

Between the “Revelation of Non-Being” and “The Revelation of Being” – Aspects of Exile in Literature –

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Abstract. We set forth the hypothesis that the literature of exile is consistently represented in the modern novel, if we understand exile in its philosophical meaning, that of an interior attitude characterized by the irremediable incompatibility between spirit and the order of the world. Taking on the role of the outsider imposes an alternative defined by Karl Jaspers: ultimate situations are experiences that once assumed can show the individual the nothingness or the fullness of being. The first alternative is illustrated by the “literature of the absurd”, with themes that derive from the “revelation of non-being” mentioned by Jaspers. Writers like Camus, Ionesco or Kafka are commented from this perspective. Mircea Eliade and Vintilă Horia are, on the other hand, writers that prove the second alternative, finding the path for knowledge in exile.

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I. *One* of the major ideas based in Nicolae Balotă's essay, *Exil linguistique et exil métaphysique*¹, is that the experience of the exile is, after all, a beneficial experience because it grants access to an authentic existence, to redemption. The author's statement refers to the physical exile – understood as a forced dwelling in a more or less hostile environment – and the linguistic exile – the need to express oneself in another language than one's mother tongue. Being himself exiled, the critic feels he is entitled to state: „c'est l'exil qui nous engage dans une crise, qui peut être une expérience féconde si elle est vécue comme un jugement. C'est ainsi que vécurent les prophètes de l'exil cette épreuve, véritable théophanie négative suivie d'une rédemption. Ils avaient compris, eux aussi, à leur manière, que l'exil constitue l'être, qu'il l'institue en le fondant”²In other words, the painful nostalgia of the home land gradually transforms in a more profound nostalgia, that of the realm from which all of us have broken away and towards which all of our known and unknown desires lead. The idea underlined by Nicolae Balotă is that the physical exile – imposed by political reasons – and the linguistic exile – a severe problem for a writer – are two privileged ways towards the metaphysical exile: an interior attitude of a severe inadequacy to the order of the world and the irrepressible temptation of searching or creating alternative worlds compatible with the spirit.

¹ Nicolae Balotă, “Exil linguistique et exil métaphysique,” *Euresis. Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires* 1–2 (1993).

² Ibid., 21.

In a different phrasing/With different words, Monica Nedelcu expresses the same idea when she notices that, in the case of the hero from Vintilă Horia's novel *God was born in exile*, the longing for his native country finally becomes a "metaphysical longing."¹ The suggestion implied by these statements is that the exile is in fact a constant of the human condition; in the essay previously mentioned Nicolae Balotă clearly states it and adds that "l'archétype même des drames de l'exil reste pour nous, pour notre culture, l'exil babylonien, la déportation et la captivité du peuple juif."² After all, this archetype can be placed back at the beginning of time, when the primordial couple was banished from Heaven by god's rage. The conclusion would be the one Nicolae Balotă asserts, with the additional observation that the ones who truly are exiled – in the common meaning of the word – are in fact privileged like the Jews who had the revelation of God during the Babylonian exile.

The necessary condition however is that the exile and the suffering that comes with it should be assumed as such. If not, the exiled is confronted with the *absurd*. It would not be an unpermitted exaggeration to place (based on these premises) a lot of the 20th century's novels in the vast area of the "literature of the exile", understood as a *metaphysical exile*. In extremis, we could fit in this category writers that were not literally exiled. Such an approach is justified, according to Georg Lukács. In his book, *Theory of the Novel*, he underlines that the essential difference between the epopee and the novel resides in the vision that generates the creation, in the image of the world reflected in the artistic consciousness. The world of the epopee is a round, homogenous world, characterized by an undisturbed "substantial unity". "Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars".³ Adventure, risks, tension are all present in the epic world, but there "The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself. Such an age is the age of the epic.", when, as Lukács adds "destiny is not yet understood by man, but is familiar and close to him as a father is to his small child"⁴

Instead, novels are born, according to Lukács, from the rupture between the world and the conscious mind, a problematic consciousness for which the extensive whole of life ceases to be an obvious fact. It is only now that the real tension of the search emerges, when the meaning of the world that was until then visible and immanent starts to fade away and so does the authority that provides it. "In the novel, meaning is separated from life, and hence the essential from the temporal; we might almost say that the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the

¹ Monica Nedelcu, "Postfață" (Afterword) in Vintilă Horia, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil* (God was born in exile), trans Al. Castaing, revised by the author (Craiova: Europa, 1991).

² Nicolae Balotă, "Exil linguistique et exil métaphysique."

³ Georg Lukács *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

power of time.”¹ We can also add that it is just now that time and its destructive force are discovered, the time that comes between man and the essential levels of the world, the time that, in its flow, engages the individual, taking him away from home. “[T]he novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness”² The corollary of Lukács’ theory would consequently be that the novel is the epopee of a world deserted by the gods that it is not the expression of wholeness but the expression of the nostalgia of a lost unity that the consciousness tries to rebuild.

Without any doubt, among the many definitions that modernity has, one of the most relevant would be that modern age is a time of full affirmation of man. However flattering, this tendency has its risks and severe consequences. In a world of immutable and preexistent meanings, in a world inhabited and ruled in a visible manner by gods, the issue of knowledge and the problem of existence, after all, is not really a problem. However it becomes an overwhelming problem when those immutable values fade away or are replaced with some unclear, relative or fluctuant ones. When, at last, man finds himself to be alone, without any gods to guide his path, confused before a world he does not understand and in a world that is not his home. From this perspective, it is justified to include the modern novel (of late modernism, as Liviu Petrescu³ defines it) in the category of the exile novel. If we are to keep Lukács’ terms, it can be defined by “transcendental homelessness”.

Existentialism is the trend that intensely theorized this situation man finds himself thrown into, in a world without any clear landmarks where he is consequently forced to build them. Even if it is unique in the history of philosophy, the line that separates the two branches of this philosophical trend (atheist existentialism and religious existentialism) is not at all surprising. After all, once the role of the exiled, of the rootless individual, is assumed as such, the option becomes necessary: to discover your roots (the transcendental grounds of existence), thus turning the exile into a beneficial experience or, on the contrary, to find out that the existence of such grounds is impossible. In this second case, the entire structure of the universe rules out any solid ground in which one can anchor his consciousness; therefore, all the suffering that comes with mere existence is useless and absurd as long as the nothingness is all around you and it cripples any search attempt. The rebellion that Camus⁴ proposes, as a solution for this type of situation, is useless and absurd when one (Camus, mostly) denies the existence of an authority/instance that can be the target of the rebellion.

The alternative previously stated is convincingly laid down by one of the most important representatives of existentialism, Karl Jaspers. He is the theoretician of *ultimate situations* (*death, chance, guilt, uncertainty*), those situations that reveal failure and the extent of human incapacity. But it is the way in which we relate to this failure

¹ Ibid., 122.

² Ibid., 41.

³ Liviu Petrescu. *Poetica postmodernismului* (The poetics of postmodernism) (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1996), chapter “În orizontul misterului” (In the horizon of mystery).

⁴ Albert Camus. *Omul revoltat* (The revolted man), in Idem, *Fața și reversul. Nunta. Mitul lui Sisif. Omul revoltat. Vara* (The face and the reverse. The wedding. The myth of Sisiphos. The revolted man), trans. Irina Mavrodin, M. Simionși Modest Morariu, intr. Irina Mavrodin (Bucharest: RAO, 1994).

that is decisive: “In ultimate situations man either perceives nothingness or senses true being in spite of and above all ephemeral worldly existence. Even despair, by the very fact that it is possible in the world, points beyond the world.”¹ These are the alternatives clearly stated: a possibility “to find a revelation of true being in human failure”² and another possibility sees failure as the final point of any human effort. Expanding Jaspers’ opinion we can say that, after all the absurd dimension of existence is common for all the existentialists. The essential difference is that for some it is a partial reality, located somewhere in the level of appearances, while for the others (for atheist existentialism) it is the final reality of the world.

II. The absurd is obviously not a finding of the 20th century, but never in the history of culture was it so extensively debated. A first appearance of the theme of the absurd is in Søren Kierkegaard’s work, the precursor of this trend. In his approach, human existence is a sum of antagonistic terms (limited and unlimited, temporary and eternal, freedom and necessity) and it is therefore a paradox.³ Moreover, the issue of freedom and of authentic existence is formulated in paradoxical terms: for the Danish philosopher, death is the greatest evil and at the same time the cure for this evil is death itself. “La mort exprime bien aussi la pire misère spirituelle, quoique la guérison même soit de mourir, de mourir au monde.”⁴ Then, despair is regarded as a disease but at the same time it is the condition for freedom. Finally, a set of severe paradoxes mark human existence, placing it under the sign of anxiety. For Kierkegaard, freedom is still possible; truth and eternity are reachable, and anxiety remains the path to reach them.⁵ In fact it suffices to say that a commentator like Grigore Popa found in Kierkegaard’s work a reformulation of the principles of Christianity.⁶

In French existentialism (the so-called atheist existentialism) the situation is radically changed, the absurd becomes the essential attribute of existence and of the world. While commenting Sartre’s work, Nicolae Balotă⁷ shows that there are two main sources of the absurd. The first one derives from the incongruence between reason and reality. The second one is made up from the specific position of the human consciousness, which is unable to acquire a meaning that cannot become a true consciousness unless it projects itself over reality. However, reality is made up of inert things waiting for a consciousness to give them meaning and thus the vicious circle is perfectly closed. Incidentally, it can be discussed whether there are two sources for the absurd or if the problem is just one: the gap between the structure of the consciousness

¹ Karl Jaspers, “Sources of philosophy,” in *Way to Wisdom. An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 23.

² *Ibid.*, 23.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Le concept de l'angoisse*, trans. Knud Ferlov and Jean-Jacques Gateau (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 124–126.

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Traité du désespoir*, trans. Knud Ferlov and Jean-Jacques Gateau (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 49.

⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Le concept de l'angoisse*, 200–234ff.

⁶ Grigore Popa, *Existență și adevăr la Søren Kierkegaard* (Being and truth at Søren Kierkegaard) (Sibiu, 1940).

⁷ Nicolae Balotă, *Lupta cu absurdul* (The struggle with the absurd), (Bucharest: Univers, 1971), 23ff.

and that of reality. It is, in fact, something that Camus, maybe the most fervent theoretician of the absurd, firmly states: “Mais ce qui est absurde, c’est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l’appel résonne au plus profond de l’homme”¹ Ultimately, Camus’ entire philosophy can be reduced to this statement. [The solution of the rebellion, that Camus proposes, is unconvincingly pleaded. As we’ve shown the object of the rebellion is missing, abolished by Camus himself. Then the pride, the superb pride that stands behind the rebellion can be, in turn, subscribed to the absurd and consequently is not a valid solution. Furthermore, it is hard to foresee the justification of that infinite longing for clarity. Finally, it is inconstant to state that the value of a life is given by its degree of sterility² and, at the same time, to plead for art or for gaining experience. The reason is simple; in a totally absurd world, experience is nothing more than the accumulation of meaningless deeds. If, in the spirit of consistency, human experience is like this, it will be very difficult to see it, as Camus states, as a domain of rational action³ with its endless desire for clarity; and it is even more difficult to admit that reason could be efficient in an area such as human experience, that cannot be anything but absurd, if we follow the philosopher’s thought. These are all observations that naturally draw attention to the cracks in Camus’ theoretical system.]

Therefore we should keep in mind the distance that separates in a definitive manner the consciousness from the world, the overwhelming feeling of alienation, of exile in a world that is certainly indifferent, if not hostile. In such a world, the spirit’s twitches are practically annihilated, to the point the individual himself becomes motionless, giving up or being incapable to show the slightest emotion. “Tout est ordonné pour que prenne naissance cette paix empoisonnée que donnent l’insouciance, le sommeil du coeur ou les renoncements mortels.”⁴

Without any doubt, the prototype of such a character is Meursault, the protagonist of *The Stranger*. The obvious attribute to his whole conduct (until the end at least) is total indifference, the lack of any interior reaction. Before any event or phenomenon, a thought always appears: “this doesn’t mean a thing”. The same thought accompanies the news of his mother’s death (and the whole funeral), the proposal of a promotion or the perspective of the wedding with Marie. Even the crime he commits apparently remains without any remorse. This very aspect makes him a stranger in a world where he seems to belong. His apathy and then that liminal sincerity will, eventually, cost him his life but at the same time these are the things that fundamentally set him apart from his fellow citizens. But this sincerity does not have any ethical value because – and here lies the full justification of his status as a stranger⁵ – he refuses, whether in a conscious manner or not, the common values of his peers, observing the lack of substance in these values and the duplicity that lies behind them.

¹ Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 37.

² Ibid., 59.

³ Ibid., 61.

⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵ Cf. N. Balotă, *Lupta cu absurdul*, 298–300.



Șerban Savu, *The Edge of the Empire*, 2008, 126 x 190 cm, oil on canvas

In fact, for his peers, he is to blame for this very offence: the indifference he displays (ostentatiously, they think, but in fact, naturally), the refusal of clichés for the counterfeit interior experiences. Camus' novel invites for a longer reflection which we shall not elaborate here. Finally, the French author makes us ask ourselves if Meursault is really the dehumanized individual or the people who condemn him are actually dehumanized. Is he really apathetic, with no interior reaction or does he censor his reactions, considering them to be useless? Most likely, he can be regarded as an exponent of the "rebellious man", the one who came to understand that he has to "live with what he knows, deal with what he is and not to use anything uncertain"¹... To refuse any illusion regarding the possibility of an interiority of the world or of man, regarding a hidden meaning of things or deeds, and thus live in a lucid manner everything that comes his way, in a continuous present, in a perfectly flat world. These are problems the novel leaves open to interpretation, the only certainty is that Meursault is a stranger that lived his exile without being fully aware of it. It is only after he commits the crime with the consequences that derive from that does he fully understand his status and takes it on with pride; he wishes that "qu'il ait beaucoup de spectateurs le jour de [son] execution et qu'ils [l']accueillent avec des cris de haine."² However, for the use of our study we should have in mind that the exile can be a beneficial experience that facilitates the understanding of the fact that the absurd governs the existence and that the emptiness is all around it... This is, from Camus' point of view, the supreme wisdom that man has access to.

¹ Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe*.

² Albert Camus, *L'étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 179.

If, for Camus, the lack of meaning in the world, transcendent or immanent, is a given fact, things seem to be different in Kafka's case. While studying the *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, Nicolae Balotă underlines the passion for truth, for authentic existence, for ultimate finalities, the search for which was not only an artistic preoccupation of the Czech writer.¹ In the pages we are referring to, the paradoxical nature of the writer is emphasized: on the one hand, the labile constitution, a consciousness torn apart by frustration and the permanent proof of an undecided guilt; on the other hand, "a pathetic thirst for existence fills the life of this anxious, undecided, ambiguous man, haunted by the thought of an imminent death." The conclusion that can be drawn from these pages is that – because of complex reasons still undiscovered by Kafka's biographers – the novelist turned his work into the living expression of the search that marked his entire existence: the search for a hidden and inexpressible meaning in life and in art. "His work is far from being a demoralized apology of the irrational, of chaos, like it was sometimes presented. Kafka was Goethe's admirer therefore the struggle of the Olympian with the daimon is the salutary model of the victory of man over the darkness. Like Goethe, Kafka has a humanistic faith in what is indestructible within man [...] because his struggle is set upon what is indestructible within us: man is unable to live without and durable faith in something that cannot be destroyed. In this struggle with the inexpressible, Kafka hopes to set free that indestructible, in order to be, in order for the man – in the world – to be."²

These conclusions are somewhat surprising for a work that is thought to be emblematic for the literature of the absurd; a work that generated an epithet that designates the absurd, the irrational or the dark aspects of life. The universe of Kafka's novels seems to justify that epithet. The laws of common sense, the natural way of things seem, at least at a first glance, not to apply to this universe, and therefore this universe becomes a strange world. It suffices to draw attention to the borderless world of the Court from *The Trial*. Joseph K. is arrested without knowing why, his arrest is a virtual one, one can say, because he is allowed to move freely; the crime that got him arrested is unknown and it exists only if he admits to being guilty; the offices of The Court are located in the attic of an apartment building inhabited by a colourful crowd, and the codes of law are collections of indecent pictures.

However unusual, chaotic in appearance, this alien world in which the protagonist enters after his arrest seems to function perfectly, governed by laws which the hero ignores. He is confronted with a system of hidden laws that even the insiders, those within the Justice barely know. Everything seems to be constructed in such a manner that any effort to understand this world is useless and in consequence the hero cannot be saved. It is, on the other hand, a different world with a different order in which Joseph K. is the perfect exiled. He is and remains a stranger until the very end despite all his efforts to fit in and to adapt to the system in which he unwillingly ended. Finally, the exile loses, in this case, all its meaning, it remains a failed attempt of initiation, and the hero is in fact an anti-hero, because he is defined through his failures. His major failure is not death, but his incapacity to understand, even a little bit, the dark mechanisms of

¹ N. Balotă. *Lupta cu absurdul*, chapter "Franz Kafka sau universul absurd" (Franz Kafka or the absurd universe).

² Ibid., 183.

the Justice he is confronted with. The problem is however that these mechanisms are not known, not even by the clerks with higher ranks. Therefore it is legitimate to ask ourselves whether this Justice is the equivalent of a transcendent authority or is it a pseudo-transcendent one, lacking an authentic justification that exists just because it is accepted as such by the ones who judge.

Besides, Joseph K. tells the judges, during the first and only hearing in the trial, that “there are proceedings only if I acknowledge that there are”¹ The fundamental issue that the novel depicts is the reality of the Court, and, more precisely, the status of the Court and the existence of laws that govern its functioning. Also, we should not ignore the fact that Joseph K. seems to be the victim of confusion because during the first hearing the judge calmly addresses him: “So you’re a painter.” It is also relevant how Huld, the lawyer – “a man of great experience” – describes the Court. It is a description that shatters the whole image of the Court, practically revealing the absolute chaos, the rule of nonsense: nothing is certain, everything that is recommended is ignored or neglected; everything that seems to be in favour of the defendant is actually against him, but not always; the right to be defended is annihilated, but lawyers remain extremely useful in advising the judges who only see unknown files and so on.² In short, the lawyer’s description underlines the irrationality and the absurd that govern this system. An infinite system that seems to extend its power, virtually at least, over every individual. This is the image of a supreme authority, located under the sign of the absurd, of full incoherence in its functioning. This nonsense, the absolute absurd reveals itself to the main character at the end of his experience. Having entered a world he does not understand, Joseph K. tries to save himself in vain, searching for a meaning that could be like Ariadne’s thread. Therefore, the novel becomes the story of an individual that always ends up defeated in front of a Transcendence (the Justice) that firmly keeps its secrets.

Not different is the situation in Kafka’s other novel, *The Castle*. The land surveyor also can be considered a prototype of the exiled in a perfectly strange world, overlooked by the castle shrouded in mist. Having got there through a bureaucratic mistake (by absurd reasons) the land surveyor persists on staying, against all odds, trying to fit in order to understand this world and seeking in this manner to reach the castle, the place where the ultimate authority of this world seems to reside. The difference, in this novel, is that the structures of this world do not interfere with those of the world; the distance between the castle and the village is firmly kept, so is the distance between the villagers and the castle’s clerks. But, at the end, we still deal with the same pointless struggle to know and to understand the laws of a universe that remains foreign/elusive until the end.

In this novel, *The Castle*, the transcendent seems to be empty taking away any justification for the world it governs. “The sacred that Kafka, thirsty for the absolute, is searching has abandoned this world. The primordial intuitions that used to be revealed through symbols, archetypes have degraded and have become simple legends and superstitions. The positive sacred, the one that gave meaning became a negative, demonic and disturbing sacred”³. What is irrefutable is the separation between man and

¹ Franz Kafka. *The Trial*, trans. David Wyllie (Dover Thrift Editions, 2009), 30.

² Ibid. 85–104.

³ N. Balotă, *Lupta cu absurdul*, 207.

world, between man and the transcendent, between man and man. Going back to the quotation that started the commentary on Kafka's work, one might argue that what is indestructible in man is the passion of the search, generated by the outsider status, an outsider that severely feels the lack of roots. The search is in vain because his callings are answers in an intelligible manner, and the castle that seemed to hold all the answers is nothing more but a cluster of huts. Before Camus, Kafka, being himself exiled in this world, shows through his work that the exile and the anxiety, inherent to human nature, cannot have any corollary than the lucid acceptance of an empty transcendence, of the emptiness beyond the horizon.

Considering Romanian literature, Eugène Ionesco, through his work, positions himself as the promoter of a similar perspective. In his case, however, we must make a preliminary observation: his belonging to Romanian literature is questionable, because he wrote his work in French, he was a member of the French Academy and he declared himself to be a French writer. On the other hand, the argument of his native land and of his intellectual formation is equally strong. This is not the place for such a dispute, therefore we will settle to give credit to the *Encyclopaedia of the Romanian literary exile*¹, which also includes this author.

Eugène Ionesco's work artistically deals with all the important themes of existentialism. We can find these themes in the volume Emmanuel Mounier dedicated to this philosophical trend.² There are enumerated and commented here all the dangers and helplessness of the modern man: the contingency of the human being (a double contingency: "Pourquoi y a-t-il, si l'on peut dire, *de l'homme*? Et pourquoi moi, individu particulier, suis-je *cet homme*, ici et maintenant?"³; the incapacity of the reason before the paradoxes that characterize our existence, an existence disputed in equal measure "de l'éternité à l'historicité, de l'Infini au fini, de l'espérance au désespoir, du transrationnel au rationnel, de l'indicible au langage".⁴ Then, the fragility of the being, its limits, and the perpetual living on the edge of death; finally, the solitude, the incapacity to communicate, the barrier between the self and the world, between the self and the other. (We must note that Mounier also analyses the other side of existentialism which "marque un retour du religieux dans un monde qui a tenté de se constituer dans le pur manifeste."⁵)

The theme that seems to preoccupy Eugène Ionesco is that of the draining of the being, of the mechanization of the individual, so, consequently, his plays can fully justify Bergson's definition of the comic: "du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant" The way his characters speak, eloquently illustrates the full perverting of logic and at the same time the absence of any trace of affection or inner feeling. The verbal nonsense and the mechanically repeated clichés are obvious symptoms of the emptiness that reins the characters' lives. It may suffice to mention here the well-known dispute of the characters from *The Bald Soprano* about the doorbell or the savant observations about yogurt. In

¹ Florin Manolescu, *Enciclopedia exilului literar românesc* (Encyclopaedia of the Romanian literary exile) (s.l.: Compania, 2003).

² Emmanuel Mounier, *Introduction aux existentialismes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962).

³ Ibid., 39.

⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵ Ibid., 188.

Delirium for Two, He and She have been arguing for the past seventeen years over the differences between a turtle and a snail. In *Jack, or the submission* there is a true family scandal set by young Jacques, who does not like French fries with ham.

The absurd statements, the logical contradictions, the puzzling syllogisms, improprieties, distorted words are abundant in the language of these characters who still seem passionate over logic: the causal and consecutive sentences are not missing, they are actually numerous and are spoken with clarity, in order to prove that the brain still works properly: “Tuesday, Thursday, and Tuesday, so three days a week” (*The Bald Soprano*); “I’m cold because this is not the hour to be warm” (*Delirium for Two*). These are logical simulacra, in a world that has no logical signification. The phrase “empty words” gains full meaning in Eugène Ionesco’s work and it is the indisputable proof of an empty consciousness, of the “ontological void” that takes over the characters. Also of great significance is the fact that these characters do not have names to express their individuality. Whether they have a common name that can be interchanged, like in *The Bald Soprano*; whether they share the same name (a whole family named Bobby Watson or Jacques: Jacques the father, Jacques the mother, Jacques the grandfather, Jacques the grandmother, Jacques the son); or they are simply named with impersonal pronouns: He and She. These are embodiments of the same substanceless entity – man in Ionesco’s vision.

The void that marks the individual existence finally takes over the whole universe of Ionesco’s work. *A Stroll in The Air* is relevant from this point of view. Until a certain point the play seems to be a eulogy of human flight, of the aspiration for heights that defines human nature: “flight is an indispensable necessity for man, “C’est une faculté innée. Tout le monde oublie” says Bérenger before he takes off in the sky.¹ The ending however shatters all illusions. Once returned to earth, the protagonist shares with others what he saw while he was in the inaccessible heights: an entire succession of awful images that depict an infernal reality. As if it were not enough, Bérenger saw what lies beyond the inferno above the world: “Après, il n’y a plus rien, plus rien que les abîmes illimités...que les abîmes”.²

The nothingness, the emptiness is therefore what one comes across beyond the horizon of this world. The same gloomy vision is emitted by another play, *Exit the King*. Even if it is not quite visible, the play is a parody, a remaking in an absurd manner of the legend of the Fisher King. In this case, the king’s illness (his name is Bérenger too, Bérenger the First, the only one in his dynasty), his sliding towards death reflects over the entire kingdom: once endless, blooming, with nine billion inhabitants, it is now a small piece of land, wasted, inhabited by a thousand dying old men. The unrelenting degradation of the universe, simultaneous to the degradation of the king’s condition is not the only connection to the legend. Parsifal is replaced here by a foreign engineer (un ingénieur...étranger)³ whom the king is waiting in order to find what’s wrong with the kingdom. The engineer does not show up, nobody shows up, like in *The chairs*. The same overwhelming solitude, the same certain sliding towards the nothingness... The final stage indications underline the invasion of the nothingness over these lasts remains

¹ Eugène Ionesco, “Le piéton de l’air,” in *Théâtre*, vol. 3 (Paris, Gallimard, 1963), 166.

² Ibid., 198.

³ Eugène Ionesco, *Le roi se meurt* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1968), 51.

of humanity. The stage is emptied gradually and is covered by darkness; a last strip of light lingers on until it's swallowed by the darkness.

III. After a brief presentation of the legend of Parsifal in *Images and symbols*, Mircea Eliade adds the following comment: “No one had thought, until then, of asking that central question – and the world was perishing because of that metaphysical and religious indifference, because of lack of imagination and absence of desire for reality. That brief episode of a great European myth reveals to us at least one neglected aspect of the symbolism of the Centre: that there is not only an intimate interconnection between the universal life and the salvation of man; but that *it is enough only to raise the question of salvation*, to pose the central problem; that is, *the problem* – for the life of the cosmos to be for ever renewed. For – as this mythological fragment seems to show – death is often only the result of our indifference to immortality.”¹ The entire work of Eliade, not only the literary part, but also the theoretical one, convincingly pleads for the existence of a sense in the Universe and the human being. The work itself seems to say, with its every single page, that the possibility of salvation exists and that there is no emptiness on the other side.

The starting point for this study was Jaspers' point of view, which says that confronting the human condition's limits can reveal either the nothingness, or “something which is truly existent”, the immutable ground for existence. Earlier before, we mentioned Nicolae Balotă's affirmation, the man who thought that the exile, if correctly assumed, could provide the possibility of resurrection. The condition involved here is, after all, still an alternative. Then, we punctuated the distance between the two fields of existentialism, considering up to this point the so-called atheistic existentialism and the literature which stands close to it (close and not subordinate, because Kafka wrote before the crystallization of this thinking current). On the one hand, Sartre and Camus placed the whole existence and the Universe under the sign of the absurd, on the other hand, some other existentialist thinkers found that however sinuous or dangerous it may be, the way of human being exists and can even be travelled through. Jaspers himself thought this way and he was closely followed by Berdyaev. He states the alternative of the first man in a different manner: “ou l'homme se met face au mystère de l'être, face à Dieu”, which generates “une connaissance initiatrice, originale, la philosophie authentique”; “ou bien il se tourne face à autrui et à la société”.² So the saving knowledge is possible and the rest is just a matter of option. Nonsense, disorder, the absurd, are all localized at the superficial level of reality. “La connaissance découvre le sens derrière le nonsens, l'ordre derrière le desordre, le cosmos derrière le chaos [...] elle ajoute à la réalité”.³

Following the same line, Ortega y Gasset thinks that the degradation of humanity is due to a wrong choice and sees the possibility of making the right choice, nobility based on a permanent effort, on the assuming of the exigencies of the human condition.⁴ As we

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 56.

² Nikolas Berdiaeff, *Cinq meditations sur l'existence* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1936), 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴ José Ortega y Gasset, *Revolta maselor* (The revolt of the masses), trans. Coman Lupu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 75–90.

have previously shown, an experienced commentator like Emmanuel Mounier, after he summarizes both trends in existentialism, underlines that one of them, the one we are talking about, marks a resurrection of religion in the modern world. Commenting Jaspers's work, he notes that the limits of human condition are walls that cannot be overcome, but they emphasize "an obscure sense of the world that needs to be deciphered." "In this hostile neighbourhood that is the forbiddance of the limit, the remote absolute is revealed, the inapproachable Deus absconditus, as a secret presence in the night. The limit that vibrates at the edge of the act does not impose a stop, but urges to a leap, to adventure, to risk."¹

Paul Foulquié also emphasizes the connection between Christianity and existentialism,² and his idea is promoted by Grigore Popa too, when he sees in existentialism "a philosophy of redemption rather than one of despair. Existentialism is a way of life, specific to those who are passionate about the immortal essences of the spirit and about the building beauty of the lived truth. In this case, the truth is not only knowledge, but it is alive/life??. the way to redemption, via."³ All in all, these thinkers all state the same thing: the perceptible order of the world is an apparent one and the knowledgeable individual must rearrange its chaotic shape, in the virtue of the meanings hidden behind it. The search for these meanings, the permanent effort to find them and then to assume them practically is the solution for an authentic existence: a difficult and hard to accept solution, but still a possible one.

Mircea Eliade is one of the most astonishing representatives of the Romanian exile who assumed the exile in the metaphysical sense that Nicolae Balotă underlined. He can hardly be listed as an existentialist and only with a small part of his work, but he is very close to a perspective like the one mentioned in the previous paragraph. As a philosopher of religion, he drew attention to the fact that the concept of religion "does not necessarily imply belief in God, gods, or ghosts, but refers to the experience of the sacred, and, consequently, is related to the ideas of being, meaning, and truth."⁴ From this point of view, the universe of art is comparable to the universe of religion, because in both case there is an individual experience that is connected to trans-individual meanings.⁵ Two of his works convincingly illustrate this conception. In *În curte la Dionis* (In Dionysus' court), the prototype of the poet is Orpheus, the one capable of enlightening people with logos. Adrian, the main character of the short story, considers his art "more of a mystical tool or an instrument of knowledge. Poetry is, by excellence, a political method, the last one we have at hand to change people, to transform them in real people."⁶ The idea is more clearly depicted in *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (Nineteen roses), but here the theatre is the one debated upon as an artistic form. "Deciphering the secret symbolic meanings of historical events can be a revelation in the religious sense

¹ Emmanuel Mounier, *Introduction aux existentialisms*, 184–185.

² Paul Foulquié. *L'existentialisme* (Paris: PUF, 1948), 94.

³ Grigore Popa, *Existențialismul* (Existentialism), (Sibiu, 1943), 16.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Quest. History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 5.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Mircea Eliade. *În curte la Dionis* (In Dionysus' court), ed. Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1981), 514–515. (Author's translation, C.R.)

of the word. Besides, this is the purpose of all arts, to reveal the universal dimension, the spiritual significance of every object, gesture or event, no matter how small or common.”¹ Ieronim Thanase obsessively draws attention to the “magical origin” of art and its capacity to become “an instrument of enlightenment, more precisely to redeem the crowd.”²

It is difficult to say if Eliade set these goals when he wrote his works. It is certain however that all of them, especially the ones written in exile, describe initiation experiences that have the role of reminding the protagonists of their origin and the necessity of liberation. The two works mentioned before are highly relevant, both of them being constructed around the myth of the “saved saviour” and around the Orphic-Pythagorean mythology. (In his *History...*, Eliade underlines the substantial analogy between Orphism and Pythagoreanism.)³ The myth of the *saved saviour* imagines the existence of a messenger from God sent to reveal the saving knowledge to the chosen ones. However, sometimes the Messenger is himself overwhelmed by matter, by oblivion and also needs a messenger to remind him of his origin and his destiny. This is obviously the case in both of the novels. Adrian, the poet from *În curte la Dionis*, is the carrier of a message he forgot, being overwhelmed by cultural memory. From that point on, his experience becomes a wandering in a labyrinth, until he meets Leana; she becomes an “Angel of Death” that will set him free from this world. At the same time, some textual clues are reminders of another Gnostic myth, the myth of Simon Magus. From this myth’s perspective, the meeting of the two is a meaning of universal salvation, because it symbolizes the reencounter of the divine with the wisdom that had fallen in the terrestrial horizon.

Nouăsprezece trandafiri speaks about the same salvation, where the role of the saviour is played by Niculina Serdaru, and the role of the saved saviour is played by Anghel Pandele. The last, a secularized figure of the Messenger, was tempted, as a young man, to reinterpret myths, in order to later write the play Orpheus and Eurydice, guided by a view on theatre similar to the one of Ieronim Thanase. He suddenly becomes amnesic and it will last thirty years until Niculina comes into his life and causes the beneficial anamnesis. Like in the previous short story and similar to other writings, this one ends with the physical disappearance of the main character, a death invested with positive connotations: liberation from the inert matter, from the contingent and a return to the origins.

According to his own confession, in his *Journal*,⁴ on the 26th of June 1954, Eliade considers that *The Forbidden Forest* is the best thing he wrote. He admits “the flaws, the lacks, the excesses of the book,” but this does not change the way he admires his book. “Sometimes, when I listen to the eulogies for other books of mine by people whom I admire and love I secretly smile. I tell myself: you are perspicacious, cultivated and smart, but you didn’t see. This reflection is so much more innocent because I’m

¹ Idem, *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (Nineteen roses), ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Ed. Românul, 1991), 85.

² Ibid., 27.

³ Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase* (The history of religious beliefs and ideas), trans. Cezar Baltag (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1991), vol. 2, 179.

⁴ Idem, *Jurnal I (1941-1969)* (Journal I), ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993).

unable to show them what they can't see." Other confessions noted in the same *Journal* and later included in the *Memoirs* are about the difficulties the author encountered while writing the novel and about the extent to which this project distracted him from other duties. The novel was written between 1949 and 1954 and was first published in 1955, in a French version entitled *Forêt interdite*. The hesitations and the fears experienced during the writing of the novel are reflected in the novel and the author himself sees the flaws. These drawbacks are sanctioned by the critic Ion Vlad who sees *The Forbidden Forest* as "an unequal novel, paralyzed by numerous digressions, exhausted in the same philosophical speech rather viable in an essay about cosmic and historic time, about the exit from time and about the overwhelming labyrinth of the being possessed by love, about the traps of the double and about the present mythical signs. If in his short stories the author discovers the necessary embodiment of the motifs and the perfect granting of the destinies under the unrelenting sign and the vast motives of the divine and of humanity, in the novel the dilution cannot be avoided and the inequalities become more visible."¹

We fully support these statements, but in the economy of this study, the value of the novel is a secondary issue.² The important thing, for these pages, is that the novel as a whole depicts the story of a restless spirit, obsessed with the terror of time and with the possibility of avoiding it. A statement from *Images and symbols* is essential for the interpretation of this novel: "India knows not only two positions regarding time: the first one, of the ignorant, who lives exclusively in the duration and of the wise who tries to get out of time, but a third, intermediary, one: the situation of the one who continues to live in his time while is still open to the Great Time, never losing the consciousness of the unreality of historic time."³ The situation fits perfectly to Ștefan Viziru. He continues to live in time and to follow his path and, while describing his route, the novel reconstructs a true fresco of Bucharest around and during the war, with all the turmoil of that period. However, caught in the turmoil of history the character keeps in mind his authentic purpose: "time is irreversible, without doubt, the moments go by and we? get closer to death, as Biriș said, as everybody knows – but besides that there is something else. Besides this race towards death there is more. This light holds a secret. Life holds a secret. It is something hidden somewhere inside us, deep inside us. Something else..."⁴

The theme of *the terror of Time* is a constant in Eliade's thinking, like the camouflage of the sacred in the profane. The structure of this novel is built in such a manner in order to suggest the pressure of the historical time over the character's consciousness. This tumultuous period of Romanian history (1936–1948) was not chosen randomly. Ion Vlad observes "the flashback and insertion technique, the discourse organized by alternating and fragmenting plans, the sudden insertion of new elements, voices or temporal sequences"⁵ this technique is meant to suggest the idea of terror of time, of the chaotic appearance of reality. The kaleidoscopic impression of the

¹ Ion Vlad, *În labirintul lecturii* (In the labyrinth of reading), (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1999), 177–178.

² Nonetheless, this value is not at all negligible, despite these drawbacks, as the same critic notes at the end of his comment.

³ Mircea Eliade, *Imagini și simboluri*, 113.

⁴ Idem, *Noaptea de Sânziene* (trans. as *The Forbidden Forest*), ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Minerva, 1991), vol. 1. 65.

⁵ Ion Vlad, *În labirintul lecturii*, 178.

novel suggests the complex nature of reality, the surprising turns that lead to the centre. It is the level of the profane that covers the sacred, the essential that is only seen by the chosen ones. The signs inexorably guide Viziru towards understanding, even if this is not the solution he wanted. In the section dedicated to Eliade of his remarkable book, *Archaic and universal*, Sergiu Al-George observes “the ambivalence of the events, marked by a direct, visible reason and by a more profound one that arranges the events in a coherent manner.”¹ An eloquent illustration is the case of the mysterious Lady Zissu: the protagonist meets several/many characters who are apparently not connected, all of his relationships seem to be hazardous. At the end he discovers that all the characters had met this woman, therefore there is a hidden connection, an occult necessity that connects the characters. That this relation is not fully settled is equally true but, for the intentions of the novel, the important fact is that it exists.

In *Images and Symbols*, Eliade talks about symbolical thinking, based on the premise that “the universe is not closed, not even a single object is isolated in its own existence, and everything is connected through a system of assimilations and correspondences.” This is the conclusion Viziru reaches, even if these correspondences are not fully disclosed. He becomes aware of a hidden order or reality and that is the ultimate wisdom he can reach. He does not succeed to fulfil his dream; his initiation guides him toward a more difficult solution, but an authentic one nonetheless. He wanted to escape time during his lifetime, he committed a sin by wanting, as Irina said, “to live death on earth.” Knowledge, in his case, is not equivalent with escaping the horizon of this world, but with the acceptance of the world and of the order that governs it. “To give meaning to history (by taking part in it) means to discover that necessity is another side of contingency, and that any meaning is given by necessity. Transcending suffering through discovering the hidden sense of history is an act that transforms the absurd into something with significance.”² This very discovery and the agreement over the necessity that lies in the contingent takes shape in the exclamation that the hero utters after the pain of losing his wife and child: “your will be done”. His experience shows him another way, the only one allowed, of transcending history: deciphering and assuming the ultimate significances that lie behind absurd appearances. In the same *Journal*,³ Eliade noted that understanding is the “death stone of the wise man.” Most likely, this is the point that generated the end of the novel, when the hero dies in the car he saw twelve years before. Once he comes *to understand*, he is no longer part of this order, he is part of the order he has just begun to sense. Only then can he obtain the much wanted liberation: after he did his duty, after he fulfilled his destiny pulling it from the power of time.

IV. In essence, Vintilă Horia's work is very close to Mircea Eliade's. Exiled just as Eliade, Vintilă Horia found the way to being, to knowledge, as he himself confesses. He is known as one of the most vocal critics of modern society. In line with the esoteric doctrine, he sees the Renaissance as the moment that marked the beginning of an

¹ Sergiu Al-George. *Archaic și universal. India în conștiința culturală românească* (Archaic and universal. India in Romanian cultural consciousness) (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1981), 185.

² Ibid., 190.

³ Mircea Eliade, *Jurnal*, 263.

accelerated degradation of humanity. In his essays or interviews, he does not miss any opportunity to expose the atrophy of the spiritual side, the inexorable slide toward the nothingness of humanity that has lost its bearings. One of the fundamental motives of his work is the "end of cycle", the "Evil Age" (Kali-yuga) which precedes the extinction of humanity. It should be emphasized, however, on the one hand, that, in the same line of esotericism, the end is not definitive, it's just the end of a cycle dictated by law governing the evolution of mankind and is followed by its rebirth in another life cycle. On the other hand, the degradation that Vintilă Horia sanctions is caused by ignorance and forgetfulness that rule over the conscience/consciousness???. Nothingness does not span the human existence, transcendence is not empty, and the authentic being is possible, provided by the perpetual anxiety, by the *memory*. In Vintilă Horia's novels, memory is one of the fundamental motives, the equivalent of spiritual activity, which, as in Eliade, remains anchored in the realm of the *great time*. Memory is the one that breaks the surface, which reorders the facts of life and fragments of reality, giving them coherence and an upward line.

Knowledge is thus possible for Vintilă Horia and his whole work is an advocate for the knowledge to be seen as the only purpose of human life. Art is, for this writer, "a means to travel to the truth"¹ and the novel as a privileged form of art, is invested with the status of "technical knowledge". According to another confession, "love, exile and death are the three keys of knowledge"² that need to be added to the act of creation.

Love cannot be, as in Camus' work, a mere carnal attraction or, as in Ionesco's work, a surrogate scattered within clichés. For Vintilă Horia, love is authentic because it is one of the means of knowledge. Eros, in this author's novels, is of an obvious Platonic origin. Moreover, Plato appears as protagonist of the novel *The Seventh Letter* and we see Plato-the character ruled by that love that Plato-the philosopher conceived and made known through the voice of Diotima. In this novel, the love that unites Plato and Briseis is obviously the same one that Diotima preaches in Symposium. Before such a love, any obstacles related to the ephemeral land collapse helplessly, just like religious precepts. At a first glance, it may seem surprising that, within some books that are true pleadings of faith, morality and uprightness, the writer imagined with predilection "sinful" loves, formally convicted by the social conventions and religious commandments. Of course, the sweet taste, enchanted, of the sin ... It could suggest the special intensity of feeling, self-abandonment and the world's oblivion.

More precisely, one can discern the suggestion that a love like that rises above what is human, that, enslaved by the irresistible calling of one to another, the souls do not take earthly rules into consideration. They, the souls, are exiled on earth; they belong to another world, under the rule of eternal Beauty and under the law of love. Stolen from the earthly order, love remains unfulfilled, here on earth. Its purity is not compatible with the imperfect structure of the world; it lives in order to light up the irrepressible desire to get closer to the Truth, of regaining freedom and absolute science. In *God Was Born in Exile*, Dochia is the woman about whom Ovid says she taught him

¹ Vintilă Horia. *Un mormânt în cer* (A grave in the sky), trans. Mihai Cantuniari and Tudora Sandru Olteanu (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1994), 65.

² In the interview made by Marilena Rotaru, published in Marilena Rotaru, *Întoarcerea lui Vintilă Horia* (The return of Vintilă Horia), (Cluj-Napoca: Ideea, 2002).

“more truths than all the women in Rome”. But she leaves him, following her husband with devotion, leaving in the Roman poet’s spirit the sadness and memory of the touch that reconciled him “with this land, with this relentless sound of the water.”

An unsurpassable wall of tyranny comes between Toma Singuran, the main character of *Persecute Boece* and Malvina Rareș. Their love story is brutally interrupted by the almighty silence of the tyrannical regime. The prisoner status, exiled in their own country, makes their love impossible. But, despite the short time it lasted, love permanently tied them, revealing the essence of their being, and bringing them closer to the essences of life: “and all the obstacles that history raised between me and the roots of things were falling one by one, pulling from the darkness, with my own fingers, the vague yet visible face of what I couldn’t see before, of what was once forbidden.”

For El Greco, the main character of the novel *A Grave in the Sky*, “to paint and to love was the same thing as travelling toward the truth.” Besides painting, his love for Jeronima helped him, like the other characters imagined by Vintilă Horia, to discover, deep inside him, the voice that guided him towards the immutable beauty, towards Truth. His life will not be happy, his love will flourish only with Jeronima’s disappearance. Platonic in essence, the eros in Vintilă Horia’s novels is fully justified as a privileged meaning of access to knowledge. The knowledge of Good and Beauty is only possible through revelation, and love has the power to provide that revelation, the only one that can provide meaning to human life, that can set free, even for a brief moment, the soul from the prison of the body, making breath once again the air of eternity.

“The exile doesn’t mean departing from one place and living in another. It might be the case for many, but not for writers. For writers the exile is a key, a technique for knowledge.”¹ Vintilă Horia’s words indicate without doubt one of the keys to reading his work, maybe the most important one. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find in the history of literature a writer who is more preoccupied with this theme, with showing the exile and its consequences over the spirit. Being himself exiled, the author tried to transpose in literature the drama of being away from home, each and every time in a new shade, to describe with the means of art the way in which suffering can eventually unravel the way towards the light.

The character from *A Grave in the Sky*, El Greco, settled in Toledo, he exiled himself due to the Ottoman danger. He comes to transform the space of his exile in his country, closer to his soul than his native land. “What is a country if not the place where man willingly comes to grow roots, stronger perhaps than the natural ones. There are countries chosen freely, and there are friendships stronger than any family bond.”² As a matter of fact, the question of free choice is still debatable. As a child he found a stone that immediately captured his attention through the peculiar drawing it had; after many years of exile, contemplating the view over Toledo, he realizes that the stone that captured his eyes had a drawing of the city where he will end up living. This event suggests that there is a force that had already settled the course of his life from childhood and that will eventually lead him to the city where he is to fulfil his destiny. In the spirit of the book, and not necessarily in the spirit of the historical facts, we can state that El Greco would

¹ Vintilă Horia, “Despre degradare și risc” (On degradation and risk), *Cotidianul*, 2nd year, no. 85, 4 May 1992.

² Vintilă Horia, *Un mormânt în cer*, 3.

not have reached to discover his true creative form if he had stayed in his native Crete: "...here, and not in any other place, I have come to understand, my understanding getting a new form."¹ He had to escape the Balkan atmosphere in order to discover the Byzantine spirit, tired after two centuries of renaissance, on the point of getting killed by Humanism.

From a certain point of view, Radu Negru's experience, the king from *The Resignation Knight*, can be similar to the one mentioned above. His stay in Venice can be similar to an exile, because he had left, planning on never to return again, he had fled hoping to escape a fate that seemed hostile and unfair, hoping to find salvation in the prosperous Occident. Without any doubt, he finds it. The West unravels the solution, but, like in El Greco's case, it does so through the contrast it gives, through a negative revelation. Venice is a place of degradation and artificiality, of wealth that tries to cover the moral and spiritual downfall. Enslaved by the morbid refinement, specific to the decay, drowned in immorality, the Venetians offer the Wallachian prince the counterexample he needed. Far from offering freedom and serenity, Venice breathes the smell of death. Its inhabitants are living images of the unconscious slavery, of unspoken fear, which Loredano, the painter knew how to capture and which existed in the eyes of every Venetian. In the middle of this spectacle of death, Radu Negru finds his way to life; surrounded by the testimonials of the immeasurable pride of the Venetians, who believed they could impose their order upon nature, the one who came here driven by the promethean spirit discovers resignation, the only road to supreme wisdom. To humbly bow before an eternal power and never to bow before earthly evil... His people had lived from the beginning of time under this teaching: obedient to the divine law, lacking the smallest tendency to rebellion, they had relentlessly fought evil embodied by the Ottomans. This is the significance of the painting showing Mircea cel Bătrân holding the ark – a sign of faith, and with the sharp crown on his head – the sign of sovereignty and the refusal of slavery. The exile proved to be once again beneficial: it brings to light the truths that lay inside him, inherited from his ancestors.

Exile does not necessarily involve a physical distance from the home land. In some cases, between yourself and your own country, there can be an invisible wall, an insurmountable distance. This interior exile is perhaps the most painful one because, being separated from your compatriots, you still see the desolate image of the disaster in which they live, an image that offers constantly the exact measure of the distance between you and them. These sorts of experiences are usually caused by political tyranny. It is meaningful that in the novel *Persecutez Boece*² there are two characters that claim the main role. Separated by two millennia, Toma Singuran and Boèce are, in essence, two sides of the same character: the exiled in his own country, the one that, in the middle of his compatriots who are reduced to silence and slavery, dares to claim his right to freedom and life. Refusing slavery, he exiles himself before he gets exiled, thrown in jail or to the edge of society by the political police. Boèce and Singuran are placed side by side in order to underline their common essence and the common essence of the persecutors. They were both in jail because they did not obey the regime. They are both offered the pact with the devil – freedom in exchange for obedience – but both of

¹ Ibid., 129.

² Vintilă Horia, *Persécutez Boèce!* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1987).

them refuse, emphasizing the fact that they are not exiled, but self-exiled, the distance from their peers is due to their own will. The exile is for both of them a wilful experience.

We can see, therefore, that the space of the exile, whether a jail or a faraway country, becomes in Vintilă Horia's vision a space of knowledge. In the examples mentioned so far, this status is not due to intrinsic virtues, on the contrary, the space is a negative example, it shows the consequences of the wrong choice, determining the right one by reaction. The space from *God Was Born in Exile* is imagined in a totally different manner.

[The name *Dacia* defines a space that beyond its geographical coordinates acquires in Vintilă Horia's vision symbolic meaning, the only one that matters after all. The Dacia of Ovid's exile, Radu Negru's Wallachia, Ștefan's Moldavia fit in the same symbolic coordinates and we shall refer to them as a single territory, invested with special significance and characteristics. It is a mythical space, transformed from geographical space to a symbol of a way of being, of a "style matrix". Blaga's term is required because the way this land is described fits perfectly with the "mioritic space" from the *Trilogy of Culture*]

We saw that for Radu Negru, El Greco, Toma Singuran or Boèce, the space of the exile caused a negative reaction that forced them to discover the values they had within themselves. Unlike them, for Ovid, Della Porta and Matteo Muriano, the exile will mean the giving up of a system of values and the gradual assimilation of a new one, of a different way to see life. If in the case of the former we can talk about a revelation, about the activation of something that was inside them, in the case of the latter we can talk about an initiation process that leads to knowledge.

Della Porta and Matteo Muriano are not really exiled. They are both doctors, one of Radu Negru and the other one of Ștefan, and they are free to return to their own countries. They were not banished and they did not run from a political regime, they came to... do their job. The hesitation proves to be justified, because both of them seem to have followed their inner voice. "I clearly felt that there was no other way"¹ says Matteo Muriano while justifying the ease with which he had accepted the mission in Moldavia. Their civilized people's eyes are firstly puzzled by the strangeness of these places; coming from the sophisticated West they see at the beginning the world in which they are entering as being primitive and naïve. Gradually they will come to realize that this simplicity hides "the core of life and spirit that, with its modes, opposes resistance to history".² They discover here the way of living at harmony with eternity that implies the carelessness towards the fluctuations in history. They will realize that what they considered to be naivety is in fact true wisdom that is gained through faith and by obtaining a harmony between spirit and the universal rhythms. Their pride and their promethean rebellious spirit, Della Porta preached, the Faustian thirst for knowledge and

¹ Vintilă Horia, *Mai sus de miazănoapte* (Beyond the north), (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1992), 69.

² Lucian Blaga, *Ființa istorică* (The historical being), ed. Tudor Cățineanu (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1977), 63.

conquering through knowledge are set aside without any remorse in favour of a serene resignation and knowledge through love, which they learn during their apprenticeship.

The exile as soteriology appears in the most expressive form in *God was Born in Exile*. Vintilă Horia describes the way in which the endless despair from the beginning of the exile is transformed into an edifying experience. At the end of the eight years of exile, Ovid discovers what he had been looking for all along. This permanent search connects him with Matteo Muriano and Della Porta: the anxiety, the dissatisfaction, the unclear desire for something else could be interpreted as being symptoms of the adequate manner in which they used their free will. Instinctively, Ovid had opted for the right way before the exile and it is suggested that this option was one of the causes of his banishment: he had embraced Pythagoreanism, a monotheistic religion, seen as a heresy by Augustus. It was the path that his soul had instinctively chosen but, blinded by Rome's high life, he lost his way. Exile takes him away from these temptations, brings him the needed suffering and leads him to his goal, on a journey of revelatory encounters. Firstly there is Dochia, the woman who made him feel true love and who taught him that "we cannot be the masters of our own faith".¹ Then there is Mucaporus, the roman soldier who had deserted, choosing the freedom to be the master of his own life without having to kill. Finally, the encounter with the priest from the Holy Mountain is crucial. There, at the monastery of Poiana Mărului, Ovid will find the blessed peace, he will have the decisive revelation that, as he would say later on, brings into his spirit the secret of life and death.

In the afterword to the Romanian edition, Monica Nedelcu underlines that in the metamorphosis Ovid undergoes at Tomis, "the heartbreaking longing after the lost space – Rome – gradually becomes a metaphysical longing, defined by the need and seeking of God." Beyond those guiding signs, coming from the outside, everything comes down to a subjective process, of ontic foundation, a process that finds its initial impulse in suffering. Pulled out of his familiar space, the poet's soul becomes rebellious, wanting desperately to rebuild his broken connections. The exile becomes a reconstitution of the first banishment, an experience that favours the *anamnesis* – the revelation through which man discovers the sparkle of divinity inside him and becomes aware of his exiled condition. Monica Nedelcu's observation is fully justified: the longing for his own country gradually melts in the longing for the Absolute; through the suffering it entails, the exile makes it possible for the being to find its foundation in the transcendent.

V. In his essay, *The Art of the Novel*,² Milan Kundera shows that in its evolution, after it exhausted the careful research of the inner self (from Proust to Joyce), the novel was reoriented by Kafka towards another direction: the confrontation with external determinations. This is actually the main characteristic of the novel previously discussed: the fact that it takes into consideration the limits of human condition which it transforms into an interrogation about the world and about existence. As soon as he starts to discuss the world's fundament, the writer becomes an outsider, an exiled who tries to understand his adoptive country, in order to fit in. His anxieties, his searches, his

¹ Vintilă Horia, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil* (God was born in exile), (Craiova: Editura Europa, 1991), 27.

² Milan Kundera, *L'art du roman. Essai* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 42.

questions are inevitably transferred to the character that is consequently configured as an individual with problems, haunted by uncertainties and by the feeling of not belonging. He will try to cast away his uncertainties and to fix firmly his roots in a solid ground. Will he succeed or not, will he find the saving certainties or will he end up defeated and lost, thrown into an absurd and hostile world that baffles any attempt to escape? ... What remains essentially is the quest, the serene acceptance of the exile and of the fertile anxiety that necessarily comes with the existence defined as such. After all, you cannot file the world as being absurd, without having previously drained, by living, the possibilities it has to offer.

Obviously, this type of literature brings a revaluation of life, an attempt to annihilate the tragic conflict that divides the human consciousness between a vital principle and a spiritual one. This is a reinterpretation of the Christian message, in the sense of empowering the individual responsibility and rejecting the possible solutions of retreat in front of History, of retreat in a fatalist attitude or passive contemplation. The perspectives debated so far lead toward, as we stated at the beginning, the conscious acceptance of the severe consequences that derive from the full affirmation of man, of his dignity and his freedom.

“Instead of taking men's freedom from them, Thou didst make it greater than ever! Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering. [...] Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings for ever. Thou didst desire man's free love, that he should follow Thee freely, enticed and taken captive by Thee. In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide. But didst Thou not know that he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice?”¹

Dostoyevsky managed to capture in words like no one else the overwhelming burden of this freedom. In the legend of the Grand Inquisitor he warns about the temptation to quit, to leave to others, to a superior authority, earthly or transcendent, the responsibility of one's existence. This fatal resignation is equal to giving up life, equal to death, in the full meaning of the word.

In a previous study dedicated to the novel², Liviu Petrescu took out from Joyce's novels a definition of knowledge, seen as a process of exhausting all of the possibilities of the being, of realizing *entelecheia*. By taking Aristotle's concepts and applying them to Joyce's work – conceived as a vast cycle of biological ages – the critic assimilates the artist's childhood with the stage of pure virtuality of the soul, stage in which he is sleeping in his own latencies, when he is not yet awoken “into being”. Next,

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 198.

² Liviu Petrescu, *Romanul condiției umane* (The novel of the human condition) (Bucharest: Minerva, 1979), 114–124.

there's the pull out from the un-being, the birth of the soul, its coming into shape, and afterwards life becomes a pursuit of knowledge, "the development of an entelecheia". "Through entelecheia everything that is a simple possibility or virtuality comes to a full realization, becomes actuality. Consequently, knowledge will be defined by temporariness and relativity, as long as the object still contains unfruitful potentialities. This aspect imposes an imperative to *being*, to living in the Time as an essential condition of knowledge. The way to release oneself from the ontological evil, to a salvation from the evil of being, paradoxically implies, in its first stage, the acceptance of existence and the participation to it."¹ This perspective offers a consistent and meaningful interpretation for the literature we have discussed above. Mircea Eliade's and Vintilă Horia's works become, thus, a plea for an existence lived as a continuous effort to self-edification, an effort for assuming freedom and the responsibility it necessarily entails.

¹ Ibid., 115.