

The Temptation of Absolute Knowledge Vintilă Horia and the Modern European Novel

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Abstract: This study aims to identify the writer's specific narrative technique and to situate his literature in a certain typology. We have detailed his doctrine about art and literature, as it is expressed during his career. Literature is seen as a privileged technique of knowledge, the instrument through which the vocation for absoluteness can be best satisfied. In order to emphasize the characteristics of his work, we draw a comparison with the works of some modern known writers, which are united in their conception about literature, the formula of the novel of ideas, as well as Erich Auerbach's concept of "figural representation". The best definition for the metaphoric novel, which aims to meditate upon the human existence, is smoothed by remarkable theoretical contribution, marked inside of this study.

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I. The ball scene from Trevisan palace is less significant for the epical development of the novel *The Resignation Knight*, but it is important, in turn, for the configuration of the philosophical vision about writing, and, above all, for Vintilă Horia's entire work.

In this scene we are witnessing a "rhetorical competition", during which the participants are competing to describe, as expressively as possible, their own particular vision about the beauty of a woman's body. After the Venetian rhetoricians "praise" in beautiful words one or another part of a woman's body, Radu Negru will eulogize, in the end, the beauty of the whole body: "We cannot separate her body from her soul, nor her different parts of her body in separate fragments. I think she is perfect, as a woman, and our people say that a woman is indeed beautiful when every part of her is beautiful [...]. Just the same, I could tell that the world is beautiful and complete not isolated in the image of a flower, of a tree or of a mountain, but in its whole, just like a naked woman"¹.

The character's words are, as a general fact for Vintilă Horia's work, very illustrative and transparent: it is about a way of conceiving the world, about a philosophical attitude. Through that phrase "our people say", the voivode's conception

¹ Vintilă Horia, *Cavalerul resemnării* (The Resignation Knight), trans. Ileana Cantuniari, afterword by Monica Nedelcu (Craiova: Editura Europa, 1991), 87-88.

embeds, without doubt, the wisdom of his people. To the fragmentary way of perceiving the world, which is specific for the Venetians, the Walachian voivode opposes a unifying vision, a vision which “embraces” the woman (respectively the reality) in her complete visible and invisible embodiment. The episode mentioned here is illustrative for an entire vision which shapes the substantial opposition between the two confronting civilizations, respectively, the Venetian and the Walachian one. In this respect, Radu Negru’s words addressed to Paolo Erratino, the poet of the court, (let us remark how transparent the etymology of this name is) are very significant: “You are much cleverer than I am, he says after a moment of silence, but I know more essential things than you do. With all your knowledge you will never discover them. Your cleverness choked you like an ivy and now it forbids you from seeing. Soon it will suffocate you.”¹ These words, as those uttered in Trevisan’s palace scene, reflect the failure of Radu Negru’s attempt to self-exile. Only here, in Venice, his inner self discovers the hidden wisdom, inherited from his people and its superiority in front of the Venetian’s sterile erudition. In the same time, the two episodes, among others, lead to one of the fundamental assumption which defines the work of the writer: the clear opposition between two human models, the dissociation between two existential attitudes, which can be reduced at the opposition between an authentic existence and an inauthentic one.

This antagonism is an essential theme in Vintilă Horia’s novels. All the novels are, without exception, novels which follow the knowledge path, novels of initiation crowned by a blessed revelation. This revelation, gained at the end of an initiation is embodied as a definitive option for the authentic model, of the two antagonistic models. The voivode from *The Resignation Knight* has inherited, besides the crown, his father’s deadly sin (motif taken from Kierkegaard)², being tempted to abdicate in front of the unbearable responsibility and, in the same time, to rise against the Power which lay such a burden on him, “without even asking him”. Della Porta, the unconverted Venetian, stimulates his Promethean impulse³: “We are Prometheus, our actions repeat his saga. One day, through us, people would no longer be humiliated [...]. There is no object or aim, visible or invisible, which can escape our thirst for knowledge. We are God”⁴.

We are witnessing here the classical conflict with the limits of the human condition, with the absurdity of the existence, a concept theorized by Pascal and ingrained in the European consciousness by Kierkegaard. Vintilă Horia borrows from the Danish philosopher not only the title and his novel’s motto, but also the theme of the difficult relationship between humanity and the limits assessed by God.

For Kierkegaard, assuming the option and the responsibility which comes with it generates suffering, but refusing the option leads to spiritual death⁵. If at the beginning of the novel, Vintilă Horia’s character wants to avoid the “agonizing strain”, which the necessity of the option involves, at the end, he will discover the sense of the authentic resignation, perfect equivalent of the Christian humbleness. For this to happen, he has to

¹ Ibid., 125.

² Søren Kierkegaard, *Traité du désespoir* (Paris, Gallimard, 1963), 7.

³ Ion Vlad, “Simbolurile cunoașterii și ale existenței,” (Symbols of knowledge and existence) *Tribuna* 3 (22.01.1992).

⁴ Vintilă Horia, *Cavalerul resemnării*, 47.

⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Traité du désespoir*, 49-85, *passim*.

confront the anti-model offered by the Venetians. The configuration of the entire space of Venice suggests the twilight, the morbid sophistication specific for the decadence, with the perversion of the values, with the shadow that embraces the view, with the sleep which descends upon the doge's eyelids and after all with the resignation before the Turkish threat, the symbol of the supreme Evil. This is the second meaning of the concept of *resignation* in the novel, the resignation in front of the evil, consecutive to the revolt theorized by Della Porta, captured in Aloiso Loredano's paintings and in Paolo Erratino's words. The Prince's living in Venice reflects his initiated experience, through the direct confrontation with the established model. He will realize that it is an evil model, its assumption will lead him to spiritual death: "To stay would mean to forget", the hero says to himself¹. His option would lead him to the return in the Walachian "wood", a space in total opposition with the Venetian one, symbolized by material poverty but abundant in spiritual richness. It is a space of wisdom and of authentic values, in opposition with the perverted knowledge and fake values of the Venetian space.

This binary opposition is also clearly marked in the novel *God was born in exile* where we find the opposition between the space of Dacia and that of Rome. For Ovid, who is a sophisticated Roman, the contact with the wild space of Tomis is a real shock and his initial abhorrence is imminent. But soon he will get through the surfaces and will discover a world of freedom which he groaned unconsciously for a long time. "I have found a path which I had been searching for all my life, without finding it" the character notes in his diary, remembering that he was once interested in the Pythagorean theory². (Vintilă Horia suggests that this is the real reason for Ovid's exile, and not the immorality promoted by *The Art of Love*. It is a valid hypothesis stated by Nicolae Lascu in the volume dedicated to the Roman poet.³)

The space of Dacia, organized around the Holy Mountain is being transformed gradually from a space of punishment into a blessed one, which reveals a full sense of existence for the poet, offering him, a belated, but blessed self-recapture. The space of Dacia, through its special configuration, overlaps itself perfectly on the Walachian one from the other novel, while Augustus's Rome is the counterpart of Venice. The same strict antinomy between two types of humanity is reflected in the novel *Above North*, where we are witnessing Matteo Muriano, a stranger who is initiating himself in the deep mystery of a mythical Moldavia. The people of this county live "beyond the learning of the Greek books and beyond those up-side-downs characterized for our living, we, the one from the bookish Western, full of imitation and cast in marble artistically grounded in faithlessness"⁴.

Vintilă Horia's work is very seamless in what concerns the thematic field, the shades are often insignificant and what remains important is the prototype which can be traced in every novel at an easy rate. Each of his novels asserts one of these kinds of

¹ Vintilă Horia, *Cavalerul resemnării*, 93.

² Vintilă Horia, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil* (God was born in exile), trans. Al. Castaing, reexamined by the autor, afterword by Daniel Rops, study by Monica Nedelcu (Craiova: Editura Europa, 1991), 59.

³ Nicolae Lascu, *Ovidiu. Omul și poetul* (Ovid. The man and the poet) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1971), 60-66.

⁴ Vintilă Horia, *Mai sus de miazănoapte* (Above north) (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1992), 80.

archetype, a human model, whose ascendancy can be easily figured. From this point of view, his manner of writing is a transparent one, namely because his spiritual masters are indicated directly either in his novels or in his theoretical writings.

One of this archetype is that of Plato's, having a long history and initially being defined in his *Phaedo*. As Eliade¹ had shown, Plato takes and integrates elements from Orphism and Pythagoreanism, he determines as the imperative of existence – the dismissal of the contingent and the bend of the human spirit to the native word of Ideas. The *philosophers*, in the proper sense of the word, are Plato's closest category, are those who subordinate their life to the love of wisdom, deliberately ignoring any other activities. For them, life is assumed as an exile, as a long preparation for *returning*, which is desired and not feared. This model is implicitly in opposition with the other one, which defines existence in terms of mundane objectives, abased it, breaking it from what is essential: "It seems that all we can do in our lifetime in order to get close to knowledge is to break any connection with our body, except for physiological necessities. Consequently, it is not a strong proof for you, Socrates said, that the man whom you will see revolted in front of death was a bodily lover, not a wisdom lover? Because the same man is maybe a lover of money, of honours, that he cherishes one of those, or both."²

A long tradition will take this theme and will treat it intensively, as in fact a distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence. It is a tradition which Vintilă Horia implicitly assumes. Some Gnostic suggestions clearly appear in his work, as in *God was born in exile*, where we find out about "a humanity with a flesh heart" and where it is said that "soma estis sema."³ Gnostics are those who distinguish three types of humanity, respectively: *somatics*, *psychics* and *pneumatics*, introducing in the same time the difference between elite and the amorphous assemblage⁴. When Boethius, who is himself a character of the novel *Persecutez Boece*, discovers the *The Consolation of Philosophy*⁵, he actually continues, in other shades, the Platonist knowledge. Not least, Vintilă Horia was attracted by Existentialism. As we have already seen, from Kierkegaard, who is the pioneer of this current, the writer took his novel's motto (*The Resignation Knight*), and Heidegger is explicitly mentioned in the novel *Persecutez Boece*. The German philosopher is, just like Vintilă Horia, a critic of the technological development of the modern society and of its negative implications. Consequently, "the daring" of the modern man is perfectly equivalent with the "rebellion" from *The Resignation Knight*, while the "docility" is similar with Vintilă Horia's resignation⁶. The theme of self-edification through the *active memory* is also an existentialist theme, which is an essential argument of Vintilă Horia's work. It is important here to notice that

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase* (The history of religious beliefs and ideas), trans. Cezar Baltag (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1991), vol. 2, 180-186.

² Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Dialoguri* (Dialogues), trans. C. Papacostea, examined by C. Noica, (Bucharest: EPLU, 1968), 66.e-67.a.

³ Vintilă Horia, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil*, 159.

⁴ See Serge Hutin, *Les gnostiques* (Paris, PUF, 1959).

⁵ Boethius and Salvianus, *Scieri* (Writings), trans. and commentaries David Popescu (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1992)

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Originea operei de artă* (The origin of the work of art), chapter "La ce bun poeți" (What are poets for), trans. and notes Th. Kleininger and G. Liiceanu, introduction by C. Noica (Bucharest: Univers, 1982), 236-261, *passim*

the ideologists submitted to this theory operate the distinction between two ways of living in the world. The concept of elite exists, even though is no longer associated with the transcendental truth, but defined by the capacity of assuming one's existence and building it through continuous spiritual effort. In contrast, the inert assemblage is incapable of authentic existence. (We can mention here Jaspers's¹ *finite man*, Ortega y Gasset's² *material man* or Berdiaev's³ *superficial man*).

Finally, we can refer to René Guénon and his followers, because Vintilă Horia deliberately adhered to their theories. René Guénon is known for his virulent tone in the discourse about the modern society, seeing it as the deplorable result of a long involution. He takes from Hindu culture the notion of Manwantara, placing our society under the sign of Kali-Yuga, an evil age, the last of the human cycles. (In this regard, Cornel Ungureanu⁴ noticed that the final eve is a key concept in Vintilă Horia's work). The cause of the involution is the alienation from the spiritual values, from the tradition which became the privilege of a small number of illuminists who have access to the final truths and salvation. The rest of humanity stands under the sign of the evanescent world and its destiny is to pass into nothingness⁵.

II. Vintilă Horia's adherence to these conceptions is immediately visible. We have to mention that the writer did not assume these influences directly, but he is congenial with them after he has exposed his personal vision, although not very systematic, in his youth articles.⁶ We can speak about an early shaped vision which was kept almost unmodified during his entire career. Obviously, this conception shaped the writer's vision upon literature and art in general. As we have seen, a dominant line in the evolution of his heroes is the longing, more or less conscious, for knowledge, seen as access to the hidden mystery of the world. In fact, this aspiration belongs to the writer and it is the one which generates the artistic act. We opened our paper with a suggestive scene which reflected the substantial difference between the broad wisdom of the Walachian land and the Venetian's narrowness. Consequently, we have discovered that, in fact, the novel emphasized the opposition of two ways of conceiving life and reality. The writer totally assumes this distinction and transfers it on the way of conceiving literature. The result: two types of literature, of which just one deserves its name. Here is what Vintilă Horia wrote in no. 2 of the journal *Meșterul Manole*: "Art is the discovery of a symbol. The writer's mission is like the one of the man's off-stage who, lifting the curtain reveals the

¹ Karl Jaspers, "Condiții și posibilități ale unui nou umanism" (Conditions and possibilities of a new humanism), in *Texte filozofice* (Philosophical texts), ed. Bruno Wurtz and George Purdea, trans. and notes George Purdea (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1981)

² José Ortega y Gasset, *Revolta maselor* (The revolt of the masses), trans. Coman Lupu (București: Humanitas, 1994).

³ Nikolai Berdiaev. *Un nou Ev Mediu* (The new Middle Ages), introduction by Sandu Frunză, (Craiova: Editura Omniscope, 1995)

⁴ Cornel Ungureanu. *Mircea Eliade și literatura exilului* (Mircea Eliade and exile literature) (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1995)

⁵ René Guénon, *Domnia cantităților și semnele vremurilor* (The rule of quantity and the signs of times), trans. F. Mihailescu and D. Stanca (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995).

⁶ Cristian Radu, "Publicistica lui Vintilă Horia" (The journalism of Vintilă Horia), in *Tribuna* 44 (31.10.1996).

unknown world of the scene, a world of full and clear meanings and bright deeds, which are kept in shadow by the average curtain of life.” The same theoretical position is reaffirmed by the writer when he glosses over Rebreanu’s new novel, *Gorila* where he seizes upon “the drama of the realistic writer who tries to bring a light upon, *ad litteram*, the archaic precept of creation, ‘*ars est imitatio naturae*’”. There is a drama in this struggle, because the act of representing faithfully a given reality means to copy, believing in the same time that you, as a writer, can create a reality, which is, in fact, only a faded and average reflection of life, projected and mediated by your own mirrors.” He continues in the same article: “To be a writer means to let go of the objectiveness and to reproduce it as dishonest as realistic you are”¹. In another writing he enforces the artist with “the fear of imitation” and asks him imperatively “to transfigure, to recreate reality, to impregnate it with the original rules of his own soul”. After this, he concludes: “The great art of the world was always a fantastic art, an escape from reality through the assembly in unnatural times and symbols of a whole reality of life”.² This assessment is worth remembering, even if its articulation is slightly ambiguous, because in one of the next numbers of the same journal, this statement is invested with a value of “aesthetical faith”³. There is also another sentence which is eloquent in this sense: “The mysticism, understood as a dive of the self in the womb of the supreme pneuma, appears forever as an ontological condition of the artist”⁴. This aesthetical belief was often mentioned, both in his novels (through the characters’ voices) and in his theoretical writings. Here is an example of Ovid’s thought recorded in his diary: “The poets are also prophets, they are the connection between beauty and men, and if beauty is God, the poets should reveal the true God”⁵. In another novel, where the character is El Greco the art is seen as “a channel of searching the truth”⁶. On the other hand, in the volume which the writer considers to be “the essence of his academic career”, he clearly asserts that the novel is a technique for knowledge, and that the writer is the prototype of the connoisseur man.⁷

For clarifying this statement, we recover in short terms another parameter of Vintilă Horia’s thought, which is the denunciation of the deep crisis of the modern world, always reaffirmed in an obsessive way and in firm terms. In the number from October 1936 of the journal *Gândirea*, under the pretext of a review for a volume written by Alexis Carrel, the young writer of only twenty one years old, exposes the degradation of the spiritual side of the human existence, and in the same way the specialization of the sciences, the relativization of the knowledge up to a point where its

¹ The review of *Gorila*, *Gândirea* 12 (December 1938)

² “O nouă înțelegere a fantasticului” (A new understanding of the fantastic), *Meșterul Manole* 2 (February 1939)

³ “La inaugurarea unui sistem estetic” (On the inauguration of an aesthetic system), *Meșterul Manole* 7-10 (September-December 1939)

⁴ “Miracolul fascist” (The fascist miracle), *Gândirea* 10 (October 1937)

⁵ Horia Vintilă, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil*, 170.

⁶ Horia Vintilă, *Un mormânt în cer* (A grave in the sky), trans. Mihai Cantuniari and Tudora Șandru Olteanu (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1994), 61.

⁷ Horia Vintilă, *Introducción a la literatura del siglo XX*, ed. Andres Bello (Madrid Universidad Gabriela Mistral, 1989), 140.

unity becomes impossible to be recreated in the mind of the contemporaries. This idea is continued in *Introducción a la literatura del siglo XX*, where the cause of the crisis is seen as the incapacity of man of finding satisfactory answers for his existential questions, in his impossibility of understanding the world and his own human condition.” Hence, we do not know what we die for and we ignore the goal we direct to.”¹ Concisely, we find in Vintilă Horia’s work the whole arsenal of accusations towards the contemporary society, the writer bonding himself to the conception promoted by traditionalism, existentialism and esotericism. Consequently, the solution promoted in this volume is inspired by the last of these doctrines, esotericism. Besides the theoretical content of this doctrine, it is an ample way of understanding the world, “a historical-metaphysical vision”, as it is named by the writer².

Coming back at the content of our study, it is this kind of model which literature should aim at, and the novel in particular. It is about an absolute sense of knowledge, which should integrate the Wholeness and reveal its indissoluble unity. If the evolution of the sciences led to the fragmentation of the knowledge and the transformation of it into a way of expanding the material legacy, the novel is the way through which the unity must be rebuilt and the existence should regain its supreme goal, dignity. The sciences, no matter what field, are not condemned, but their infusions should be integrated into a “general epistemology”, into an effort of total knowledge, which has wholeness as its goal. The only one susceptible to accomplish this goal is the novel: “this technique of knowledge with epistemological possibilities, in a way more esthetic than scientific, is the novel. Literature, in general, and the novel in particular, could be the proper field for a connection between different types of human knowledge”. What follows is that the writer is the one who “knows and describes in order to understand the world around him”³.

There is the possibility that some critics show reticence or even rejection upon such affirmations. This kind of reactions might be legitimate. Our objectivity advises us that the whole literary history book is impregnated with a strong essayistic sense, somehow not in accordance with the title, and that the author selects the closest writers and analyzes them from the perspective of his old obsessions.

We have to make clear that this kind of conception upon literature, upon art in general, was born a long time ago and, at least in the time when this book was released, was timely. A tenuous interpreter as Nicolae Balotă was writing in 1968: “There is no art like the novel where the man looks for himself so feverishly. The present writers, trying to communicate the incommunicable, they attempt to explore the Being, who the older novelists understood as a psychological and social entity, but today, more and more, the Western writers seen it as an ontological entity. The obsessive goal of the present novelist is the essence of the Being, its plenary becoming”⁴.

Vintilă Horia’s “daring” is, in fact, the act of placing the novel into a sovereign position among other artistic forms of expression, and implicitly, he is offering the

¹ Ibid., 90.

² Ibid., 105.

³ Ibid., 96.

⁴ Nicolae Balotă, “Introduction” to R.-M. Albères, *Istoria romanului modern* (The history of modern novel), trans. Leonid Dimov (Bucharest: EPLU, 1968)

writer a privileged status. (His wisdom lies in his ability of reminding his contemporaries, who often are tempted to forget that the novel, and literature in general, are forms of art.) It is worth mentioning that in history, art was often seen as the first (sometimes the only authentic) in the order of human activities. Even Plato, known for his tough condemnation of poetry and its relegation from the Citadel, admits that the poet is the “Gods’ translator”, the voice of the divinity. Being in a state of grace, the poet writes some poems that “are not human, but divine and belonging to Gods”¹. In *The Republic*, after a close reading, suggested by Noica’s *Cuvânt prevenitor* (Admonitory word) it is revealed that the art is disclaimed as an imitation of *this* world, and that it would be better instead an art which would imitate the Essences. If he repudiates the poetry for its irrationality (after all, for its adequacy at the contingent) he suggests that he could accept a poetry “which would deal with the truth and would be reliable”², a poetry “opened to idea”, as Noica³ calls it.

In Plotinus, instead, all trace of ambiguity vanishes, and the art becomes the only form of access for the authentic knowledge. Here appears for the first time the opposition between the artistic knowledge and the scientific one, which is totally inefficient. When the soul accepts the scientific knowledge of an object, it alienates itself from the One and ceases to be itself, because the science implies discursive rationality and discursive rationality implies multiplicity. In conclusion, “for reaching the One, you have to be above science”⁴. Hence, there are two types of knowledge, as W. Tatarkiewicz⁵ remarks, one rational discursive and another one, named “the wisdom of Gods and the happy ones”, which can be fully traced only in the artistic act. For Plotinus, this implies a direct intuition of the absolute, intuition which generates in the artist’s spirit the so-called “inner shape”. The art work is born out of the concrete embodiment of this inner shape which, as generative core, assures its beauty and its revealing effect upon the one who contemplates it. In this sense, “the aesthetic feeling [becomes] a metaphysical elevation of the human. In his inspiring language and in his pathetic style, Plotinus compares this emotion with a saint enthusiasm, in which the man gives away all the vainness of the physical life and elevates himself through the eternal land”⁶. Finally, we have to mention W. Tatarkiewicz’s addend who shows that Plotinus “situated art between this world and the other one”⁷, endowing the artist with a privileged status, who through his gift, is a mediator between humanity and idealism. These considerations are important because Vintilă Horia, without getting in contact with Plotinus’s philosophy, seems to get his inspiration directly from here, when seeing

¹ Plato, *Ion*, in *Opere* (Works), trans. Dan Slușanschi and Petru Creția (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1976), vol. 2, 533d-534e

² Plato, *Republica* (The republic), in *Opere*, reviewed edition by Constantin Noica and Petru Creția, translation, interpretation, introduction, notes and annexes by Andrei Cornea, (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), vol. 5, 604d-608a

³ Constantin Noica, *Cuvânt preliminar* (Foreword) to *Republica*, 16.

⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 6.9.4. (apud Grigore Tăușan, *Filozofia lui Plotin* [Plotinus’s philosophy] [Iași: Editura Agora, 1993])

⁵ Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, *Istoria esteticii* (The history of aesthetics), trans. Sorin Mărculescu, (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1978), vol. 1, 467.

⁶ Grigore Tăușan, *Filozofia lui Plotin*, 256.

⁷ Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, *Istoria esteticii*, 466.

in the creation “the imitation of a blustering interior landscape” or when he considers the poets “prophets, revelators of the divine order”.

Following this lineage, we have to mention F.W.J. Schelling, the one who has also antagonized the art with science and cast a reflection on the last one. “The science itself, which, through its gratuitousness, situates itself in the proximity of art, remains long behind it just because it always directs itself towards an exterior goal and it has to be just an agent for what is supreme”¹. Practically, for the German philosopher, the artistic act is the only shape through which the self can recreate the unity between *objective* and *subjective*, between *conscious* and *unconscious*. The artistic intuition (“unmediated and incomprehensible”) is the only one which assures the absolute self-consciousness of the spirit: “By means of this intuition the whole (supreme) problem of the transcendental philosophy is solved”². Schelling is one of the few philosophers who offer art the first place, proposing it as a model for philosophy: “If the aesthetic intuition is nothing but the transcendental one transformed in the objective one, implicitly the art is the only authentic and eternal authority of the philosophy [...]. For the philosopher art is supreme just because it reveals for him the most sacred realm where it burns in a single flame, in an eternal and original immortality, what is divided in nature and in history”³.

The list could go on with some other thinkers who offer art a privileged status. Let us remember Heidegger as well, who, less generous, placed the poetry (“citadel of the Being fulfilled by words”⁴) next to philosophy, both being the ones which “elevate themselves from Being and reach its truth”⁵.

This kind of vision upon art is fully shared by Vintilă Horia. His only “dare” as we have already mentioned, is that of placing the novel on a sovereign position. This is a debatable option, which can generate a contention with other categories of artists, but in the same time is a vision shared and argued by some prestigious writers and critics. For the moment, our interest is to show that this option is reflected upon Vintilă Horia’s thematic field and upon the structure of his narrative discourse.

Concerning the thematic field, we can say that the label of *novels of knowledge* find its support in the general opinion of the critics upon Vintilă Horia’s work. The same critics assign some constants concerning the thematic of his work. Besides all, we have the supra-theme of the knowledge, which subordinates the theme of the exile, of creation, of love, as privileged forms of knowledge; then we have the theme of the ending cycle, which shape the chronotope of Vintilă Horia’s literature, situating it under the sign of the perverted values, of the “reign of the quantity” and implicitly of the crepuscule which dominates the world, auguring the night and in the same time the dawn, the resurrection; the elite theme, the authentic existence, opposed to a terrestrial bounded existence. The opposition of these two types of existence is expressively embodied in the opposition between memory and forgiveness, two central elements of the writer’s work. We have to mention here the complementary meanings of the concept

¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Sistemul idealismului transcendențial* (The system of transcendental idealism), trans. Radu Gabriel Pârvu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 303.

² Ibid., 291.

³ Ibid., 307.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Originea operei de artă*, 201.

⁵ Ibid., 317.

of memory. Firstly, the memory is the equivalent of the perpetual wake, of the deliberate conscious effort to remain bound with the unchangeable values. Then, the memory is seen as the only weapon against time: thinking your existence, reliving it, bestowing it in words, whose magic powers shirk it from the demolishing power of time. In other words, memory represents the activity of the spirit itself, the necessary and self-assured condition of the plenary existence.

III. It is clear that this kind of thematic joins a larger problematic, that of the human existence, transforming literature into a meditation upon the deep significances of the world and of the existence. Liviu Petrescu, critic and theoretician, noticed in an older study that “the theme of the human condition is a twentieth century theme, if we take Albert Camus’s observation, according to which in art collective passions take the place of individual passions”.¹ This is not an isolated observation, because this type of novel came into prominence in the first half of the twentieth century. The young Vintilă Horia, when he made visible in a convincing way his artistic view, he bonded himself in the spirit of the age. He would later discover his fellows, would give them his credit and would appreciate them, discovering in their literature the same grave questioning which he also approached.

This phenomenon is visible in the above mentioned *Introduccion...*. After he reconsiders the humanity crises and reaffirms his literary doctrine, he goes through the literary history of the twentieth century and, through interpretation and personal consideration, he converts it into a lively mirror of the evolution (involution!) of humanity. Corin Braga, when making commentaries upon this book, signals that Vintilă Horia sees in the literature of this century “not a different area of the spirit, but an instrument of experiencing reality (the global reality) and an anthropological geophone.”²

According to Vintilă Horia, the whole literature of the twentieth century illustrates the process of the continuous degradation of the human race, the forthcoming of the end, which, in different shapes, was signalled by Spengler, Nietzsche, Toynbee and especially Guénon. In literature, the direct expression of the degradation of values is reflected in the forms of vanguard, which is integrated as “a symptom of the existential crises and of the global technique of modifying the being.”³

The writer’s focus is on the great creators, those who deliver through their literature a meditation upon humanity problems. The first signs of the “sickness” are signalled by Dostoevsky and Kafka⁴ (authors who are assigned little space in this volume). Musil’s *The Man without Qualities* is seen as the prototype of the dehumanized man, and the symbolic space of Kakanian is a metaphor not just of the empire, but of the agonized world.

In the writer’s hierarchy, the preferred authors are Ernst Jünger, Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse. In Jünger’s *On the Marble Cliffs*, Vintilă Horia sees the confrontation

¹ Liviu Petrescu, *Romanul condiției umane* (The novel of human condition) (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1979), 11.

² Corin Braga, “Literatura preapocaliptică,” (Pre-apocalyptic literature), *Steaua* 9 (September 1990).

³ Vintilă Horia, *Introduccion a la literatura del siglo XX*, 167.

⁴ Ibid., 144-145.

of the two principles which fight for the human destiny from its beginning, even if Jünger wanted to punish, through his parable, the ascension of the third Reich. Then, *The Treatise of the Rebel* is an advocacy of “the freedom hidden in the woods,” for refusing slavery and assuming the unrest of the freedom.¹ Regarding Hesse, his work is seen, in a metaphoric sense, as a permanent effort of finding “a clearance in the woods, where science, religion, philosophy and art can integrate themselves for building the image of a new man, capable of fighting with disaster and crisis”. The death of Joseph Knecht, from *The Glass Bead Game*, is regarded as “a return to essence and the resurrection of faith”, and Goldmund’s experience (from *Narziss and Goldmund*) is an initiatory one, he gains access to authentic faith through art and suffering.² Finally, Thomas Mann describes in *The Magic Mountain* the same sinuous way through knowledge, through life, which is assumed and understood by Hans Castorp at Berghof³ sanatorium, in the presence of death and agony, at the end of an initiation.

Even without making these brief considerations, the connection between Vintilă Horia’s work and those mentioned above is self-evident. Hans Castorp, just as the heroes of the Romanian writer, is himself an exiled, far away from his country, from his family, from his “bourgeois” life. There, in the sanatorium on the high mountain, in the closeness of illness and death, he would build his own conception about life, instinctively rejecting Naphta’s and Settembrini’s pedagogical burst, finding in the end his own way through fulfilment: “there are two ways which lead to life. One is the regular one, straight and honest. The other one is dangerous, gets through death, and is the genial way.”⁴

The closest writer to Vintilă Horia, through his artistic conception reflected in his work, seems to be Hermann Hesse. His own confessions are relevant in this regard: “to create means to follow the path of the life voice, which I hear inside of me, which calls me to follow it, even if I am not capable to distinguish its meaning and its goal, even if it will take me away from the road to happiness, and dip me in dark and incertitude”. He sees in art “an alternative for the alienated civilization” and creates his work as a personal citadel and, in the same time, as an “expression of the resistance that the spirit opposes to the barbarian forces.”⁵ He would transfer this passion of quest upon his characters, restless spirits, chosen ones, hating people’s inaction and getting through the twists and turns of life to make a sense for his own existence. Hesse’s obsession is the possibility of finding a solution for the conflict which turns apart the human consciousness, the one between spirit and life, between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*.

This antinomy is reflected with extreme clearness in Hesse’s heroes. His novels deal with pairs of characters, whose confrontation reflects the opposition between the spiritual character and the vital one. We have, on the one side, Joseph Knecht and Narcis, on the other side, Plinio Designori and Goldmund. Each of them experience in a

¹ Ibid., 273-283.

² Ibid., 306-312.

³ Ibid., 312-315.

⁴ Thomas Mann, *Muntele vrăjit* (The magic mountain), trans. P. Manoliu, (Bucharest: EPLU, 1967), 641.

⁵ George Guțu, *Preface* to Hermann Hesse, *Lupul de stepă. Siddharta* (Steppenwolf. Siddharta), trans. George Guțu (Bucharest: Univers, 1983)

bitter way the incompleteness, the melancholy of the “otherness”, the unfairness of the necessary option they have to take: “Ah, and life does not make any true sense unless if you can achieve both of them, if life would not be separated between this empty “or-or”! To be able to create without paying the price of life! To live without letting go at the elevation of creation! Was this impossible? All the existence seems to be built on duality, on contraries.”¹

Following the line of Platonic philosophy, and then, of Gnosticism (but also Christianity), there is the tendency of solving this antinomy through the generalization of the spiritual dimension to the injury of the unvalued “living in the world”. Hesse’s heroes, besides their choices, test until breakdown the principle they choose, discovering its failure and seeing, only in the end, the saving solution of the balance. We are witnessing here a revaluing of life, and it is also here that the existentialist philosophy finds its influence. The isolation of the spirit from life, the idea of a conflict between the two “half” of life is displaced by the suggestion of their complementariness. If in the novels *The Seventh Letter*, *God was Born in Exile* or *The Resignation Knight*, Vintilă Horia seems to frame the first solution, the one-way choice, in other novels he converges to Hesse’s vision. El Greco’s observation in *A Grave in Haven* (“what wisdom lays in life’s contradictions when they get together”²) can be named as a central idea in Hesse’s novels. This last idea is made visible in the novel *Persecutez Boece*, where Ștefan Diaconu dreams about building a “complementary ontology” which should integrate the unity of the human historical side with the corpuscular (supra temporal) one.³ In the second part of this novel, Boethius later understands “the complementary solidarity” of Plato’s and Aristotle’s work, which, joined together, reveal the human and world complexity.⁴

Among the writers Vintilă Horia did not mention in his *Introduccion...*, Hermann Broch is congenial with him. In his *The Death of Virgil*, he describes the reign of Augustus under the same atmosphere of an ending which embraces the world, an image present also in *God was Born in Exile*. The parallel with the century in which he writes is clear and the writer confesses this directly.⁵ In Broch’s case, we have to mention, in addition, the clear identity of his conception on the novel with Vintilă Horia’s one. “If there is a right of literature to exist, if there is an over temporality of poetic creation, than there is the absoluteness of knowledge. Because the wholeness of the understanding of the world, as it is that the work of art dreams, concentrates the whole knowledge of an infinite human evolution into a single act of knowledge: into a single existence, into a single work of art and in its wholeness has to be included the eternity”⁶. For this writer, the pure aesthetical function of art is unacceptable, he dreams about writing a “gnoseological” or “polyhistoric” novel whose mission is the integrative knowledge of reality.

¹ Hermann Hesse, *Narcis și Gură de Aur* (Narcissus and Goldmund), trans. Ivan Deneș, (Bucharest: RAO, 1995), 228.

² Vintilă Horia, *Un mormânt în cer*, 57.

³ Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea de ostrogoți. Prigoniți-l pe Boețiu!* (Persecutez Boece!), trans. Ileana Cantuniari (Craiova: Editura Europa, 1993), 14; 45,

⁴ Ibid., 178

⁵ Ioan Roman, Preface to Hermann Broch, *Moartea lui Vergiliu* (Virgil’s death), trans. Ioan Roman (Bucharest: Univers, 1975), 15.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

Finally, it's worth mentioning here Julien Gracq, a writer less present in the commentaries upon the modern novel. His novel, *The Opposing Shore*, is closely connected with Vintilă Horia's writings. Julien Gracq imagines, in a lyrical way, the utopian realm of Orsenna as a crepuscular world, crushed under a great, extinction history, ceased by a restless sleep, hunted by anticipations. The suspense of this world is vanished by Aldo, a chosen hero, obsessed of what is beyond the moving border reflected in the crystal of the sea. His gesture of crossing the forbidden border (besides the fact that he awakes Orsenna) is the equivalent of a revelation, of an enlightenment which gives sense to a confusing existence. "The inner feeling which lay out the web of my life, still from my childhood, was that of a wandering deeper and deeper. And now, the irrational feeling of the right path made the salted desert to bloom all around me. It seems to me that I was blessed with the promise and the revelation of another pole, where the roads unite themselves instead of separating."¹

In the preface of the novel, the professor Nicolae Balotă notices, on one way, the model of the agonizing civilization and the waiting state which arouses the desire for knowledge in the souls of the chosen ones, the searching for a revelation which should end the wandering in the dark. On the other way, he suggests that, in front of Gracq, the world opens like a book, that "the creature and the things are not detached, are not lying in lethargy, but they point to something beyond them."² For Gracq, reality has a double dimension and his interest is guided towards what is beyond appearances. Because of this, for the French writer the literary work represents a palimpsest, which hides in its filigree "a magical text", which reveals the meanings of the world for those who know how to see.

IV. When investing the novel with a gnoseological function and approaching a philosophical thematic, this leads to some consequences upon the technique of the novel, upon the configuration of the narrative discourse. Nicolae Balotă's observations concerning J. Gracq's work can also be applied to the work of any the writers we have already mentioned and, evidently, on Vintilă Horia's writings. Returning to Vintilă Horia's work, we have to remind that the shades and details of his creation are less important, his focus is on the "essential things". He frequently chose his characters from the historical field, without a closed or detailed description of the respective historical context. Even if he approached the Greek Antiquity (in *The Seventh Letter*), the Romanian Middle Ages (*Above North* or *The Resignation Knight*), the Romanian Post-War Age (*Persecutez Boece*), the timing is always the one of the final age. The crepuscular atmosphere, the indefinite waiting, the anticipation of the imminent ending and implicitly of a new beginning, all these images are present in his novels.

The space is always described in a brief way, neglecting some concrete features. What is said about it is enough to know that it is a space of malefic glamour or of benign poverty. For example, the description of Venice is very significant in this context; it is concentrated in three sentences: "Everything was beautiful and tidy. No spontaneous

¹ Julien Gracq, *Țărnuțelul* (*The Opposing Shore*), trans. Gellu Naum, (Bucharest: Univers, 1970), 201.

² Nicolae Balotă, *Introduction* to Julien Gracq, *Țărnuțelul*, 5-9.

things could happen. The sky seems to be the men's work.” The epical dimension in itself is not very dense (should be mentioned that his novels have in general a small number of pages). Vintilă Horia's characters move and talk just so much as to specify their belonging to one or another antagonistic existential models.

We find no concern for the particular aspects of life, not an effort to describe in detail a segment of reality. There is no focus on the visible side of this reality; it is described just to suggest the a-temporal foundation which lay beneath it. From this point of view the things get a new shape, different from the common one: a shepherd is more learned than the Western scholars, a poor and ignored by history country becomes a blessed land, and the abject space of a kennel is broader and more suitable for living than a kingdom. This is not the common face of things, but is the real one, as it is suggested, because it is built by the Reality itself, by that level in relation to which reality is just a mere reflection.

Erich Auerbach, in the first chapter of his known book, *Mimesis*, proposes a comparison between the Odyssey and the Bible. Along with the author, we find out that the people, the deeds, the phenomena brought in scene by Homer are *what they are* and nothing more. Everything happens in only one level, the background does not exist, any secondary significance is out of order. The reality is just as it is presented to us, is the only and absolute reality.

By contrast, the Bible favours the background. The characters that act lose their consistency, their material presence, the role of people of “flesh and blood” is diminished. There are few words and gestures, the spatial and temporal clues are sketchily presented and, in most of the cases, not important. A thing, in itself and taken separately from its context, has no meaning. What remains important is its projection on the background; a thing gets consistency only in relationship with a vertical level which dominates the whole scene. It is what Auerbach called “figural representation”.

This technique of representation starts from the conception of the universe as an absolute unity, from the connection between the horizontal level and the vertical one. All that happens in the horizontal level gets meaning in the vertical one and the objective reality is overwhelmed by the hidden meanings. “The connection between events is not seen as a temporal or causal development, but as a unit in the divine plan, all these events being its links and its reflections”¹. In other words, “the temporal-horizontal and causal connection between events is broken, now and here, they do not exist anymore as links in a mundane existence, but on contrary, of something that had always been there and will be accomplished in the future”².

Auerbach's already classic contribution was referred here because the figural representation dominates Vintilă Horia's work and also the work of the other writers mentioned above. This type of novel requires this kind of representation as long as its goal is to follow not the effective shape of empirical reality, but the mysterious meanings which are hidden in it. In other words, reality is important just because, in its entirety, is a reflection of the worlds of essence, a “forest of symbols”, as a famous quote. We have seen how firmly the young writer disclaimed the realistic literature,

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. I. Negoitescu, (Bucharest: EPLU, 1967), 18.

² Ibid., 81.

making a resolute option for the “fantastic” literature. The writer’s devotion has to be, not toward reality, but toward the “inner landscape” which will be born out of the contemplation of reality. The writer will recreate the reality, will impose his own rules, will become “the creator of a personal universe, who looks to reproduce the hidden meanings of the universe, and not its complex visible manifestation.

Some of Nicolae Manolescu’s observations, from his ample study dedicated to the novel¹, are welcomed in this context. Compared with “Noah’s ark”, the novel is being characterized by the choice it makes, by the fact that it is a “sample of reality”. This choice leads to the existence of a goal, of an established sense, in front of which the selected sample has to become expressive. “Not all the people entered Noah’s ark, just like a heroic poetry could not contain the whole reality; the novel reproduces it on a small scale and it systemizes it, it is a reconstruction of the universe, not a restitution of it”.

Questioning “what is the meaning of realism in the novel”, Manolescu uses the definition which Arnold Toynbee gives to the city, “a place that cannot produce its necessary goods and it is, because of this, dependent on the agricultural Hinterland”. The novel is similar to the city, it cannot feed itself alone, it needs the Hinterland of the empirical reality. The critic puts a light on the ways in which the ages of the novel deal with this “appendix”, which is the reality: the *Doric* novel and the *Ionic* one searches, even if from different perspective, to reproduce reality for itself. The *Doric* does that from an objective perspective, while the *Ionic* does it from a subjective, relative perspective, but they work in the same extent, trying to capture the reality as exactly as possible, in an analytical and classifying approach. The two novelistic prototypes want to substitute the reality with the fiction, making the last one similar to the first one, searching, in other words, to create an illusion closer to the reality appearance.

The “anti-natural” approach of the *Corinthian* appears to be in contrast: “The Hinterland of the Corinthian novel recovers its conventional status: allegorical, mythical, imaginative, exotic or just bookish”. The reality of this last type of novel is conventional, it signifies, it does not copy, it is just a way of outlining another reality, an idealistic one. Implicitly, it is not followed by plausibility or respect for the truthful reality (if it has one), but its obedience in front of the truthfulness of the artistic structure. Let us notice that only in this last case reality proves to be truly helpful, being subordinated to art; for the *Doric* and *Ionic* novels, the proportion seems to be backward, namely, the art seems to be subordinated to life. The *Corinthian* novel is built “in filigree”; it has two levels, a closed one, “copied” after reality, and one in background, imposed by the creative imagination. It is obvious that the first level is subordinated to the last one that the physical reality is presented so as to speak about the invisible reality, as the author conceives it.

The above considerations did not follow to integrate Vintilă Horia’s literature in the frame of the *Corinthian* type of novel, which has some other features besides those already mentioned. Vintilă Horia’s theoretical option is clear in what concerns its relation with the reality, and his art will abundantly confirm this. To use his term, his literature is, without a doubt, a “fantastical” one, if we interpret the fantastic as defining the supremacy of fantasy upon reality, the firm expulsion of any mimetic form. This

¹ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe* (Noah’s ark) (Bucharest: Minerva, 1983), vol. 1, 42-60, *passim*

kind of thinking does not imply the disdain of reality and Manolescu also observes that, paradoxically, the *Corinthian* novel “does not exclude (even increases) the detailed and closed description made by a vigilant eye, which gives attention to the feeble porosity of the real”. The paradox disappears when we state that, after all, only if you carefully observe the appearances you can distinguish the essences. We do not have to limit our understanding at the surface of the things, but to go deeper and treat it for just what it is: the visible part of an immense invisible reality. “Just like the depth needs a surface to stay underneath, in the same way the surface, to be real, needs a thing to rest on and to cover it”.¹

We have to mention here that realism does not take imitation as a goal in itself, because this will be impossible to achieve, and consequently, abnormal to settle as a rule. After all, the realist authors also see in their creation an act of knowledge, but one situated under the positivist paradigm. It is about situating in a deliberate way the artistic consciousness in relation with reality, a fact that aspires to identify the artist with the scientist. Vintilă Horia's distinction between realist literature and fantastic one can be reduced to the distinction between the scientific knowledge and the artistic one, as they were described by Plotinus and Schelling.

The obligation of the scientific knowledge, as it is postulated by the positivist paradigm, requires the writer to limit himself to the realm of the sensible reality. The writer will give his full attention to this reality, will examine, catalogue and classify it, searching intensively through each corner (even the abject ones, in the case of the naturalists), observing people, firstly in their external movement, and then trying to penetrate their psychic, in search of their inner mechanism. “The modern novel analyzes the common man and makes anatomy and classification, being grounded exclusively on the objective, bringing out the man from the diurnal life. It is entirely the prosaic type.”² This is a realistic doctrine that Vintilă Horia would certainly turn against. This kind of novel limits itself to observation, at close observation and impersonal recording, as an actuary. The observation can be directed towards a society, a restricted community or it can explore the psychical and emotional life; it can be objective and all-embracing, in the case of the omniscient narrator, or can be relative and restrains its area of exploration, if it is assumed by different reflectors. The narrator's look remains inside the world, analyzing it in detail, but not crossing its borders, no matter which technique he uses or which is the object of his observation. The empirical reality, even transformed or just copied, it remains the model the work relates to.

In the case of “fantastic” literature (keeping for now Vintilă Horia's term), the model is ideal, is beyond the border of the world. In this order, the reality is analyzed just because it hides, in its depth, reflections of the transcendental model; the artist did not observe the things, but contemplates them, trying to guess their deep value. “There is not a thing in the world that would not be impregnated with a divine nerve; the difficulty is to reach it and to make it tighten”.³ The artist always searches the hidden meaning of

¹ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditații despre Don Quijote și gânduri despre roman* (Meditations on Don Quixote and thoughts about the novel), trans. Andrei Ionescu (Bucharest: Univers, 1973), 68.

² G. Călinescu, *Principii de estetică* (Principles of aesthetic) (Bucharest: EPL, 1968), chapter *Reflecții mărunte asupra romanului* (Minor reflections on the novel), 292.

³ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditații despre Don Quijote și gânduri despre roman*, 53.

the world, the significance that assures its coherence and justifies its existence, being confident that every object is a sign, that the world, as a whole, is a book. The sensible reality is analyzed, invested with significance, in permanent connection to its transcendental foundation; its image is reflected in the work and is subordinated and related to the absoluteness which the artist feels beyond the limit of the visible. The image of the reality is transfigured, becomes an essence of the world, as seen by the eye that contemplates it.

The general features of the two types of novel are reflected in the building of the characters. In the realistic novel, “of observation”, (we adopt for the moment this name), the characters live *in the world*, they develop their life exclusively in the area of the contingent reality. Their actions, thoughts and wishes are in direct connection with the environment they live in and their reasons and consequences do not cross the border of this environment. They are “terrestrial” spirits, no matter how elevated their concerns are, their living is part of this world. They do not look beyond the visible, their wishes stop at the border of the achievable, their thoughts do not exceed the rational. They are “flesh and blood” heroes, their life is subordinated to the laws of nature and society. “In the typology of the Romanesque forms, the spiritual alternative which plays the deciding role is the one which emerges from the fact that either the soul of the character is, in connection with reality, too narrow or too large”.¹ Judging in G. Lukacs’ terms, we will easily discover that the heroes’ soul is, in relation with reality, too narrow. The limits imposed by the social order or by ethic, the historical limits in general, can be experienced as border of a jail, producing, as a consequence, revolt, break-out. The reality, in its entirety, is large enough. The human limits are not fully experienced, they are not questioned.

On the other hand, in the “fantastic” novel (as named by Vintilă Horia) the narrowness of the reality is acutely experienced. The horizon of the heroes opens towards infinity, their look constantly goes towards a point placed *beyond*, their dreams point the unreachable, their thoughts think the unthinkable. Their actions relate with a transcendental level, the reasons and the meanings of their actions should be searched in this level. The laws that govern their life are the spiritual ones. If we are to use a metaphorical image, Kafka’s land surveyor can be a prototype of these characters. All his actions and thoughts search the access of the far-away, misty castle. He studies people and their customs, he falls in love, fights with all his being to achieve his purpose, namely to enter the forbidden space of the castle of which the village life depends. It is another matter whether he will succeed or not, a matter which could lead eventually to a sub-classification. The novel is a story of a spirit of unrest, of life experienced as a perpetual search. “In this way, the fundamental generative command of the novel’s shape is realized as the psychology of the heroes: they are the searchers”.²

V. We have named here the two members of the typology using Vintilă Horia’s terms in order to emphasize the differentiation between the two. From this point forward we will drop this terminology. We would like to borrow, in this respect, Ioana Em.

¹ Georg Lukács, *Teoria romanului* (Theory of the novel), trans. Violeta Nişcov (Bucharest: Univers, 1977), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 65.

Petrecu's terminology, namely, the distinction she made between *sight* and *vision*¹, a distinction which we find relevant for our discussion. In this regard, the first type of novel will become one of *the sight* (the term is already established, as we shall see), a sight which impersonally records the scene of life; the second one, named "fantastic" by Vintilă Horia, will become the novel of *vision*, a vision which opens itself to the hidden meanings found beyond the surface of the world. Our concern was to define the type of literature where Vintilă Horia's novels can be placed, and not the typology. The existence of this type of novel was intensely commented and debated. Wayne C. Booth is one of the critics that define this kind of novel: "the quest-novel". The author of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* signals the appearance, in this century, of some novels whose authors "thought they were similar to Conrad, competing with the philosopher and the scientist, unravel the truth". All these novels are similar to "a philosophical dialogue as *The Banquet* or to allegories as *The Pilgrim Journey*, then to *Tom Jones* or Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. In all these novels a character or a group of characters set for the essential truth". It is about the "modern quest-novel", and they are given as example Kafka's *The Castle*, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, or Hesse's *Siddharta* and *Steppenwolf*.²

This type of novel, in some way, is close to what Northrop Frye calls "the romance", making a difference between three other types of fictions: the novel, the confession and the anatomy. Unlike the novel, which is constrained by its relationship with history, the romance gravitates towards universality and timelessness. If the novel is closer to "an extensive fictional shape of the history", the romance converges to allegory, "reflecting allegorical implications through its every element". This type of writing is at the crossroad between the novel, which speaks about people, and myth, which speaks about gods. Frye, in the same manner as Lukàcs, suggests that the way in which the characters are conceived is defining for every type or narrative. "The essential difference between novel and romance belongs to the way in which the characters are conceived. The romance's creator does not propose himself to create flesh and blood characters, but stylized figures, capable of generating psychological archetypes."³

Signalled by Northrop Frye, the tendency through allegory becomes at R.M. Albèrès the fundamental feature of the new type of novel, specific for the middle of the twentieth century, marked by Kafka's influence. It is about "the symbolic-allegorical novel" whose model is indebted to D'Annunzio's or D.H Lawrence's lyric novel, and also to Swift's and Wells' utopia. The features of this kind of novel are meditation, esotericism, the suggestion of a hidden meaning, the utopian alienation, all these subordinated to the defining character, which is the allegory. "The symbolic-allegorical novel aims, in addition to using the fable, to reveal the mystery which connects the visible life to the deep one, the anecdote with the essential. Hermann Hesse, Ernst Jünger, Marcel Schneider offer in the same time a true story and its symbolic meaning.

¹ See Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești* (Eminescu and the mutations of Romanian poetry) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1989)

² Wayne C. Booth, *Retorica romanului* (The rhetoric of the novel), trans. Alina Clej and Șt. Stoenescu (Bucharest: Univers, 1976), 344-345.

³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomia criticii* (The anatomy of criticism), trans. Domnica Sterian and Mihai Spărișu (Bucharest: Univers, 1972), 386-390.

The art of novel does not lie either in description, or in imagination; it is about the creation of a dense and opaque fable in which should develop, with the same force, the resistance and contingency of reality, as much as the elementary fever and the elevate possession of the spirit who wants to give it a meaning. It is a symbolic novel in the whole sense, because it is established between the common and the essential reality, between existence and essence, between the lived and the ideal world of the spirit. The symbol, constant and voluntary, is here the unifying feature between the universe of the ideas and the apparent universe. The novel is neither life, nor ideal, it is the relation between them, continuously polished”.¹

The novel, through its aim to offer an image of the Wholeness, to look for the unique principle which guarantees the unity and the homogeneity of the universe, competes with philosophy and this fact was emphasized by Wayne C. Book. In a pragmatic way, this type of novel illustrates or debates a certain philosophical conception, even if it is not a systematic one and does not integrate itself in one of the philosophical doctrines. In these novels, more or less ostensive, the writers integrate their hypotheses or opinions about some concepts that are part of the philosophical field. Often, the writer develops his thesis in his confessions or in his commentaries upon his own writing, to make sure that his conceptions are properly perceived. In Vintilă Horia's case this was explicitly demonstrated. We shall not limit his entire work at these “theses”, because, as Maria Corti suggests, the work asserts its own will, enclosing the will of the writer, preserving itself so in the end it might not reflect his intentions with precision.² But these theses still exist, the novel was conceived upon their frame and it reveals them, even if not in an obvious manner. We can find the same phenomenon in Th. Mann's work. It is enough to mention that, writing *Doctor Faustus*, he also added the story of writing it. In this “novel of the novel” we are explicitly offered the reading key: “I knew what I wanted and what burden I was assuming: nothing less than the novel of my age, dressed in the precarious and outlaw story of an artist”. In another place we find: “The fundamental reason of my book: is the imminence of the sterility, the innate dismay, which favours the pact with the devil”.³ The writer, in the same manner as Vintilă Horia, for gaining a faithful reception of his intentions, reveals them through the perfect credible narrator, who, in *Doctor Faustus*, alarms us towards the “symbolic parallelism” between the order of the German nation and Adrian Leverkühn's illness. In a similar way, “the publisher” from Hesse's novel, *Steppenwolf*, to which we owe the autobiography of Harry Haller, writes: “the illness from Haller's soul, I am convinced now, is not the caprice of a single man, but the illness of the age itself”.⁴ We

¹ R.M. Albérès, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-375

² Maria Corti, *Principiile comunicării literare* (translation by Ștefania Mincu, Introduction by Marin Mincu, Univers, 1981) p. 93

³ Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus. Viața compozitorului german Adrian Leverkühn povestită de un prieten. Cum am scris Doctor Faustus. (Romanul unui roman)* (Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, as Told by a Friend. How I wrote Doctor Faustus. The story of novel), trans. E. Barbu and Andrei Ion Deleanu (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din R.S.R., 1970) (In English: *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, as Told by a Friend*, trans. Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948])

⁴ Hermann Hesse, *Lupul de stepă*, 42.

also have to mention that in the afterword of the same novel, Hesse pointed out that the detected illness “does not lead to death”, that in his work, “it does not represent the fall, but its contrary: redemption”.¹

After considering these examples, we can draw the conclusion that we are confronting some “novels with thesis” (making this reference we exclude any possible pejorative connotation). When formulating this statement, we do not have in mind only this practice of the writers to make commentaries upon their work. It is a well spread practice, which can guide the critic to some basic assumptions, but not to some decisive arguments for analyzing the work, which has to be approached as a distinct entity. The way in which these writings are conceived limits the critic’s liberty, guiding him firmly enough through a closed interpretation, exposed by the writer. The allegorical construction implies by definition this kind of orientation. It would be hard to analyze *God was Born in Exile* in another way than a novel of an exile as soteriological experience, or *The Glass Bead Game* as a meditation upon the sterility that threatens the spirit as soon as it isolates itself from life. The characters, their gestures and their words, the background in which they move, are invested with significant meanings which make difficult or even impossible an alternative meaning. “We are dealing with an authentic allegory when the poet explicitly reveals the correspondence between his images and some examples or perceptions, trying to suggest the way his work should be explained. The writer uses the allegory every time he explicitly asserts ‘when I say X I also refer to Y’. If he acts in the same way all along his work, we can say, although prudently, that his writing is an allegory”.² There is nothing to argue against this way of conceiving literature. The writer has full freedom in choosing the conventions, and the critic owes respect to his choice and to studying him according to the terms of the respective conventions. The base of these narrative constructions is the convention that substitutes the author’s commentary with the setting, with symbols and the dramatic presentation of the characters. (It is a compositional strategy signalled by Wayne C. Booth³, who had demonstrated that the author has the freedom to choose his disguises, but it is impossible for him to vanish from his text.) Hence, in the novel *The Resignation Knight*, in the place of an explicit authorial comment, which should label Venice as a space of ignorance, of moral and spiritual decadence, we find an image shaped in a way that the reader could label it accordingly. In *The seventh Letter*, the broken statues of gods speak instead of the author about the disappearance of faith among the Athenians. The narrator from *Tonio Kröger* does not said directly that the people with blue eyes are “the unconscious” type, but the way they are presented excludes the ambiguity. Judging in these terms, in the case of these novels, which spotlight the correspondence between images and their meanings, we could talk about a deeply marked authorial presence. This aspect is not surprising at all because, as we shall see, we are speaking about “autobiographical” novels. But this consistency of the authorial comment (concealed or not) can become slightly annoying for the reader. We are not talking about what Northrop Frye⁴ named as “the aversion” of the critic in front of a work that limits his

¹ Ibid., 21.

² Northrop Frye, 109.

³ Wayne C. Booth, 245.

⁴ Northrop Frye, 112.

interpretative possibilities. The results of our analysis show that the specificity of this type of novels implies this strategy of orientating the spirit of the reader, leading him to follow the author in his way to “knowledge”. To make this clear, there are no objections to be made against this type of literature; conversely, in our opinion, they are exceptional artistic achievements, valuable and fascinating novels.

Some prestigious critics gave evidence for the demonstrative character, sometimes excessive, at least in the case of Vintilă Horia. The professor Ion Vlad, making commentaries upon the novel *The Resignation Knight*, finds it “here and there overwhelmed by the insistence of the meditation and implicitly of the demonstration”¹. Cornel Ungureanu is even stricter, affirming that “Vintilă Horia’s didacticism (like Mircea Eliade’s) becomes at one point annoying”, that some ideas are obsessively reaffirmed in his work and “disseminate the text, dividing it in moral stories.”² Consequently, there is a risk to glide in didacticism, understood as the author’s wish to firmly orientate the reader’s mind. This risk is not always avoided with enough cleverness by the writer. The problem is delicate and difficult to settle because it is impossible to determine a categorical limit for the firmness of the authorial voice. Although, reading *Narciss and Goldmund*, it is hard to repress the feeling that the author, through the narrator’s voice, works too hard to make us see the two characters in the way he conceived them. As for Vintilă Horia, we have to mention that his novels remind or even lead to René Guénon’s and especially V. Lovinescu’s esoteric doctrine. In *The Resignation Knight*, the aim of introducing one of these theses has as a result the inconsistency of Della Porta’s portrait. At the beginning of the novel, he is the revolutionary type, who arrogantly affirms “We are God”; but he is also the one who recounts Radu Negru about the “possibility of becoming eternal”, about Plato’s and Pythagoras’s learning, about “the religious truth valid for all people, beyond the Churches”. The *elite*, that minority of initiated people, who were meant to keep alive the spiritual flame in order to make possible the rebirth of the world into another cycle of life, appears in every novel, sometimes only as a simple gloss of Guénon’s thought, insufficiently integrated in the unity of the artistic text, as it happens in *Les impossibles*: “they are the guardians of a universal equilibrium, which we are about to destroy and they are about to save it, because they know the laws...”³. In the novel *Persecutez Boece*, the fragment from Diaconu’s manuscript, about the strange meeting of Madame S.’s friend with a woman who had been dead for two years, appears as a perfectly strange textual body; it seems to be introduced only to justify Guénon’s opinion about the communication between the dead people with those alive: “Guénon is clear in his book, *The Spiritist Fallacy* and *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Times*”. It briefly exposes the thesis of this book, and suddenly, in the next line, we have Niels Bohr and Max Planck, thinking about the bond between science and religion⁴. The truth is that Vintilă Horia’s novel are not equals as value, but we should not accuse him. They are less elaborated novels, less shaped from an artistic point of view, as *Les Impossibles* or *Above North*, and others, like *God was Born in Exile*, *The Resignation Knight* or *The*

¹ Ion Vlad, “Simbolurile cunoașterii și ale existenței.”

² Cornel Ungureanu, 115.

³ Vintilă Horia, *Les Impossibles*, 118.

⁴ Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea de ostrogoți*, 45.

Seventh Letter, in which the artistic accomplishment was more attentively searched. In the first novels we can distinguish that “didacticism” we have already mentioned, manifested by the wish to introduce in the text some particular ideas and concepts.

When the writer competes, as Booth said, with the philosopher and the scientist, he takes the risk of borrowing their instruments. Consequently, the fact that he directs the interpretative act cannot be disapproved as long as he conceives it with artistic instruments. We cannot incriminate the illustration of a philosophical doctrine, of a vision upon the world by the agency of the novel. The novel cannot speak for itself, as some people asked, more than the eye can look itself or more than a man can lift himself when he pulls himself by the hair. There is no valuable novel that does not philosophize, that does not reveal hidden meanings, that does not raise important questions in the spirit of its readers. The problem is the way these things are revealed, when it uses an easy method of expression, in a specific (scientific) formula, by the agency of the characters or the narrator. These ideas will remain as strange bodies in the novel as long as they are not expressed in an artistic way. To use the art in order to reveal a truth means to limit yourself at suggesting the way that leads to it, and not imposing it as such. “An esthetical necessity enforces the novel with hermetic feature; binds it to be a closed universe for any factual reality. And this condition generates a number of consequences, among which that the novel cannot be directly a philosophy, political pamphlet, sociological study or moral sermon. It cannot be more than a novel, its internal world cannot transcend the exterior”¹.

In a direct way, the novel cannot aim to be more than it is, namely a fiction, a closed universe, enough for itself; it is a world that has its own truths, disguisedly beyond appearance, just like in real life. This world of the novel can foster many truths and meanings, on condition that they find a “body”, an image to live in, a surface to hide beneath. Ortega Y Gasset said that “the essential feature of the profound things is the fact that they hide beneath a surface and reveal to us in this form, vibrate through it”². The novelist is, by definition, an architect; he does not state anything, he does not express his thoughts, but he builds an entire world who speaks for himself, in its own language.

In addition, Milan Kundera, one of the brightest critics of the modern novel, comes to support these statements. Even if he admires Broch, the Czech writer and theoretician holds back the trilogy *The Sleepwalkers*.³ One of these distances is in connection with the apodictic message present in the novel, which loses in this way the level of relativity. Kundera, continuing the idea in the next section, he firmly asks the novel to maintain itself in the area of the *possible* and not to make definitive statements. “In the field of the novel there are no statements; it is the realm of the play and of hypothesis. The novelistic meditation is, in its essence, interrogative, hypothetical.”⁴ All this inquiry did not follow the negative aspects of Vintilă Horia’s prose. Their number is reduced as compared to the whole creation, which has an exceptional value. It is a discussion which tried to reveal the limits of this kind of literature. More precisely, our

¹ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditații despre Don Quijote și gânduri despre roman*, 205.

² *Ibid.*, 67.

³ Milan Kundera, *L’art du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 86-87.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 101 (Dans le territoire du roman on n’affirme pas: c’est le territoire du jeu et des hypothèses: La méditation romanesque est donc; par essence, interrogative, hypothétique.)

analysis tried to signal, in an artistic language, the existence of these limits, because it is impossible to mark them in a firm way. To determine these limits lies in the power of every artist, this (difficult!) freedom is his privilege. The length of this realm depends on the force of the artistic consciousness, on the capacity of keep under the control of art this field. Ortega Y Gasset reaches the same conclusion, even if exploring other paths: “Inside the novel you can find everything: science, religion, discourses, sociology, esthetic opinions – on the understanding that eventually, all these should be attenuated and kept in the novel body without having an executive and final power. The amount of strange elements that a book can contain depends, after all, by the power of the author to melt them in the atmosphere of the novel as such”¹.

This way of conceiving a novel is generated by the relationship between the artistic consciousness and reality. We have replaced Vintilă Horia’s terms, considering they were inappropriate, with Ioana Em. Petrescu’s distinction between *sight* and *vision*. The *novel of sight*, named by the ones who promoted it, existed in the European literature contemporary with the one discussed so far. It is about what we called the “nouveau roman”, and it is quite odd that Vintilă Horia did not mention his position related with this literary phenomenon. The accusations that Vintilă Horia brought on Rebreanu’s technique (not rightful because the Romanian novelist was searching a “realism of essences”) could find a more adequate object in the new technique promoted by the *nouveau roman*. We do not mean to analyze in detail this phenomenon. Our intention is to underline its major features (even they were not fully accomplished) presented by its promoters.² It is, as we have already seen, a novel of *sight*, almost transfigured in a “camera”, moved arbitrary in the world. Robe-Grillet said that the story, the narrative, as seen in the traditional way “became something impossible”, the novel will be invested with a self-reflexive function. Consequently, all the fundamental elements of “traditional”³ epic discourses are disrupted: the author, the story, the character. We are not discussing here whether the literature of these novelists followed their theoretical discourses or about the value of this kind of literature (it is worth mentioning that Vintilă Horia won the Goncourt award in 1960, when the *nouveau roman* was in full offensive). On short notice, the problem is about the writer’s attitude towards reality: a neutral attitude, which will eliminate any sense of subjectivity. The reality is depicted by the author, who gives up his creative ambition and remains a simple “cameraman”. The reality is inexpressive, lacking, as Genette shows, any inner side, any depth. “The function of this surface representation is obvious. Bachelard showed that imagination is useless in front of surfaces or figures: the subjective inner self cannot project itself but in an objective inner self, but in the depth of a substance. To declare that Robe-Grillet’s objects are only surfaces means to say that they are not susceptible of any human significance but that of their presence and after all, their tools’ function; it means to say that the subject that they reflect is an empty subject. Similarly, the gestures, the actions are in general, inert, or meaningless”⁴.

¹ Ibid., 214.

² Romul Munteanu, *Noul Roman Francez* (Bucharest: Univers, 1973), chapter *O nouă aventură antiromanescă* (A new anti-novel adventure).

³ The promoters of the *nouveau roman* thought of this term to be depreciative.

⁴ Gerard Genette, *Figuri* (Figures), trans. Angela Ion and Irina Mavrodin (Bucharest: Univers, 1978), 27.

We can immediately grasp the distance between these two visions upon literature. First, we have on the one hand the tendency of annihilating the subject, and on the other hand, the full expression of it, a tendency which approaches the novel to self-biography. It is remarkable that Vintilă Horia, along with those close to him, confess this self-biography character of their writings. “A writer does nothing but describe himself. This is a truth I have experienced in all my being and which gives a light of authenticity to this work of mine in which I had done nothing else but to describe actions from my future, deeds of a life”¹. Vintilă Horia’s confession, made in 1922, could be continued by such like, which all have the same meaning: the characters are the writer’s avatars, their experience is fed by the consciousness that created them. Mann, Hesse or Junger see their creation in the same way,² concluding that this kind of novel is born as the history of the artist’s consciousness which creates it. It is a permanent wake consciousness, which permanently searches to endow reality with meaning.

The writer defines himself as a critic of the book which is the world itself, he offers a reading which articulates hidden meanings of the world, bringing it into being. The work is in fact autobiographical and authentic since it tells the story of an experience elevated into an act of knowledge through which the artist himself continues the act of creation. We take the risk of a surprising association and we yield to the temptation of reminding that “it is not possible...” which the Creator utters next to Hyperion’s demand in Eminescu’s poem. This is not a refusal; it is the acknowledgement of an impossibility which the poem does not respond to, allowing us to take this burden. At least, in what concerns *The First Letter*, we have the subtle interpretation made by Ioana Em. Petrescu, who considers that the old teacher is “the embodiment of the power attributed to the human intelligence. The teacher has, ultimately, the role of an *axis mundi*, his thought supports the world into being [...], has the role of an eye that sees the world and shapes it.”³

Our intention is not to associate Eminescu’s genius with the novelist (even if the writer’s virtues, as they are described by Vintilă Horia, would make it possible). We have used this comparison because, after all, beyond the shades, their role is similar: that of an active conscience, which gives sense to the Creation through its own creative work, and, in the same time, fulfils the destiny, balancing the precariousness of the human condition.

VI. Our analysis leads us to assume, in order to label this type of novel, Sanda Berce’s distinction exposed in a study dedicated to the typology of the novel.⁴ This study distinguishes a *metaphoric novel* from a *metonymic* one, the two terms being perfectly proper for our distinction. The contrast between them is, while the *metonymic* novel has

¹ *Despre degradare și risc* (On degradation and risk), *Cotidianul* 85 (4.05.1992)

² Thomas Mann, *Scrisori* (Letters), trans. Mariana Șora (Bucharest: Univers, 1974), 14-15; Ioan Roman, Preface to Ernst Jünger, *Pe falezele de marmură* (On the marble cliffs), trans. Ioan Roman, (Bucharest: Univers, 1971); George Guțu, Preface to *Steppenwolf*.

³ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Cursul Eminescu* (The Eminescu course), reviewed by Ioana Bot (Cluj-Napoca: Babeș-Bolyai Univ., Faculty of Letters, 1991)

⁴ Sanda Berce, *O posibilă teorie a formei* (A possible theory of form), doctoral thesis (Cluj-Napoca: Babeș-Bolyai Univ., 2002)

a relation of proximity with the reality, discovering its terrestrial dimension, the *metaphoric* novel is born under the sign of “as though”, “as if”, taking the poetical dimension of human existence. The *metaphoric* novel gets close to the myth, to the sacral story, which combines two levels: of the untruth speaking and of the truth that it reveals.¹ We can add that the *novel of sight* gets close to the historical condition which reproduces life in its superficial levels. The authors of *Pragmatic Dictionary* suggest that the archetype of the literary discourse would be the fairy tale, with its “Once upon a time....” which gives it a strong metaphoric dimension.² The same authors cite D. Lewis, who rejects the mimetic function of literature (the literary representational function) in order to emphasize the metaphoric nature of literature.³

From another perspective, the epithet *metaphoric* applied to Vintilă Horia's novels finds its justification. We have already mentioned that this type of novel is born as an expression of a dream for the absolute knowledge. Its duty is to certify and to enrich the effort of the artist to compensate for the fragile character of the human existence. “From a structural and existential point of view, the human being finds itself in a double situation of precariousness. He lives, on the one hand, in a concrete world which he cannot express through his structural instruments; on the other hand, he lives in the horizon of the mystery, which he cannot reveal. The metaphor is seen as a complementary ontological moment which tries to compensate the fragile situation.”⁴ In Blaga's vision, the metaphor does not have an aesthetical function, or this function has a secondary role. It is about an ontological function, as the quotation shows, through which the metaphor comes to enrich the human destiny. In simple words, Blaga's philosophical vision asserts that any cultural act is justified by the *emancipation* tendency, being a leading fact in authentic human existence. In the same time, every cultural act is in essence metaphoric: it is an act of knowledge through which the spirit crosses the visible border in order to find access to the ultimate mysteries of the material reality.

Paul Ricoeur's study dedicated to the concept of *metaphor*⁵ adds new nuances in the spirit of the same conclusion. The French philosopher, when making commentaries upon Aristotle's work, debunks the wrong acceptance of *mimesis*, showing that the notion of Stagirit is completely alien to that of *imitating*. “Therefore, just through a mistaken twisting Aristotle's *mimesis* could be similar to imitation in the sense of copying [...]. Mimesis is poesis and vice versa”⁶. On the other side, the comment upon Aristotle's definitions of metaphor lead to the conclusion that the metaphor – as being a “redefinition through fiction” – realizes a connection between mythos and mimesis and can be, therefore, assimilated to poesis. In short, Paul Ricoeur's thesis postulates the metaphoric nature of the literary discourse and the clear assertion of its ontological function. The relation between *physis* (living nature) and

¹ Ibid., 125-161, *passim*

² J. Moeschler, A. Reboul, *Dicționar enciclopedic de pragmatică* (Encyclopedic dictionary of pragmatics), trans. and ed. Carmen Vlad and Liana Pop (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Echinox, 1999), 412.

³ Ibid., 421.

⁴ Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii* (The trilogy of culture), *Opere* (Works), reviewed edition by Dorli Blaga, introductory study by Al. Tănase (Bucharest: Minerva, 1985), vol. 9, 289.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Metafora vie* (The live metaphor), trans. Irina Mavrodin (Bucharest: Univers, 1984).

⁶ Ibid., 72.

mimesis (understood as *poiesis*), is that of the being-in-power (*in potentia*) and being-in-act, suggesting that the literary discourse operates an actualization of the hidden meanings of the world. “In it every hidden possibility of existence appears as open, every potential capacity of action appears as effective. The lively expression is that which tells the story of the lively existence.”¹

The effort of finding a proper definition for this type of novel is a secondary problem, because, as we have already found out, it can take multiple names: *symbolic-allegorical* novel, *Corinthian* novel, the *quest-novel* or the *metaphoric* novel. What is important is the effort of trying to define the essence of this way of seeing the art of the word. The great spirits meet themselves in the same conclusions. The conceptions of the writers we have already discussed and the commentaries of the theoreticians imposed a sense of the novel as a privileged technique for knowledge. Milan Kundera adheres to this conception with his subtle plea for *the art of the novel*. One of the essential affirmations of his study dedicated to the novelistic art is that the fundamental and the unique aim of the novel is the knowledge. “The novel which does not reveal an unknown area of human existence is immoral. The knowledge is the only moral of the novel”². Kundera, without accentuating it, shows that the novelists spotlight, before the philosophers did, the guiding lines of the European cultural development (or involution). The major contribution of the novel is that it kept the universe of life (“le monde de la vie”) under the *light* (“*éclairage*”) of perpetual meditation, protecting the world against forgetfulness. The novel does not explore reality, nor history or culture but *the existence* understood as a “territory of human possibilities.”³ Although in a different formulation, Kundera’s thought carries further Ricoeur’s: the novel is an exploration of *the possible*, of that territory that surrounds without borders the existence, of *the mystery*, with Blaga’s term. In this flow, that used expression, according to which the writer “gives life”, gets new and profound meanings: every novel, in the universe that it creates, elevates in the level of *being*, what was until then in the level of *possibility*. The essential ground of the novel remains the ambition of transcendence beyond the sensitive reality, the vanity of sharing a wide knowledge of the Wholeness.

In the light of these statements, Vintilă Horia’s vision (and of the other modern novelists) upon literature becomes clear. Vintilă Horia’s firm statements were qualifying *only* this type of literature as being authentic and this is also Ricoeur’s conclusion: namely, that the artistic act is justified just because it represents the expression of the tendency of investing reality with meaning. The writer’s work attempts to *forms*, following the laws of the artistic subjectivity, a *substance*, which for a profane eye seems shapeless and incoherent. Our intention is not to establish a scale, or to privilege a certain type of novel. We can mention that the realist novel (mimetic, in the narrowest sense of the term), and especially its external shape, the French *nouveau roman*, succeeded as far as it betrayed the programmatic intention of its authors. This happened especially because, in the case of the creator, the drive to give birth, the ideal of the *lively expression*, subordinated to the impulse of knowledge, are irrepressible.

¹ Ibid., 79.

² Milan Kundera, *L’art du roman*, 20 (Le roman qui ne decouvre pas une portion jusqu’alors inconnue de l’existence est immoral. La connaissance est la seule morale du roman.)

³ Ibid., 61.

A number of modern writers, among whom Vintilă Horia as well, assumed this impulse through knowledge as a major aim of their creation, dreaming to offer a sublime image of the world, re-created so as the laws that govern its development to become coherent. We found it appropriate to situate this type of novel under the *metaphoric* category, since, guided by Blaga's and Ricoeur's thoughts, we have seen in the metaphoric discourse a privileged way of manifestation of the human force to know. This type of discourse expresses, in fact, the unique power and the dignity of the human being, made, as The Book says, "in the image and likeness" of the Creator. It is not surprisingly to see that a writer who conceives his work under these principles, dreams about "an ideal novel", impossible to be written, but assessed as object of perpetual aspiration, a novel which can be able to offer "a total vision of human history and geography, seen from all possible perspectives".¹ We could say that, in the end, this is the ideal of an absolute *metaphor*, gifted with the magical power of *expressing in words* the infinity of the possible meanings of the world.

¹ Vintilă Horia, *Introducción a la literatura del siglo XX*, 35.