

completedness fundamentally questions the “absolute” too, including the philosophical systems dedicated to the absolute, to which, with respect to Hungarian philosophy, Ildikó Veres consecrates a whole chapter in her book.

The volume continues with a series of studies about Béla Brandenstein, while the last chapter deals with the inevitability of philosophical criticism, introduced by a meditation on the present and future of philosophy, actually discussing the Hungarian Philosophical Society founded between the two world wars.

In conclusion, I could say that Ildikó Veres’s book about Hungarian philosophy and the central role of the subject of lack in it urges the readers/philosophers of our times to meditate about and creatively study the current and timely tasks of thinking, treating this history as a living and critical dialogue partner. For Hungarian philosophy was true PHILOSOPHY and it must remain so in its interpretations as well! This is the only way it can become our EUROPEAN critical past, present and future. And not merely a kind of historical “object”.

*Translated by Emese Czintos*

### **Literature as Life; Life as Literature.**

#### **A review of Irina Petraș’ book *Use(less) Digressions. Life and Literature***

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*Irina Petraș’* book – literary historian and critic, president of Cluj Union of Romanian Writers – appeared in 2012 at Eikon Publishing House, entitled *Divagări (in)utile. Viață și literatură (Useful(/less) Divagations. Life and Literature)*. The book is somehow paradoxical due to its premises, and this is because the writing presents itself as a book of personal recoveries that don’t claim to save the world. We talk about personal recoveries, as the author desires to gather some of her speeches regarding the Romanian post-revolutionary literary life. On the other hand, these recoveries don’t expect miraculous effects in the world trajectory mutation. Moreover, in Blaga’s style, Irina Petras considers that her demarche is going to emphasize the uncertainty of the world change, becoming, subsequently, from this point of view, a useless demarche and a fortuitous act.

There are two levels of divagation – term borrowed by Irina Petras and assumed from George Bacovia – as species to place her writings. A content divagation consists in things that are to be said, established under the sign of a relative lack of seriousness (that is going to prove later a dimension of the author’s ludic spirit), and a formal divagation,

which refers to the eclectic structure of the book – essays, pieces of literary criticism, answers to inquiries of cultural and literary journals, presentations of personal perspectives on socio-cultural aspects, interviews etc.

Beyond nuances, divagation contains, indubitably, the meaning of change. It is true, a change as a departure from norm, from a fixed direction as the correct one. But the reader may ask himself from the first lines of the book if it is the case of an innocent change (only ascertained and directed in a conscious manner towards the useless and/or ludic area<sup>1</sup> or, on the contrary, a subtler *desire of change* of what exists or, more important, of the reflection on what exists. It is not incidentally maybe that the *uselessness* is in brackets in the title, indicating thus the potentiality of *utility* concerning this demarche. The paradox and the conceptual tension realized through attitudes that may seem opposite (of reinvesting with actuality the personal and literary trace in a context of literary and life revisions, and on the other hand, of declaring the uselessness of this reinvesting) are only on the surface. Otherwise, the harmonization in the po(i)etic logic of Irina Petras' book is present, being the case of a logic that we may name a logic of an integrated rupture, of the conscious artistically functional fissure: "Betting on provisory, on fragment, on nuance, unenchanted and exuberant at the same time, I don't feel strange or excluded from the present times, but I don't lose the critical eye and allowance. And I don't forget for a moment that I am mortal, and therefore there is a certain indifference towards 'events' and attitudes that are situated on the ephemeral page one"<sup>2</sup>. The fragment becomes the organizational unity of the book, but beyond this there is a coagulating force, which is the force of revising and which binds the fragments in a wholeness of fragments (as in a Picasso's painting, where the object is exposed to the eye through a pluri-perspective coding<sup>3</sup>).

But what keeps together the fragments of Irina Petras' book, offering the coherence of a homogeneous and extremely pleasant book to read, is not only a compositional strategy – a very good syntactic junction of the fragment that seems, despite what separates them, to flow one into the other – but also a coordinate that regards a meta and trans-textual area. The essence of the book is of ontological nature – the constant feeling (a feeling passed in the text, of course) that the author's being is threatened by death and, more precisely, that this is a *being-toward-death*, using the Heideggerian terminology. Fear of death is, in what concerns Irina Petras, the milieu through which life and literature may face each other, addressing questions and receiving (however incomplete) answers. At the same time, we repeat that death is the one that contributes to the literary and ontological legitimation of some divagations, which the readers would probably rank in their utility.

If we discussed the major mechanisms through which Irina Petras' book is articulated, we are to examine some of the most important subjects discussed by the author, highlighting the specificity of the approach and their originality. The theme of the book with its secondary themes: reader, writer, literary critic, book production and

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<sup>1</sup> Although the ludic spirit is, as the author defines it "the boldness to doubt the common places of the absolute". Irina Petras, *Divagări (in)utile* (Useful/(less) Divagations. Life and Literature) (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2012), 18 p., ISBN 978-973-757-716-0.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. "I am afraid that we are made of chips and it suits us". Ibid., 217.

the reading process occupy a very important place among the concerns of this writing. Summing up, the reading process is understood in a Gadamerian perspective of *enhancement of the being*. For Irina Petras being a reader compensates the human condition characterized by finiteness not only and not in a quantitative meaning<sup>1</sup>, but especially in the sense of (pseudo)demiurgic re-assuming of the own existence – in other words, infusing it with meaning and truth: “I’ve always felt reading as a means of retracing the true plan of my limited place. Chain of splitting toward other places of mine, set aside by the destined choice of a certain time and place in a temporary forgetfulness”<sup>2</sup>. Then literature offers an efficient means of attenuating the fear of death and of feeding the necessity of the *tamed* significance: “man has only the solution of the linked fictions that would provide him surrogates of peaceful truths”<sup>3</sup>. As we may see from these two quotations, the *truth* must be understood in the postmodern sense, as being relative, *weakened*<sup>4</sup>, being in need of protection even while providing protection in its turn.

However, literature isn’t salvation from death only in the sense that it may offer to the being, to the reader a series of mechanisms through which he may open himself to death as his possibility to become again in a Heideggerian vision *authentic*, as *literature in general is an ars moriendi*.<sup>5</sup> This is a sign for the author that being a reader means ascending a step on the road toward authenticity and describing, slightly idealizing, that the reader makes: “the-one-who-thinks-alone and can’t be slave to anyone can’t be kneeled neither manipulated. He doesn’t cease to ask himself and answer, searching alone the truths from the humankind thesaurus”<sup>6</sup>, but partially justifiable through that note, which precedes this portrait: *for me*. The reader is the first stage, necessary for the development of other roles that gravitate around one principle of the book: the critic and the writer. If it is more intuitive that the writer can’t exist without including twice the reader – the other, the audience, and himself –, then the including relationship between the critic and the reader could not foresee so clearly in all its aspects. Irina Petras not only names the critic a special type of reader, but she also places him at the intersection between the reader and the writer.<sup>7</sup> To be a reader is a mandatory condition, and to be a writer is an auxiliary one.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the present status of the critic and the suspicion placed on his activity are explained by the author from social perspectives. Due to the fact that there are more and more writers and fewer and fewer readers, the critic’s role becomes difficult. And this is especially due to the fact that he must justify and reanimate the lower interest in literature – an interest directed toward other entertaining

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<sup>1</sup> “If the real life is finite and it takes inevitably to death, the fictional world is another world – a world that leaves the entire freedom of choice, and also the limitless thought”. Ibid., 58.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gianni Vattimo, *Gândirea slabă* (Weak thinking), trans. Ștefania Mincu (Constanța: Editura Pontica, 1998), chapter *Dialectică, diferență, gândire slabă* (Dialectic, difference, weak thinking)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the act of writing, of creating is seen as being caused by the human condition, that of being mortal.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

media with no ontological substratum such as television. Personalization of the literary chronicle, the justifying necessity of the gesture and the critical options are explicable, considers Irina Petras through this context, this necessity of re-charming the reader, whose quality of being a reader is continuously compromised.<sup>1</sup>

Death is often a theme of reflecting upon in this book and without binding it with the writing and reading world. The author retakes a collocation-concept, *death science* of Eminescian inspiration, which is used frequently in her other books, offering some theoretic nuances and giving examples by its literary occurrences. In this book, Irina Petras characterizes death science as being necessary precisely because it is not innate in the being's structures. Although man is a being delivered to death, his abilities and fight strategies against death are not offered by nature or by society. Moreover, the writer observes that the evolution of society is based on the death occulting. A checking on this assumption may be done by placing in front of death as a reality of communication, as a contemporary value. It may be seen thus that *death fails the relation* and, subsequently, becomes indecent.<sup>2</sup> Then, beyond a death science in general, *Divagări inutile* unveils a particular, profound and exciting death science. Irina Petras' death science. There are two major vectors on which this personal death science is focused: artistic (about which we have already discussed more or less explicitly above, while presenting the author's conception on writing and reading<sup>3</sup>) and personal (where death appears in a surprising way as a connection with a clear relational valence: "my most beings: parents. Dying, both of them committed themselves to me. My part of death grew, but not in a ghoulish and dreadful manner. Without their death response my responsibilities grew immeasurably. I remained their trace here and I take their place as long as the far away is still away"<sup>4</sup>). The other's death, of those who are significant, creates, indeed, absence, but the existential lack is compensated (not in the sense of facilitation, but relief) by the increasing state of responsibility for their *trace*.<sup>5</sup> Death involves in Irina Petras' conception such a relationship, which only in this value system of the postmodern superficial layer could be regarded as a non-relation.

There are lots of ideas in Irina Petras' book on which it is worth to reflect upon. For example, the way in which the relationship with the far away other – the animal – greatly valued nowadays is understood: "Survival supposes automatically touching the environmental integrity. If you want to save any creature from suffering and death, I can't see why the pain of a flower you put in your buttonhole or of a tree you cut down mercilessly to make your chairs and newspapers may seem to you smaller. Any dissimulated and excessive ideology concerns the political correctness in a broad sense, the one full of fixed ideas and aberrations, hidden and mean interests, endangering the true responsibility towards the others".<sup>6</sup> Actually, Irina Petras is far from being

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>3</sup> Death science means to know that you would die, but to know how to die, activating your creative valences. Cf.: Ibid., 185.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>5</sup> The frequency of the *trace* motif and its semantic force determines us to say that, despite the diversity of the text types present in the book, we may talk about a true poetics of the trace.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 39.

permissive with excesses, especially ideological ones, be it the case of animal rights, feminist fight for equality with the opposite sex or valorizing ethically the quality of being Romanian (pure hazard, says Irina Petras, so improperly passed through axiological grids).

The author's portrait – a portrait that is liberated after reading this book and that floats above it, friendly and imposing at the same time, persisting in reader's eyes – is explained through the presence of numerous self-characterizations<sup>1</sup> as a reader (with her own reading rituals, privileged spaces, not subdued to models, practitioner of a pleasant reading due to the lack of time for bad readings), as a literary critic, as an observer of society (refusal of dividing the world and people in black and white<sup>2</sup>, appetite for nuances, interrogating the actual vision on Romanian communism<sup>3</sup>, rebellion against despise as a means of inter-human relationship), as a woman (challenge of an innate nature of the genders<sup>4</sup>, and also of an *a priori* justification of any type of feminist militantisme<sup>5</sup>, observing that women and men are alike more than different), as a mortal being<sup>6</sup> and as a being subjected to sickness<sup>7</sup>, as a possessor of a great cultural past (draftsman, winner of literary awards, relationship with *Echinox* Journal) and a great personal past (her close relationship with her parents, her passion for craftsmanship, nightmares about falling from the porch, the sadness of dusk), but also through the authors' capacity to express her image in any text she writes. Thus, we may say that there is a relatively direct portrait of the author and a portrait emanated from the text.

The major characteristic of this portrait, bringing together the friendly familiarity trait and the majestic one coming from erudition and intelligence, is youth. This isn't a youth of biologically infatuated cells due to the yet far distance from death – I've seen though that the author lives under the sign of death – it isn't a youth of a female writer who would desire to maintain a coquettish figure – Irina Petras considers that she is first of all a being and then she becomes a woman, a writer<sup>8</sup> – but a youth that comes through the wisdom way. This is a case of a special wisdom, as we don't deal with a fade and comfortable wisdom of the common things, of the common sense understood as means of getting close to the world with no risk of disturbing the already constructed meanings, but of a wisdom that had assumed the lesson of death and it is not

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<sup>1</sup> There are many clear, direct self-characterizations with aphoristic resonances, as for example: "I am above those who know to accept with no resignation what they can't change and who make enthusiastically everything they can change what can be changed". Ibid., 15.

<sup>2</sup> "I refuse to divide people in angels and demons, I know that the absolute black and white doesn't exist when it comes to human nature". Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup> "No society has ever been good and bad for everybody at the same time, none of them could claim the title of the single atrocious period in History." Ibid., 17.

<sup>4</sup> "Woman's "vocation" wasn't the subject of an option, but the result of an exterior imposition. Even if, biologically speaking, the woman is the one to give life, nothing from man's structure has ever impeded him to express all the gestures supposed by raising offspring". Ibid., 262.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>6</sup> "Reading and the death thought have always been close since I remember of myself". Ibid., 68.

<sup>7</sup> The self-portrait of a person suffering from hypoacusie transcends the personal boundaries and becomes a questioning of the ontologic and ontic, social sense of using words while relating to people and of degrading in *pandemonium*. Cf: Ibid., 112.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 266.

afraid of playing, searching for alternative ways to approach reality, divagations, manners with no warranty of utility. The unfaithful author Irina Petras<sup>1</sup>, often non-feminine in a graceful manner,<sup>2</sup> reticent towards the huge infinites<sup>3</sup> and definitive immortality,<sup>4</sup> practicing an existential philosophy of trace<sup>5</sup> and postulating fearlessly its its degradation in time, creates a strong effect on the reader, offering, practically, more than a book of literary recoveries, a cultural character. Memorable.

## The Stained Glass and the Window – Review<sup>6</sup> –

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*This is* the title of the book on contemporary poets I am currently working on.

This pair of terms, as it is apparent, recalls the oscillation between the poetry of modernity as transfiguration and the poetry of the last decades as transcription. The first – a transfiguration of the world in an attempt to seize its essence; the second – a transcription exhibiting the impossibility to seize any essence.

Adriana Teodorescu's poetry hesitates between the two attitudes, configuring its personal manner of facing the challenges of existence ("gloomy limitlessness in a field of feeble mirrors"). As a graduate of the Faculty of Letters of Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj (specializing in Romanian and French), she wrote her thesis on the work of Caragiale, entitled: *Carnavalul în opera literară caragialiană sau despre posibilitățile peștilor de a zbura* (The carnival in Caragiale's literary work, or the fish's ability to fly) (supervised by prof. univ. dr. V. Fanache), which won her the debut contest of the Cluj branch of the Romanian Students Union, becoming thus an author of the series *Biblioteca tânărului scriitor* (Young writers' library). Her further education, an MA in

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<sup>1</sup> "Due to this very fact that I am not faithful, the world seems to me so damn mysterious. Unsolved. I let my mind open and I don't name my ignorance and my fear God". *Idem*. p. 240. Or: "I don't believe in the after life or in soul immortality, I don't believe that the responsibility for my on life may be put on others' behalf, be it people or gods". *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>2</sup> "Brain is the thing I care the most". *Ibid.*, 218-219.

<sup>3</sup> "I don't believe in love until death parts, in total friendships, in heart rending pains, in absolute fidelity (not only between sexes, but in general). In nothing absolute". *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>5</sup> "I try to place myself in a *civilization of trace*". *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Adriana Teodorescu, *Approape memorie* (Almost memory) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Limes, 2013), 88 p. ISBN 978-973-726-793-1