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THE CHRONOTOPE IN THE ONEIRIC WRITING
OF MARGUERITE YOURCENAR

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1. CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	6
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FIRST PART THE ONEIRIC COORDINATE OF THE PROSE OF MARGUERITE YOURCENAR

Chap.I	For an oneiric theory of dream	16
1.1.	<i>Les Songes et les Sorts</i> or the oneiric perception of Marguerite Yourcenar .	16
1.2.	<i>Les Songes et les Sorts</i> – « Memoires of an oneiric life » or « the report on certain authenticated nocturnal adventures».....	18
1.3.	An oneiric theory doubled by a literary and extra-literary history of the dream	20
1.4.	An attempt to define the dream – the point of view of Yourcenar and of the cognitive psychology	28
Chap. II	The forms of dream and their significance to the writer	37
2.1.	« La maison brûlée » and the formula of the “lyrical or hallucinating dream ».....	38
2.2.	« Le rêve du 4 à 5 juin 1979 » and the formula of the “commented dream” ..	42
2.3.	The « telegrafic » dreams from <i>L'Œuvre au Noir</i> and <i>Mémoires d'Hadrien</i>	46
2.3.1.	The dreams from <i>L'Œuvre au Noir</i>	50
2.3.2.	The last dreams of the Emperor Hadrien	54
2.4.	The prophetic dream from the short story <i>Une belle matinée</i>	57
2.4.1	The seven acts of dream	64
2.4.2	The dream of Lazare – the guide of a debutant actor	71

Chap. III	The forms of the diurnal dream from «Denier du rêve »	78
3.1	« Voluntary illusion » and the dream – reverie	80
3.2.	The diurnal dream of Marguerite Yourcenar between the wakeful dream of the psychoanalysis and the Bachelardian reverie	92

SECOND PART

THE TYPOLOGY OF THE YOURCENARIAN ONEIRIC CHRONOTOPE

Chap. IV	Oneiric constructions centred on adventure; the forms of the adventure chronotope	105
4.1.1.	The road chronotope	105
4.1.2.	The meeting chronotope	113
	a. Meeting with a noble animal	114
	b. Meeting with one’s peers	118
	c. Meeting with the divinity	124
	d. Meeting with the self.....	129
4.1.3.	The secludeness chronotope.....	134
4.2.	Valorization of the space in the « report on certain authenticated nocturnal adventures».	146
	a. The natural scenery	146
	b. The constructed scenery	154
	c. The church and the cathedral.....	162
	d. The theatre and the cinema.....	167
	e. The prison and the cage	173
4.3.	The faces of time in the « report on certain authenticated nocturnal adventures».....	177
4.3.1.	The external time related to the script	178
	a. The human and the historical time	178
	b. The time of the genesis of the dream or of the reverie.....	185
4.3.2.	The inner time of the script	192
	a. The time of the writing.....	192
	b. The time of the adventure and its aesthetic potential.....	196

Chap.V	Oneiric constructions under becoming	213
5.1	The forms of the becoming chronotope.....	215
5.1.1.	The chronotope of the returning to origins	216
	a. Returning to the mother.....	218
	b. Pilgrimage to the childhood places. ..	222
5.1.2.	The chronotope of love crisis.....	232
5.1.3.	The chronotope of aging	241
5.1.4	The chronotope of passing away	250
5.2	Valorizing the space in « Memoires of an oneiric life »	258
	a. The chamber, abstract place, paradise or inferno of intimacy	259
	b. The house	264
5.3.	Valorizing the space in « Memoires of an oneiric life »	267
	a. The regretted past	271
	b. The disappointing present.....	273
	c. The future – a fountain full of concerns	277
Chap. VI	Conclusions : from the oneiric chronotope to the creation of a new genre of the oneiric literature, « le rêve lyrique ou halluciné ».....	280
BIBLIOGRAPHY	286

2. KEY-WORDS

lyrical or hallucinating dream, commented dream, reverie, voluntary illusion, oneiric chronotope, oneiric transcription

3. ABSTRACT

Important dreamer, transcriber and theoretician of an original category in the field of nocturnal oneiric, the so-called «rêve lyrique ou halluciné», Marguerite Yourcenar is at the same time a writer interested in dream. In the introduction of her collection of oneiric transcriptions of 1938, *Les Songes et les Sorts*, she engages in a literary history of dream, written by herself, having as main reference points, among others, the Greek Antiquity, the

Classicism and the Surrealism. Her writings from the '30s, especially *Les Songes et les Sorts*, confer a multiple role to the dream, perpetuated for that matter, in the following periods of her creation, in fiction and in autobiography: simple literary topic, such as love, death and illness, discrete instrument for investigating the interiority, together with the myth and legend, aesthetic reference of great value, in competition with the artistic or geographical analogy, a particular type of writing, who's mark reminds us of the poem written in prose (through visual substance, rupture, incompleteness, theoretical digressions, lyrical expansions) or the adventure novel (through the density of events, dynamism, fabulous or terrifying atmosphere).

Nevertheless, few readers know such aspects of Marguerite Yourcenar, who, for that matter, aroused little interest for the critics. In the vast bibliography dedicated to this author, a limited number of studies refer to the problem of dream and to the collection *Les Songes et les Sorts*. We mention a few of them that have inspired us in choosing the Yourcenarian dream as our research topic, and that suggested to us a series of tracks to follow, such as the use of extra-literary grid for describing the dream, the choice of a global perspective concerning the dream at this author, and not the quartering exclusively in the personal dream, the identification of formal and thematic correspondences between *Les Songes et les Sorts* and other Yourcenarian texts, the identification of a new genre of oneiric literature in the so-called «rêve lyrique ou halluciné»: Carmen Ana Pont – *Yeux ouverts, yeux fermés: la poétique du rêve dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, Maria Cavazzuni - «*Les Songes et les Sorts: mythologie du moi, miroir de l'universalité*», Patricia De Feyter - «*Le rêve, ce grand architecte*», etc. Neither the category of the diurnal dream illustrated in the novel *Denier du rêve* aroused the attention of critics, even though the novel represented the subject of multiple analysis, including an international colloquium in 2003.

To these researches regarding the dream of Marguerite Yourcenar we would like to add an original approach, which also takes into consideration the diurnal oneiric, explored in the novel mentioned above. Thus, we intend to unify the Yourcenarian oneiric universe, analyzing the personal so-called authentic dreams of the writer, from the '30s and from the '60s -'70s, and of the dreams conferred to certain fiction characters, Hadrien, Zénon and Lazare, the protagonists of the novels *Mémoires d'Hadrien* and *L'œuvre au Noir*, and the last, of the novel *Une belle matinée*. To these we add the reveries and voluntary illusions of the characters from *Denier du rêve*. The approach also involves the discussion over the theory of Yourcenarian oneirics, displayed in the introduction of the first edition of the collection *Les*

Songes et les Sorts, as well as in the notes and comments made by the author, that accompany the posthumous edition. Because such theory seems to take into consideration only the nocturnal dream, we intend to establish at least one definition for the diurnal dream that we named <<rêve-rêvière>> and for the voluntary illusion (<<illusion volontaire>> - name given by the author). The main goal of our research is to identify the forms of the oneiric chronotope at Marguerite Yourcenar that requires an exploration of both meanings of the imaginary oneiric. This is the reason why we considered necessary to present the corpus and the justification of its choice, as well as to define the oneiric categories that have been studied (the personal dream with his two forms, <<le rêve lyrique ou halluciné>> and <<le rêve commenté>>, the dream character, the reverie and voluntary illusion).

The oneiric chronotope, concept created following the model of the short-story chronotope defined by Bakhtin in his study *Formes du temps et du chronotope dans le roman*, represents a category of form and content that shapes all this types of oneiric activities, conferring them a hybrid form that transgresses the generic impediments. It is about a poem written in prose where one can find the essay, the adventure novel, the autobiography, the biographic novel. At Marguerite Yourcenar the poem written in prose as a foundation for dream includes different levels of elaboration – the most complex corresponds to the personal dream from the '30s, <<le rêve lyrique ou halluciné>>, the other ones, including the reverie and voluntary illusion, are more or less modest variants of the first one.

The centre of our research is the collection of *Les Songes et les Sorts*, that borrows its topic to the fiction work, strongly connected to the oneiric sources (significant personal memories, loved ones, cultural and geographical references, life situations, generally human obsessions), transformation processes suffered (beauty, overthrow, adjustment), certain writing marks (fragmentation, dynamism, emphasis on the visual dimension, sometimes the incompleteness, the authorial comments).

Our research is made up of two parts: <<The oneiric coordinate of the prose of Marguerite Yourcenar>> (La veine oririque de la prose de Marguerite Yourcenar) and <<The typology of the Yourcenarian oneiric chronotope>> (Typologie du chronotpe onirique yourcenarien). The first part pursues the topic of the dream in the prose of this author and it begins by analyzing the collection of personal transcriptions *Les Songes et les Sorts*, in the light of the authorial project presented in the introduction from 1938: the transcription of certain authentic dreams, interpreted as memoirs of an oneiric life (<<Mémoires de ma vie

rêverée>>) or as certain authenticated nocturnal adventures (<<compte rendu d'aventures nocturnes authentifiées>>). Because these are personal confessions, the transcriptions are not accessible to the reader unless he honors a pact of discretion imposed by the author. Further on, there are restored the oneiric theory of Marguerite Yourcenar, centered on defining the category <<rêve lyrique ou halluciné>> that includes the 22 transcriptions from the 1938's edition, as well as the literary and extra-literary history of dream, where the author places herself as a dreamer and dream explorer. The definition given by Yourcenar for the dream, less rigorous and incomplete, is compared with a scientific definition, where, for that matter, there are all the theoretical intuitions of the writer. It is about the definition of a specialist in cognitive psychology, Jacques Montanger, also interested in dream, as form of therapy, not as a literary construction. He describes the structure of the dream and the way in which the spatial-temporal coordinates are treated in dream, offering an interpretation grid that we were able to use in our analysis for the different varieties of chronotope at Marguerite Yourcenar.

Also, in the first part of this thesis, a vast chapter is dedicated to the forms of the nocturnal dreams experienced by the writer, with concrete illustrations, based on which we were able to differentiate the writing particulars of each one of these forms << le rêve lyrique ou halluciné>>, pertaining to the first period of oneiric activity, << le rêve commentée>>, specific to senescence, the condensed dreams, almost telegraphic, from the novels *L'œuvre au Noir* and *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, the prophetic dream from the short story *Une belle matinée*, with its theory about theatre.

For the diurnal dream, for which there aren't any definitions given by the author, we used certain extra-literary explicative models, borrowed from Bachelard, as well as two concepts from the contemporary psychoanalysis, the directed waking dream (<<rêve éveillé dirigé>>) of Robert Desoille and the free waking dream (<<rêve éveillé libre>>) of Georges Romey. Based on these we identified the structure and transformation mechanisms of oneiric matter (beauty and adjustment), that allow the diurnal dream, but also the voluntary illusion to exercise the compensative function.

In the second part of this research we introduce the concept of oneiric chronotope, inspired by Bakhtin's chronotope of the novel. It represents the centre of the events' organization of the script, a condensation of spatial-temporal parameters. The oneiric chronotope is placed at the base of a specific variant of the oneiric genre, the so-called << rêve lyrique ou halluciné >>, updated either as an adventure script, merger of elements borrowed

from the some canonical forms (adventure novels, black novel, police novel), or as an autobiographic script, appraising elements that belong to the autobiographic genre (memoirs, diary, autobiography).

The method of analysis conceived by Bakhtin and also used by us pursues three directions: the configuration of the chronotope, the chronotope's influence on the subject (the importance of space and time in the organization of the subject) and on the image of the human being suggested by this work. We intent to show how the type of oneiric chronotope determines the genre, or moreover, the oneiric variant of the genre that belongs to the transcription in which it appears.

In the first section of the second part we have analysed the oneiric constructions dominated by adventure (personal dreams, character dreams and reveries). We have identified three types of chronotopes: the chronotope of the road, meeting and secludedness. The most exuberant is the chronotope of the road, which receives influences from the adventure novel or from travel notes (dynamism, dynamic situations, dangerous characters, various scenery, unusual but not exotic, in a geographical sense). The meeting chronotope generates revelations concerning the relationship between the human being and nature or the obsessions and limits of the individual (the maternity in the case of the dreamer Marguerite Yourcenar, the artistic vocation for the two actors from the Yourcenarian prose, Lazare from the novella *Une belle matinée* and Angiola Fides, from the novel *Denier du r ne*). Sometimes the meeting chronotope is surrounded by the terrifying atmosphere of the police novel, not deprived by the mystery and investigation characteristic for such genre. The secludedness chronotope confers to scenarios a fixed composition (the cause of the state of imprisonment, the escape plan, the liberation, sometimes followed by an attempt to rescue another prisoner). Also in this situation, one must notice the influence of the adventure novel (the topos of the prison, the dramatic situations). When the prisoner is an animal, the secludedness chronotope brings to light the relationships between species, in an attempt to repair the pessimistic image of the human being, perceived almost every time as a kind of executioner of the nature. The definitive mark of the adventure chronotope is represented by the emphasis on space and not on adventures, as we would expect, by relating to the novel equivalent analysed by Bakhtin. Extremely diverse (natural, built, urban, rural, etc.), the space of the oneiric adventures enjoys the specialised chromatic palette of time, its fourth dimension (red and pink for sunsets, the delicate green for the beginning of spring, etc.). Exceptions are represented by the closed spaces (prison, church, cinema, theatre) where the aesthetic power

of time cannot express itself. One can say that in the adventure chronotope, time is not that important as a fabulous framework of some adventures, untrue in many cases, or of some experiences of a tourist that discovers unusual places. Its fundamental role is to sustain the discovery of something that is unique in the space crossed throughout the adventures.

The other section of the second part deals with the becoming chronotope, specific to the oneiric constructions dominated by the biographical time. This type of chronotope also valorises space, even though he lost his spectacular dimension. The life story that is drawn in watermark in the personal dreams is the story of inhabited places or (re)visited by the dreamer at certain ages: an abstract room where the birth or the agony takes place, childhood places (the chamber, house and park) rebuilt from memories with an amazing accuracy, resumed after years in the familial triptych *Le labyrinthe du monde*, in an almost unchanged form, an aesthetic chamber, conceived as a theatre scene for a unique performance, the crisis of the couple. To these we can add two backgrounds from the adventure chronotope, in communication with the after-world. The dreamer explores them in order to discover the secrets of the world beyond the grave (the grave hidden under the road buried in snow) or to kidnap the loved one from the Underworld, such as a new Orpheus (the labyrinth city).

The time of becoming is by excellence the organizer of the oneiric matter, which imposes an oneiric order to the chronotope forms that it generates (birth, ageing, regression, dissolution). Thus, the chronotope of returning to origins rebuilds the birth and the first years of the dreamer's life, the chronotope of the love crisis rebuilds the youth, by means of a unique marking experience, love, the chronotope of growing old pursues the degradation of the body, under the influence of time and illness, and the chronotope of passing away illustrates the virtual moment of death, as a superior form of knowledge or self-sacrifice, when one has to save another human being.

The oneiric constructions dominated by becoming are closely related to the prose poem by their lyrical impact, powered by the attitude towards time and by the experiences lived at a certain age (the past arouses nostalgia, characteristic with the golden age, in clear contrast to the disappointing present, marked by the loss of love and by the degradation of the body or to the future assimilated with death).

The analysis of the forms of the becoming chronotope entails a comparison with other texts with autobiographical character signed by Marguerite Yourcenar. *Feux*, the diary of a miserable passion influenced the collection *Les Songes et les Sorts* in the perspective on love but also in writing (fragmentation, titles, etc.). In *Le Labyrinthe du monde* one can find the oneiric awakening of the years spent at Mont-Noir but also of the birth.

The last chapter of our research centralizes the two main types of the oneiric chronotope from the Yourcenarian prose, emphasizing for each case its defining elements. It also shows the manner in which the two types of chronotope influence the so-called «rêve lyrique ou halluciné», an original genre of the oneiric literature that Marguerite Yourcenar promotes in the first edition of the collection *Les Songes et les Sorts*, but also the other forms of dream from the Yourcenarian prose. The adventure chronotope determines the dynamic Romanian aspect of the series of transcriptions marked by exoticism, suspense and fabulous, while the becoming chronotope organizes the investigation of the dreamer's ego based on the references of the biographical time, using two coordinates: the particular and the universal. From a generic perspective, this «rêve lyrique ou halluciné» specific to Yourcenar is related to memoirs, by asserting a second vocation, of dreamer « lyrique ou halluciné» and of transcriber, as opposed to the vocation of memorialist, specific to that genre. The author has the gift of dreaming beautifully and possesses a remarkable plastic sensibility (« le don de voir» – the gift of seeing, as she says in the introduction from 1938). On the other hand, she is looking for a shading and graceful language that allows her to reproduce as close as possible the performance in the first visual row of the dream. One should not forget the echoes of history that the dream assimilates, as well as the witness position adopted sometimes by the dreamer, which remains, in her own way, a memorialist.

From the adventure novel, the dream « lyrique ou halluciné» borrows the avalanche of events, the taste for travel and risk, from the police novel, the mystery that needs to be solved during an investigation with a detective, and from the gothic novel, the vampire figure and the specific props (the coffin).

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