

Coordonator științific: Prof. Dr. Mircea-Ionel Vartic

PhD: Oana Pughineanu

## *“The spiritualized body”. Comparative perspectives*

*Abstract*

### **I. Prefiguration of “spiritualized body”**

In the first chapter I take a closer look to the less commented early short novels of the Romanian writer Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu focusing especially the body-mind relation, which appears radically changed compared with the realist novel that has dominated the literary field until that moment. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu has a special sensibility towards modern aspects, so that we can find in her early writings a will to liberate the text from the “referential terror”.

The most striking aspect founded in her novels is that "passion" and "body" plays a different role than those with who we are accustomed by platonian-aristotelian academic interpretation. Seen as a force and not as an dissolution, passion is far from the classical hierarchical concept of human (rational faculties, intellect and finally, soul capacities) with whom operates the vast majority of the emergence of literary criticism. Subsidiary, the “panlyrical” label and the subjective-objective opposition is regarding the human that still uses the Reason following the example set by the antic world (Epictet). Like a ray of sun the Reason shines on a bucket full of agitated water. Water is of course the equivalent for passions and humor. Important is that the radius remains "immobile" constant with itself, regardless of the things that shine under. But the image of passion as force excludes the “external” regard of reason. The world described by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu is rather comparable with the Spinoza’s universe, with the *conatus*, the force by which all things strive to preserve.

We can save the characters sketched in the short novels from “bovarism” accusation, or other comments that interprets them as “vegetative being”, left out of life,

as long as we understand the “passion” as a natural force consumed in an *amor intellectualis*, lived as an *amor intellectualis*, as an effort to become self-conscious and aware of the desires that are passing through us, and less to superimpose an ordinate system over them. The mere fact of this superimposition of order on a vortex does nothing else but shed light over his arbitrary character, one that matches the arbitrary language system. Thus, passion or desire are establishing themselves an order that far from remaining fixed, has the advantage of constant renewal. The schopenhaurian and nietzschean Will, freudian impulses or phenomenological concepts attempt to explain this new order, much molded on the specifics of a situation.

As Remo Bodei sees it, *amor intellectualis* cannot be understood, in fact, neither in the emotional sense, neither just as harmony, gentleness and peace, but rather as an emotional-cognitive structure, in the same time knowledge that moves and movement that knows, an open structure”. We could say, therefore, that passions and desires are for bengescian female characters are road openers of the intentional fields. They are not mere emotion, instantly consumable in the kitsch of a predetermined formula. Rather than asking to be suppressed they need to be regarded with a tense attention. However, their character somewhat “fatal” cannot be suppressed, and the passion continues to “lead”. More difficult than subject them rationally, is the effort to raise awareness, to see the way they open. In terms of corporeality, if we find any mortuary relationship, it is referring either at the world as a tomb for the body, either at the body as a tomb for the world. To overcome this type of relation the characters are resorting to pre-Christian symbols. It's not a simple "feminine" lyricism, but a special way of thinking the body in the objective novels preceding phase. Only Mini will retain traces of this concept that I call (after Umberto Galimberti's term) "ambivalence". The rest of the characters remain subjected to the Lovinescu's imperative of “objectivity”, meaning the “disjunctive logic” that crosses over the entire Occidental tradition, from Plato to Freud, molded on conscious-unconscious conflicts. In an interesting analysis Umberto Galimberti demonstrates how psychoanalysis introduces the term unconscious as a hypothesis to explain "the incomplete nature of conscious acts". But the hypothesis take the place of the reality which explains a body understood rather in a physiological way. In an axiomatic way Freud starts from the premise that reality is something entirely causal set. Therefore, in order to explain the gaps

in consciousness he needs to "redouble" the physiological unconscious. But even if he identifies the "psychological" with the "physiological" the extremely debated Cartesian mind-body dualism is far from being resolved. Consciousness to the extent that it is not intentional nor the result of "exchange" (archaic) becomes a mysterious part of solidified Self as a result of countless repressions. Western society lives in "the division symbol" operated by "disjunctive logic".

So, the problem of the Cartesian mind-body dualism remains intact because what happens in psychoanalytic system, just like in any other system that uses the "disjunctive logic", is just an illusory unification between body and mind, better said, between body and a certain way in which the mind thinks the body. Basically this is the process in which the "spirit calvary" is consumed in a "bad infinity". Hence the proustian fear of not being capable to retrieve the time in other moment than in the one of the brutal and symbolical rupture of the death.

We could say that at Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu (and, as we shall see, at Virginia Woolf) we found ourselves at the opposite pole from Proust's narration that occurs through the mediation that avoid the symbol, while the feminine prose starts from an intuition of an subsidiary world (not the one of "disjunctive logic"), capable to erupt and interrupt, even for a second (a seducing one), the bad infinity of mediations. In the case of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and Virginia Woolf, if we can speak of an metaphysics is just in the in the sense of surpassing banality, the ordinary *doxa*, the prejudices. This exceeding as otherwise noted by critics, has an impressionist touch, being an exceeding of real by the means of sensation and less through theoretical constructions, or simply, realist narrative constructions. Is noteworthy that the "battle" between body and Self appears only with the conversion to realist novels in which appear mentally disturbed characters subjected to the XX century most fashionable illness: hysteria, but also to one of the most "romantic" illness: tuberculosis.

Using empathy and speaking of resonance Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and Virginia Woolf make place for an new approach to the world. Is not a journey without danger. The emotive approach questions the world through the body that he rebels against any *habitus*, refusing the harmony that Proust discovered grafted into the body through

involuntary memory and habit. In fact, involuntary memory is a way to restore a forgotten habit. But for the characters of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu the past is "dead" is a "faded herbarium". To rediscover a habit means to miss, to fail the world, just as giving way to emotions means missing and failing your Ego (as an ordering principle). Between the two versions, stands as a stretched spring, the "spiritualized body", as a mark of unity / individuality that do not impose herself as knowledge (Proust), but it becomes aware of itself as a defensive strategy before the emotional attack of the world.

## **II. The so called "proustian" style. Body and time.**

The second chapter depicts the major differences between Proust and the female authors in conceiving time and the recourse to sensation, trying to elaborate the particularities of regarding the world through emotion on one hand and intellectualization on the other hand.

Proust was able to make the time more than one source of degradation, and the story is more than a form of "colonization" the time. All his work was built to reject a double prejudice: that the time may be ordered by a puppeteer-author or that the time is only something that hangs behind like a convict leg weight (reminiscent piece of Judaic-Christian moral). His work, in a sense can be termed as a "redressing" because his discursive struggle with what it defines precisely the speech: the lack of completion, fulfillment, the inability in filling its own limits. The Proustian desire to find something coherent in life is, in fact, the desire to annul the discourse fragmentarity. Even at this level, we can see the platonism at work in the proustian way of thinking, where each object or passage, enter in the swirl of reminiscence in order to meet his Idea. It's just that unlike philosophical system, the Proustian system is trying to emerge from the cave of ideas, not from the *a priori* field, but from sensation. The "socratic method" that Proust uses does not take place between two minds, but between his own feelings and thoughts. The writer accepts something that the philosopher doesn't: that between these two partners in dialogue (feelings and thoughts), there isn't just one supervisor, one teacher. The roles are alternating. What is for the philosopher a source of inconsistency, for the

writer is a source of authenticity. But that's only if we refer to a type of Platonic philosophy. But Proust but was quickly assumed by the new phenomenological approach. Involuntary memory owes more to bodily memory rather than to the intellectual one which cannot perceive the fragments if they are not arranged in a line. The body, as the site of all impressions cohesion is what makes possible the existence of the fragment, the tablet that one perceives and describes.

*In Search of Lost Time* means to think the time otherwise than as a mechanical multiplication in which no form of individuality is possible. Identity between a present and a past moment in time has often been interpreted by associating it with "Platonic reminiscence" (Michel Butor). It is difficult to perceive the extent to which the proustian repetition resembles the Platonic repetition. We must remember that at Plato, if repetition occurs, it is for the glory of Ideas, not for the temporarily individuality. Therefore I am inclined to believe that it is rather possible (but again, it is unclear to what degree) a better comparison with Nietzsche's repetition. Even if the Being was "dismissed" and was replaced by chance, repetition is possible, not only as a simple perpetuation of the natural (of the species, of the seasons etc.), but by a kind of primacy of the individual. What Nietzsche wants to say is that in the Chance that we are, we can establish on our own events that are not the product of Chance. Of course, those events are not absolute; they are valid only for us. We can establish them through the authenticity of living in two ways: either as the *Übermensch* who give their own law, without expecting any "suggestion" of any world of ideas, either through intensity. The intensity of emotion (which is the source of *amor fati*) is the element that guarantees authenticity even in the absence of originality. There is no need to be "different", but only to have the courage not to fetter the desires, sensations, pleasures, in other words the will of power, the will of life. The fact that we live in a "recurrent scheme" (Noica), should not forbid us to have desires. Madame Bovary did nothing else but to seek strength in the "scheme". Is not that she wanted the intensity of an original fact ... she wanted the eternal platitudes: a lover, select soirees, to live in Paris. She committed suicide because she couldn't get out of her own schedule ... not because what she dreams or what she desires is something extraordinary original. There is no more powerful example to prove that not ingenuity, but the intensity is the most effective fighting ordinary (reinvesting it). No one can

survive in the desert of his own intellect. Proust too wants to overcome this situation but he uses other ways, without using the projection in the future. His repetition is both as in Plato and Nietzsche: is always needed the contribution of the past, a "history", as it essential that this repetition concerns only the individual.

But if the universal logos justifies at Proust the individual, in the case of Virginia Woolf and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, universal logos or what is common, means only the missing, the failure of the individuality. Of course, the universality, as universality of language is unavoidable. The focalization of female writers on the individual logos can be categorized as a form of unconscious Focusing on women's individual logos can be categorized as a form of unconscious vis-à-vis the universal the universal. But it isn't the unconscious a form of rebellion? And isn't emotion more genuine, even if it is a form of forgetfulness? Isn't a subversive way, to the sentimental construct? Just as intuition, emotion really has the quality of immediacy "phenomena" before construction.

Clarissa Dalloway or Mini prefer to thrill, or to live this world as many times at is appearing and is coming in their way without "sentimentalize" it or put it in the form of intelligence as Proust puts it, "doesn't know the closed situations of life, without exit". Empathy and resonance are authentic ways of living without resorting to what is "common". If Proust had not been so absorbed by the astonishing discovery of involuntary memory, Sarraute's intellectualism accusations were wholly justified. Involuntary memory and pleasure, before being intellectualized, ie as pure emotion, produces an remarkable change: instead of living like reliving (the eternal problem of the salon and the province), we can have the process of remembering as a process of living. In other words, not remembering what we lived nut remembering *becomes the equivalent of living*.

But Proust was somehow the victim of themetaphysical language of the era. His discovery destroyed, in fact, the eternal game of mirrors between appearances and essences, which he reintroduced by the desire to "intellectualization". His writing, however, is full of insights that have exceeded the theories, and in this way the metaphor ceases to be the mark of "municipality ": it becomes deviation. In his writing Proust anticipated the dissatisfaction produced by the use of "universal language", that has

become a pain rather than happiness. In Derrida's words, language is "the missing of singularity". In language the beginnings are always quotes, and no one demonstrated this better than Joyce with his "haosmos".

For Virginia Woolf unlike Proust it is important to reveal that there is no "universal" or "individual" logos, there are just braided elements. It's why the "fog" and "town", these sorts of melting pots become leitmotif in her novels. We are going to fount these images in "Ciclul Hallipilor" as well, expressed by Mini's feelings. Mini is a focal point through which the "tunnels" of the rest of the characters meet. At Virginia Woolf narration in itself becomes such a focal point. It is the reason why Virginia Woolf does not need a newsmonger-character and even the rest of the characters may be abandoned at half the novel, as it happened into *To the Lighthouse*. For bouth female authors is important the ideas of „simply living" and „moment". Life is an "chaotic, impersonal" energy and accepts any form. Thus between life and text is a resemblance, both being subversive precisely because they are not: they do not preclude framing, but resist, run away. In Lucian Raicu's words "the text has no fear".

### **III. The "stream of consciousness" and the illness in Mrs. Dalloway and Ciclul Hallipa**

In the third chapter I take a closer look to the common elements and themes used by the two female authors, trying to emphasize a similarity of stile. Both Virginia Woolf and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu are eager to expose the sexual opposition, not in terms of "militant feminism", but following the segregation of characters in their intimate space, in their inner self.

We find exposed, at least in Woolf's work, the full range of women "types": from the woman that is fighting the "femininity" inside her (in a somewhat Clarissa and Miss Kilman), to the woman completely subjugated by her "femininity" (Mrs. Dempser). Both writers emphasize the disturbing situation of women excluded from the masculine world of action. They could never occupy the place of the vanquished or of the hero because

they are from the beginning excluded from the battle field. But this happens not only because in a powerful cultural segregation of sexes the women are marginalized and they have no power of decision regarding the destiny of the world. The problem seen with lucidity by authors is much profound. The woman itself, in her deep mental intimacy is subjected (if not to helplessness) at least to a resistance towards this way of thinking. Is not the case of incapacity in thinking the world, not lack of intuition, but difficulty in handling the meaning, or better said, including it in a theory.

Language, as is used by women, is condemned to speak only in private. That “pure and simple” life, that “That’s all!” uttered with a quasi religious force are expressions unable to find a place in oratorical speeches. This is because those expressions are extremely affirmative and as tautology they are excluding the logical possibility of disputes. But it is a tautology which, like the visual field includes everything. Language in the feminine use, is consumed in the paradox of being in the same time purely contextual and embracing everything, without a trace of discrimination. The difference in conceiving the values by the two sexes is strictly linked to this conceptual-discriminatory capacity. Values in male vision must be "proved" and inferred using "attributes" that would accompany them, while in the female vision, similar to the existential, nothing can support, justify values than the individual. In the *agape* love type Virginia Woolf sees the only solution for the relationship between men and women. This kind of love fits the values as supported by individuals (the belief as embodied idea). The extreme reached by the saint is similar to the acceptance of "pure and simple", ie an acceptance not because such and such qualities, but in spite of their existence or nonexistence. The saint practice an "irrational tenderness, " a paroxysm of pathos indifferent to the object. A love based on attributes is a philistine occupation. We may be able to decrypt a ironically message in this *agape* love (Virginia Woolf speaks about it in *Night and day*), which sees an unacceptable formula from the male logic of dispute: "love your enemy". Could it be an irony (even a self irony) the fact that men are beginning to use the tautological language only in illness (the psychosis of Maxentiu and Septimius Smith)?



The skin, like language was often associated with the surface, the appearance, which would block the access to a deep interiority. Psychoanalysis was one that drew surface from appearance and superficial meanings with which it was related. The skin and the surface isn't anymore a shell, but the only way for the development of meaning. Writing, as the skin surface, was thought to be diverted from the truth of speech, purity of sound. Sin consists in an inversion between soul and body, between flesh and thought, between artificiality of the writing denounced by Plato and the authenticity of speech (as if the sound would be interposed between the man and the idea less than would a graphic sign, resistant in time. In fact, resistance in time was a form of sin, since it prevented the timeless contemplation.) Writing figures out, at the same time, the uncontrollable body motility, and its persistence over time. The body just as the word / text includes the paradox of persistency (in time) by passing (through time). Written word, is the way in which meet epidermis and logos, in fact, the written word is their similarity, their *coincidentia oppositorum*.

The bodily language discovered by psychoanalysis don't represent anymore the "sin" of reversing inside-outside relations, but is – blasphemy! – the equivalence between interior-exterior. The "I" is for Freud a bodily entity, at the surface and projecting a surface. Mini and Clarissa, who is said to suffer from deficiency of existence, precisely because they are too impressionable, are offering themselves as a place of writing/registration. It is through these characters overly perceptive existence that female authors are going beyond the "analysis" novel formula by "creation", ie not towards what offers the reader something already interpreted, but with the mystery of visible, of surface, of a cinematic evidence.

Another commune point that I found at Virginia Woolf and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu is the way they use the seduction in order to escape the daily routine. The originality of Virginia Woolf consists in exposing the seduction without seducer. It occurs spontaneously, is an internal combustion accompanied by a revelation, and is prepared predictable for the desire's struggle between the predictable impossibility and the impossible predictability of love. This intensity is extremely well exposed by Barthes: "I wait, therefore I am in love". Thus, the seduction may be the product of intensive and

unconscious training, a fabulous self-deception, which is no longer the result of sublimation. It is perhaps why the objects, and the scenery, play a decisive role in seduction. Seduction always starts from a feature (of the day, other body or speech) that is not only timeless and broke the ties with other things, is cut off from her own reason. The kiss that Sally gives to Clarissa provokes on her a “sudden revelation”, “an inner meaning almost expressed”. Seduction thus appears as a form of experiencing the sublime. Although it lacks the "intent" is not devoid of conscience. Like seduction, the sublime astonishes, has the power “to abduct and elevate the spirit”.

As a conclusion we can say that what remains commune to Virginia Woolf and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu is the emotion with which either the meaning, either the nonsense is lived by the female characters or in the masculine psychosis. The language retreated in himself, like a sick body makes literature the place *par excellence* where the *purpose, meaning, morals* are no longer regarded as remedies, but are themselves *symptoms*. Maybe you should see in the literary "autonomy of language", not just a metaphorical capacity as deviation, but as a "will of power", as a way to detach the thinking from the *reactive* in order to make her *active*, meaning creative. The will is the affirmation of its own differences. The consciousness takes birth only in the moment of the emergence of submission report. Or, body and language can “do” much more than de consciousness, and just as psychoanalysis challenges the mechanic, literature "contest philology” (Foucault). The literature finds its "place" anywhere it finds a lack of measurement.