proclaim its rights...

You feel *in your element* when you are much attached to a *place* which you can leave if you wish. To find it again inside you as often as you wish to do this.

A childhood play. In other places it was called, as I found out later, "to play father and mother": mainly and most certainly they decide the belonging. At us it was called "to play home" – maybe because of a more powerful *instinct* of being bound to a solid surroundings. For a

Transylvanian, for a Romanian living among Saxons, the house was necessarily, *a fortress*. Solidly built, with heavy walls and gates, courtyard as a small universe, clearly and definitely delimited. To establish relationships with others, to open towards them was always a *choice* and, therefore, the community was more close and interdependent. You may want to wish to really *belong* somewhere if you have *individuality* at hand, and it is no threatened in the least. You must be very deeply *Yourself* in the isolation/loneliness of your fate, in order to be able to say *Us* with all seriousness and to include others in your destiny... As *my* street was new, we had building materials in abundance. From boards and bricks remained from the construction of the house we could knock up little houses in the most unexpected places. It was the most fun when it started suddenly to rain and we had somewhere to take shelter in – this experiencing of the sheltering virtues of *your* house was wonderful. We refused to enter the House, we stubbornly remained in our hut and we enjoyed the precarious comfort we created for ourselves.

I remember the countless hiding places I invented in my childhood, the boxes with wonders and mysteries (scraps of tinfoil, tinsel, small statues of clay, some old doll adorned as a princess with bright rags) which I buried in the garden in order to have something to find full of wonder later on, when I was searching for treasure. I searched the garden, attics and wardrobes full of excitement and agitation to discover something *fundamental*. The play with mystery extended without a boundary, it budded in the most unexpected directions: I learnt or invented secret alphabets – “magical”, of course – I copied with my blood trickled from my finger cut accidentally some verses and hid them under the lining of my leather pencil case, more sure of myself knowing it there and known by no one else. Later on I discovered the same fascination at my daughter, Laura. All the little animals drawn had “a small secret”, of an overwhelming importance for the good advancement of the story. When other people present and she felt neglected, she asked me *to tell her a secret*; I told anything to her ears – as far as it was whispered, it was a secret and increased her importance before the grownups, it did not matter any more that she was left out of their conversation. Past itself, personal past and another person’s past, when he or she matters, has an automatic weight, because (supposedly) it is full of mysteries. Rummaging in the past is one of the irrepressible human impulses. Past/memory resembles the bodies with drawers painted by Dali.

“Intimate images have solidarity with drawers and trunks, with all the hiding places where man, a great dreamer of locks, shuts up his secrets”, believes Bachelard. The need for secrets is essential, there is an intelligence of hiding operating with forgotten and unforgettable objects. Drawers have the role to preserve small personal objects which are not to be seen by others and which can easily be lost without the shelter offered by the drawer, their *house*. After a while any drawer gets filled with useless things which were not lost, but which lost their *tale* which had taken them out from among the anonymous objects to be thrown away. Memory is also a drawer. The small things put safely away for later times sometimes require an imaginary story to revive them. Imagination and memory form a team.

The dream is, for me, a strangely rich space/time. I believe in retrospective dreams, not in prospective ones. And I push retrospection far back, maybe to the past of the successive generations which preceded me. I cannot otherwise explain their fictional complexity. I have been dreaming since I became aware of myself only in colours, with many shades – I know that many people dream in black and white and I can understand how it feels thinking of black and white movies; with some imagination you forget about the lack of colours. And I dream often. I believe I have never spent a night without dreams. They are so dense, sometimes being close to nightmares that I often go *towards* them in the evening as to a meeting, a party, or a movie. I was delighted to discover in Cărtărescu’s famous little book (*Why do we love women*) the passage on calibre dreamers who go towards the sleep accompanied by dreams as towards a fight. Towards the oneiric service. I know what he means.

A well furnished visual memory, a sometimes tiresome capacity to make connections between images, to see the figure in the carpet even when it is not there, as Mircea Eliade would say, fills my nights with chains of kaleidoscopes. The dream is a *place*, a *region*, a *realm* where *time* works with different units of measurement. If landscape is space/time, for time has no face without the *places* of memory, and if the places and nooks which refer somehow to the *shelter* are remembered from all around, shelter which – in memory of the first such place, the womb – is warm, moist, protective, then all true *houses* are warm, protective, moistened by fragrances. Well, the dream is our secret house.

As dreams are my most important *places* – the only ones which always remained *mine*, the others, the real and forming places disappearing with my successive ages somewhere inside my mind –, it is natural, for me, that they should always be inhabited by/populated with

the beings who are most completely *mine*, my parents. Both dying, they gave themselves up to me. My share of death grew, but not morbidly, terrifyingly. The unansweredness of their death increased immeasurably my responsibilities. I remained their *trace* here and I stand for them as far as the *distant* is still distant. The scale about which I spoke before really knowing how it is to be left without your parents, reset its beams. One of them winded up doubly in me. A great sadness, and also a strange serenity originating from the survivor's guilt help me to keep the balance. I believe that the past, the entire past is definitively included into your description. From whatever angle you would look, no matter how wide and "historical" the perspective would be, you cannot detach yourself from the past, you cannot deny it, you cannot run away from it. But you can re-cultivate it insides yourself. You can explore it bit by bit and to place it in an order which would not hinder you in making the next step, with it beside you there. You can dwell for ever and again in the *house of your life*.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi