

The first chapter was an exercise in close reading of John Kennedy Toole's novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*. The hypertext used as a landmark in the comparative enterprise was *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Cervantes' novel. The topic of comparison was the American Dream with its undertones of power and dominance. One of the conditions of masterpieces is to delineate the characters able to get access to a universal typology. J. K. Toole's protagonist, Ignatius Reilly, is built on a cross-hatch of discourses: Falstaff, Don Quixote, Oliver Hardy and Thomas Aquinas blended into a contradictory postmodern figure.

Another chapter considered the history and implications of the Faustian bargain. The temptation of cooperation is studied from many points of view and the chronological approach reveals the evolution of this partnership towards more intellectual cravings. The conclusion is that both Faustus and Mephistopheles refine their substance up to the point where they acquire burlesque traits. The authenticity of the legend is re-fashioned in connection to different transformations in order to correspond to every type of *Zeitgeist*. The incessant re-shaping of the legend reflects the main tenets of the philosophy of culture. The more we depart from popular culture and veer towards the limited stylistic arcs of elevated culture, the more we register surprising embodiments of the concept of authenticity. William Gilmore Simms's novel *Paddy MacGann or the Devil from the Log* pushes the legend to its postmodern consequences, where laughter and lucidity bring new valences to the devilish bargain.

Another comparative insight in the relationship between popular and professional literature is the circulation of themes and motifs. In this respect, I studied the conglomerate of narrative approaches focusing on the theme of laziness. The central point of the research was I.A. Goncharov's novel *Oblomov*. The satellite narratives were *Lazybones Taro*, a Japanese tale, Ion Creangă's *The Story of a Lazybones (Povestea unui om leneș)*, A. Pushkin's *Evgheni Oneghin*, F. Dostoyevsky's *The Demons*, Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, J. K. Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Mateiu Caragiale's *The Old Court [Libertines](#)* (*Craii de Curtea-Veche*), and John Keats' *Ode on Indolence*. This is also a study in imagology, as idleness implies various stereotypes. Ion Bușe denounced the envy provoked by those who afford doing almost nothing. Following this line of thought, parallels could be drawn between many folk tales and F. Nietzsche's theory about the conflict between overman and slaves, or the Nazi and communist doctrines which worshipped hard work as an instrument for controlling people's minds and pushing totalitarian regimes to their utmost aberrations. The Eleatic and hedonistic life style contradicts the activist utopias of Plato, Tomas Morus, or

Louis-Sébastien Mercier (*L'an 2440. Rêve s'il en fut jamais*) and stress the ethical implications of diminished entrepreneurship.

Another study was dedicated to underlying discourses and it targeted G. Călinescu's *Poor Ioanide (Bietul Ioanide)*. This is a novel about intelligentsia in which stereotypes, cultural automatism and clichés flourish at every social level. The anti-heroes are organized in family clans, in a mafia-like structure. Although the discourses are quite homogeneous, with the exception of Ioanide's, the rhizomatic intertextuality erects baroque scaffoldings which stand up owing to the firm, classical-manner of elaborating each and every character.

The baroque structure imagined in accordance with the principle of *discordia concors* is the topic of analysis in the chapter dedicated to the theme of androgyny. Italo Calvino's novel *Il Visconte Dimezzato* epitomizes a manicheistic paradigm of confronting the two halves of a unit. The consequences of a heteroclit and schizophrenic whole are visible in V. Nabokov's *Lolita*, where Humbert Humbert's self-referential discourse simultaneously justifies and blames. The same discourse imbued with aesthetic justifications is identifiable at Gustav Aschenbach, the protagonist of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice*. The contradictory soliloquy reveals the fragility of every justification or accusation. The androgynous pattern encapsulates two points of view, as everything seems relative. Androgyny is the source of conflict in G. Ibrăileanu's *Adela*, in Mircea Eliade's *Maitreyi*, in V. B. Ibanez's *Between Orange Trees* or in Aldous Huxley's *The Genius and the Goddess*. The feminist discourse makes its way in problematizing local mentalities and reactions.

This rift inside the androgynous discourse could be tackled as binary ontology: one embracing hyper-specialization, the other one superior dilettantism. To exemplify this hypothesis I selected examples from folklore. For instance, Prince Charming would be the embodiment of the latter ontological type. He is not the α individual in one or two fields, but the β one in plural fields. In order to ensure the success of his performative acts, he gathers a suit of specialists, every one of them α in their field, but deprived of the bird's eye view. Only Prince Charming has the nature of a *mixtum compositum* and this grants him the possibility of improvising, e.g. of resorting to an interdisciplinary discourse. This is the key to success in the case of young Beowulf too. In Aristotle's terms, he is the only one endowed with the will to verify potentialities (*dynamis*) in actuality (*energeia*) and thus to reach fulfilment (*entelecheia*). As *energeia* derives from *ergon* ("work"), Beowulf is the only one who creates something complex. Negative characters in fairy tales are versatile as well but their discourse is only

oppositional, not genuinely creative. Or, at contemporary level, they practise a non-creative creativity.

Discourses may be assertive or self-effacing, camouflaging themselves in contexts as allegories, symbols and hybrid figures. In *Homo Imprudens* I studied the intermingling of imagology and discourse into several literary masterpieces: *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Dimitrie Cantemir's *Istoria ieroglifică (A Hieroglyphic History)*, Tommaso di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, W. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, J. P. Sartre's *Nausea*, Mario Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, and Marin Sorescu's *Jonah*. The hybridization of discourses and archetypes has stirred suspicion and irony across history. Actually, hybridized discourses generated responses in the guise of anti-discourses. To *mixtum compositum* was opposed, at best, *unitas multiplex*. The activity of mixing discourses has been labelled as hybridization or even disenfranchisement. The hegemonic discourse finds unacceptable connotations, allusions, and puns. Generally, it embraces figures of speech and hates the straitjacket of truth. But the shorter the stylistic arcs, the more prolific the truth. Plato, in *Meno*, had anticipated the abstruse and fishy nature of virtues. That is why he insisted less on a science of concepts and more on one of ideas, which is unlimited and non-repressive.

The book ends with a study about the transfer of motifs between E. A. Poe and M. Eminescu, a latter-day romantic. In 1885, Octav Minar published a collection of fairy tales *Eminescu povestind copiilor (Eminescu Telling Stories to Kids)*, Socec&Co S.A. Press. He included here an apocryphal text of Eminescu which was presented as an adaptation of E. A. Poe's *The Gold-Bug*. I was not interested in the authenticity of the text, as it had implied enormous efforts collateral to my research. I insisted, instead, on the "possible" Eminescu's adaptation of the original with the intention of increasing its aesthetic qualities to the detriment of suspense and mystery. In other words, the pseudo-scientific discourse is dismantled and rebuilt as a sapiential and poetic discourse. Precision and objectivity recede in front of ambiguity and subjectivity. Nonetheless, the gothic patina is preserved as such, as it gives momentum to descriptions. The adaptation constantly gravitates around the matrix-text, but not along a circular orbit. We are left, thus, with a romance instead of a thriller.