

greed of the free market investors and the wars carried sometimes for unknown or minor reasons, it is more and more difficult to choose between the good and the bad things. It is at least admirable if a man has such powerful convictions about the mission he has to accomplish.

The sceptical would say: of course, theoretically speaking it is easy to accept that the intelligent, competent planning of research and resources, the admission of climate change and of the necessity of planet renovation, the new economic strategies can lead to the so called solar age. They would say that Mösl is an idealist, since immediate welfare and profit is much more attractive than a future without us. Are we prepared, morally speaking, to take such responsibility for the planet? What are the fundamental human values today? It is one topic of them in political discussions, and another one in the political actions? This book is an answer to this question, and I ask the readers to answer it too.

Cultural Benefits of Death. **A Review of Irina Petraş' Book *Death upon the Bearer***

Adriana TEODORESCU
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E-mail: adriana.teodorescu@gmail.com

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Irina Petras's book – *Moartea la purtător: stări şi cuvinte*¹ (*Death upon the Bearer: feelings and words*) – appeared at The Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest in 2011, which is in my opinion an almost defiant fact if we think about the aspect that death is, as Robert Kastenbaum would say, the enemy that economy should fight in silence, establishing systems that prevent and erode. The work retakes partially the ideas and literary analyses from *Ştiinţa morţii* (*Death Science*) but it orients them in a new direction – the present desire to write a book about death, the previously existent desire that remained unsatisfied by the two volumes of *Ştiinţa morţii* (the first one appeared at Dacia printing house, Cluj in 1995, and the second one in 2001, at Paralela 45 printing house. This is actually a way of stating that writing a book about death cannot represent an objective fully accomplished – something that was surely known and assumed by Irina Petraş – and this is why it functions as a trigger agent of the creative-thanatic impulses.

There are three major identifiable levels in the construction of the book *Moartea la purtător* and three afferent manners of using the meanings generated by the

¹ Irina Petraş, *Moartea la purtător: stări şi cuvinte* (Death upon the Bearer: feelings and words) (Bucharest: Editura ASE, 2012), 249 p., ISBN 978-606-505-563-6.

configuring way of the death theme in this context. First of all, a more general level, as death matters here basically in a profound human way; but, at the same time, this is a specific and specialized level: the manner of death representation, beyond the humanistic core that it keeps unaltered, is through the death theories (Edgar Morin, Philippe Ariès, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean Ziegler, Vladimir Jankélévitch etc.). When it is not represented in this way, death is subdued to the author's tendency to philosophise (not in the pejorative manner) and to place the text in a philosophic discourse. More elements are subject to cultural deconstruction, and they are part of the postmodern death paradigm, as the obsession for fitness, medical power, immortality substitutes etc. This first level is the theoretization of death and it has a high relevance for the inter- and multi-disciplinary areas of thanatology or death studies, found in the introductory part of the book but present in a slightly dispersed manner, in an amalgam with actual literary analyses (in a logical way and lacking useless digressions throughout the entire book).

The second level is the one of literary history. During this one, literature in its various occurrences, unrestricted to a certain period and not reduced to a national or cultural space, not even situated under the same literary and value standard, unveils its multiple relations with death. We are actually in a history of thanatic and literary representations, not in a chronological hierarchy but in a diversity context with slightly exhaustive ambitions, while the author's verve from one literary work to another determines the reader to believe that this chain of literary representations of death would not end soon. Among the analyzed works there are some Romanian writings that are not that famous, such is the case of the short story *Înainte de moarte* (*Before Death*) by Marin Preda, old and new writings of the Romanian and universal literature. Be it the case of cult or popular ones: The Reader by Bernard Schlink, *O victorie covârșitoare* (*An Overwhelming Victory*) by Aurel Pantea, the fairy tale collected by Petre Ispirescu *Tinerete fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte* (*Youth without Agedness and Life without Death*), *Vântureasa de plastic* (*The Plastic Shovel*) by Marius Chivu, *Rădăcina de bucsău* (*Root of the Rush*) by O. Nimigean, Ion Zubașcu with his book *Moarte de om. O povestire de viață* (*Death of a Man. A Life Story*), and the examples may continue. But Irina Petras is not afraid of approaching masterpieces of the universal literature as *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy, *The Red Death* by Edgar Allan Poe, and *The Last Chapter* by Knut Hamsun, etc. In the pseudo-summary of the book there are over 90 authors whose writings are discussed in the book. Moreover, the analysis of the literary works slips often in the analysis of the literary critique that has approached them, so that the death theme and inclination tends to spread in a fractal manner. The author identifies five great categories of death representation in literature: the cogitated death (*meditative-philosophical*), the tasted death (*the privilege of being desperate*), the sniffed death (*installing in passing*), the paraffin death (*defying from the distance*) and the other's death (*in proximity*).

The manner of examining the thanatical competences of the literary works is an accurate and alerted one, as if being in an emergency of confessing. There is not much waiting at a single writing; the books call each other in an unpredictable way, careless for the time and author they belong to, aspect that unites them being death itself in its various literary and conceptual hypostases. In a metaphorical perspective, we may affirm that Irina Petras's writing is a surprising, philosophic and detective book, where the main character is death, committing a series of crimes (situated at the junction of

carnal and symbolic) that require a secondary character for interpretation. Anyway, the submerged demonstration, with no strikingly visible aspects, is that literature proves to be one of the privileged headquarters of death. Irina Petraș indicates the common root between literature and death as being the process of fictionalization. In front of the inexorable death, the necessity of entering fiction is triggered: an active opposition towards human mortality while, at the same time, literature almost overlaps with the meaning of fiction, or at least it includes fiction. And this is how a fragment of Irina Petraș' book sounds (a fragment that dissolves the idea that there would be a superior discourse on death): "I have intersected *serious* books about death with fictional literature, because in front of death the human texts are fictions, no matter where they start – from the data provided groping, from science or from the ones extracted from pure and simple experience and backed by the writing talent"¹.

The third level is of the literature itself and it is a plural one, constituted in more strata consistent with the number of the analyzed literary works. The succession of the writings and their possibility of relating with each other are of no importance, only the relevance of death for the literary destiny of each book. For instance, a book consultation in order to obtain critical information on a certain book could have as a benefit the change of traditional perspective on a Romanian or universal work if the work is characterized by a period of interpretative suffocation or it is considered passé, as Susan Sontag would say; however, informing about a relatively recent literary writing could raise the interest of the reader for the author of that particular book or for other works of his. Eminescu's *Luceafărul* (The Evening Star) regains freshness when it is interpreted as a valorization of mingling death and immortality, while Caragiale's typical character *Mitică* seems to wear new clothes when the author uncovers him as being incapable of dying.

All three levels are crossed by the personal dimension of death in a manner that makes Irina Petraș's book a sample of more than an involuntary application of a methodology of transdisciplinarity, as it is presented in Basarab Nicolescu's meaning. This does not mean the inherent presence of the subject in any object subdued to the research process but the explicit expression of a personal opinion on social, cultural and philosophical aspects of death – an opinion that is transparent even in the literary analyses, and surely not to their prejudice.

The personal level has two other sub-levels – the personal conceptual and personal experiential. During the first one we may detect the personal conceptions on death of Irina Petraș as a *human*, although she is permanently accompanied by the shadow of a specialist in literature and theoretician (although philologist) of death. The personal experiential level is discovered when the author Irina Petraș is not afraid of sharing with the readers fragments of her own experience as a mortal and person who lives near other mortals. There are some significant fragments – parents' death, the storm that brought their disappearance in her life and rethinking and reassuming her own mortality as a consequence.

What we may identify as specific to the author's death conception is the positive significance of death. In a Heideggerian style, death is understood by Irina Petraș as being a constitutive part of the human being in general and especially her own

¹ Ibid., 26.

(“death enters naturally defining me”¹). Death as an intra-vital process, as the authors puts it, and as a terminus point is characterized by normality, naturality and it includes some benefits, while two of them are more consistent: growing the ethic, affective and social quality of individual’s life who accepts himself as being under the sign of death, hallmarked from his birth by this (“if you don’t think yourself from the perspective of death in ambush, you are allowed to do anything, usually *bad* things, as you have always time to grow better in a delayed future with indifference”² or “Many of the evils of contemporary society come from people that think of themselves as being immortal or they live as if they were”³) and openness to creation (“literature in general is *ars moriendi*”⁴). Besides, creation is the only antidote accepted by Irina Petraș against death, as she manifests her disapproval towards any form of confiscating the human mortality (through which manipulation becomes possible⁵), be it the case of a belief in the afterlife, in religion or in other delusions. As she seems to be convinced that the human being is, as Heidegger theorizes, a *being-unto-death*, the tentative of mortality extraction from (self)-representation equates with an alteration of its humanity. Another element that concerns the personal conception on death of Irina Petraș and which settles it in a divergent relation towards a death anthropologist as Louis-Vincent Thomas is funeral rituality deconstruction as adjuvant of collective assuming and living of death. The funeral ritual is not departing too much from the “show and social scandal that accompany death”, which is repulsive for the author, and the ceremonial in general, not only the funeral is considered a form of diminishing the authenticity of living. An indicator of the fact that we may talk about a personal level of Irina Petraș’s writing is naming the analyzed writers *fictional witnesses*.

Before we end our report on this book, which deserves to be read with close attention not only by the passionate readers of literature, of specialists in human areas, but also by passionate researchers of the subject of death, we linger on two major concepts of Irina Petraș which relate to the personal conceptual sub-level, being possible to classify them, to a certain degree, in the level of death theoretization: deathness and death science. Death science – a collocation of Eminescian inspiration – covers two meanings: of knowing, having some information and of “knowing to do something, to master an art”⁶. The author considers that death must be known and learned; in other words, the information, knowledge on death must be passed in life practices. What the entire book proves is that literature offers the occasion of acquiring a very good *knowledge of death*. The other term, *deathness*, invented by the author, is desirable to be an extrapolation, a refinement of mortality in the sense of a higher dynamism of death.

Summing up, we conclude that the benefits of Irina Petraș’s book about death and literature are cultural. No matter what we keep in mind from the plurality of meanings of this always too large concept – culture – those that relegate to a series of social practices and discourses, resulted after infinite crystallizations, or those that

¹ Ibid., 6.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 17.

⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

indulge culture with refined and slightly elitist pallets. We must add a small amendment: including the personal level (in the writing strategy of the book) in any of these semantic vectors of culture. Thus, we may say that there is a benefit of being aware and knowing death as a universal phenomenon and yet reflected in multiple manners by literary works, just as there is the possibility that the reader experiments the revelation of his own mortality (and then of a new beginning of *ars moriendi*), of his own deathness culturally and literally mediated, as Irina Petraş highlights. And this final stating doesn't need to seem paradoxical, as, in the end, any death revelation is susceptible to have been suffered previous mediations.

The Devil's Chum
Thoughts on the Book by Gyula Vadas and Albert Veress *
– Review –

Lajos BALÁZS
Ethnographer

Keywords: suicide, prevention, social and ethnographic survey, universal literature introspection.

E-mail: balazslajos@sapientia.siculorum.ro

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I often feel that we inadvertently restrict the meaning of the term “orderly Szekler community” in our discourses. As if it applied only to the material world and environment and the economical conduct and not to the social life of the community. As if the human existence fell prey to anarchy. In fact, that is not the case at all. Only that we do not want to recognise the organic unity of things, namely, that there are PEOPLE living behind the land and objects. And the orderliness, as a principle, is also a public need even against the individual's own character.

The community used to remonstrate and sanction not only those who did not keep their houses and the porches clean, who polluted the environment, did not care for the animals or damaged the wealth of others a.s.o., but also those who broke the laws and rules of social cohabitation and ignored the customs of human existence even in case of certain setbacks. Basically there were three expectations in a community, as follows:

- Children should be born and raised in the family.
- Marriage should be preceded by a thorough reciprocal befriending and consensus is needed by the two families.

* Gyula Vadas, and Albert Veress, *Az ördög cimborája – A felcsíki öngyilkosságokon túl...* (The devil's chum. What is behind the suicides in Felcsík) (Csíkszereda [Miercurea Ciuc, RO]: Státus, 2012), 303 p. ISBN 978-606-8052-58-8