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# Exile as severance

Alexandru Boldor

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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EXILE AS SEVERANCE

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
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In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

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in Comparative Literature

by  
Alexandru Boldor  
B.A., Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, 1995  
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2003  
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## Abstract

Exile is a phenomenon probably as ancient as humanity itself, and one of the oldest topics in universal literature. The great majority of its variants (political, economical, social,) are founded on the idea of "forced displacement." Consequently, most often exile is reflected in literary creations in discourses dominated by a sentiment of loss. However, in some cases exile is not seen as a tragic event, but rather as an opportunity for intellectual growth - as attested by a number of authors who have chosen voluntarily to exile themselves. The rationale behind this occurrence is a mental process I called "severance."

The first chapter of this study is an overview of the phenomenon of exile from historical and theoretical perspectives, followed by a number of examples where the subject's stance vis-à-vis their exile diverges from the "classic" definition of the subject. Based on these examples, "severance" is defined as a distinct issue among the various forms of exile, and the term is analyzed from linguistic and psychological perspectives.

The following three chapters are case studies of instances of severance reflected in the works of Tristan

Tzara, Gregor von Rezzori, and Vintilă Horia. The comparative analysis of these author's texts provide an extensive examination of the phenomenon, highlighting its importance and supporting the idea about the necessity of marking out "severance" as a new and distinct subject matter in exile studies.

Tzara's works are arguably the ideal illustration of the concept; Gregor von Rezzori's creations reflect a similar intellectual evolution, with the added benefit of several extremely lucid self-analyses directly related to the phenomenon in question. Finally, the study of Vintilă Horia's case allows the discussion of an additional number of issues related to the concept of severance.

The last chapter begins with a brief re-evaluation of the phenomenon, based on a retrospective, comparative overview of the analyzed writings; its closing section focuses on two prior works related to the idea of "severance," their main points being contrasted with the conclusions of the current inquiry in order to highlight the original elements contributed by this dissertation to the field of literary criticism.

## An Overview of the Concepts of "Exile" and "Severance"

### **Preamble**

"Exile" is perhaps one of the most commonly re-occurring terms in the literature of the twentieth century. The subject is arguably as old as written literature itself, yet despite its age it never ceases to be prevalent. As a matter of fact, in the emerging "Global Village"<sup>1</sup> of the modern society, terms like "exile" and "displacement" are gaining unprecedented weight. Understandably, the meaning of the term has undergone multiple alterations over time. The following paragraph briefly illustrates both its historical span and the evolution of its meaning throughout the past:

"The exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the wanderings of Odysseus, the diaspora of the Jews all speak to a fundamental sense of loss, displacement and a desire to regain a paradisiacal sense of unity and wholeness, whether spiritual or secular. For many, though, that loss is transformed

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<sup>1</sup> A term coined by Marshall McLuhan in his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, describing the trend of electronic mass media collapsing space and time barriers in human communication to enable people to communicate on a global scale.

from the pain of dispossession into an alternative way of seeing. For Joyce's Stephen Dedalus the "silence, exile and cunning" of his self-imposed expatriation provides the means to express untrammelled his artistic vision. For Salman Rushdie, the idea of homeland is intrinsically "imaginary." For scholarly émigrés such as Edward Said and Julia Kristeva, exile is the necessary condition of the intellectual."

(Ouditt, xii)

It would appear that exile is a fundamental aspect of *la condition humaine*, ever-present in all literatures, at all times. Yet despite its universality, exile is a remarkably difficult term to define. What is exile, after all? Is it a political status? A social phenomenon? A literary subject?

While the term can be associated with any of the above criteria, or even all of them simultaneously, the prevalence of each element will vary vastly from one instance to another. Further complicating matters, its characterization from a literary perspective will differ significantly from its socio-cultural counterpart. As a starting point towards a "working" definition, let us take on the brief, almost technical description of exile proposed by Jo-Marie Claassen:

Exile is a condition in which the protagonist is no longer living, or able to live, in the land of his birth. It may be either voluntary, a deliberate decision to stay in a foreign country, or involuntary. In some cases, exile can be merely the result of circumstances, such as an offer of expatriate employment. Such instances will usually cause little hardship to the protagonist. However, exile may be enforced. This last occurrence frequently results from a major difference of political disagreement between the authorities of a state and the person being exiled. Often such exiles are helpless victims of circumstances beyond their sphere of influence; sometimes, however, the exiles are themselves prominent political figures, exiled because of the potential threat to the well-being of their rivals.

(Claassen, 9)

The above description of the phenomenon outlines some of the most common, basic features of "exile," offering a general perspective upon the term - most importantly, the separation between the subject and his motherland. However, such a description accounts mainly for its socio-political aspects: "expatriate employment," "political disagreement," while the literary domain is concerned mostly with the ways in which the exile affects the inner world of the author and the conversion of his stance in textual form.



Furthermore, in the literary domain "exile" can be approached from two angles: the first is the writer's perspective, where it can constitute a subject *per se* or the motivation behind a certain creation. The second is the critics' perspective, where "exile" can be used as a key element in the analysis of the text. The present study will try to focus primarily on the relationship between the writers' exile status and its effect upon their creations.

But how exactly does exile affect the mindset of an artist, and how does such an altered mindset influence his creations? Most often the main effect of exile is considered to be a state of perpetual suffering. This traditional viewpoint can be traced as far back as the first century B.C., when Publilius Syrus wrote: "*Exsul, ubi ei nusquam domus est, sine sepulcro est mortuus.*"<sup>2</sup> The image of the exiled writer was introduced in literary history around the same time. Ovid's *Tristia* introduces what has become and will continue to be the norm-setting icon of the displaced artist for centuries to come: a person banished from her native country by the powers that be. Within the context of this image, the disposition of "displaced

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<sup>2</sup> The exile, whose home is nowhere, is dead without being buried. *Publilii Syri Sententiae*. München: Beckby, 1969 (my translation).

writers" was seen until recently as revolving around "a binary logic where exile either produces creative freedom or it traps the writer in restrictive nostalgia."<sup>3</sup> While this binary logic remains valid even today, the changes brought about by the modern (and post-modern) era have raised the connotations and the importance of exile to new levels. Today's idea of exile has evolved into a complex, multidimensional phenomenon.

Modernism and postmodernism, which delineate the cultural evolution of the last century are both profoundly marked by the idea of displacement,<sup>4</sup> even when the subject is an integral part of his native society: "*It would appear, almost by definition, that 'to be' in the postmodern sense is somehow to be an Other: displaced.*"<sup>5</sup>

(Emphasis mine) If the above statement is valid, we could

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<sup>3</sup> McClennen, Sophia. *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2004: 12.

<sup>4</sup> Modernism relied on displacement being rooted in the idea that "traditional" forms of art, literature, social organization and daily life had become outdated, and that it was therefore essential to sweep them aside and reinvent culture - obviously, a vision diverging from "normal" social trends. Postmodernism took these ideas even further, with its focus upon the personal, regional, etc., in short, on the *alternative*.

<sup>5</sup> Bammer, XII.

consequently argue that one of the main roles of the contemporary creative writer is to see himself as an exile. Indeed, many modern writers perceive their personas as "outsiders" with regard to their native culture; often, they aspire to define themselves as "global citizens," persons with intellectual realms spanning beyond the frame of a single culture, and founded on universally applicable references. The main factor contributing to such aspirations is perhaps the fact that one of the defining traits of the modern intellectual is the construction of his identity around the idea of alterity. Alterity becomes more and more prevalent in the context of the abovementioned "global village," where the self can seldom be conclusively defined among the countless alternatives for one's existence (and identity). This "global village" is a world in which the private (our inner world) becomes "reality"; the outer world will turn by necessity into "the artificial" or "constructed." The artist is thus left to oscillate indefinitely in an interstice placed between his own reality and the society in which he lives - the paradigmatic *exsul*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This Latin term borrowed from Publilius Syrus defines specifically the concept of "exiled person." I will henceforth use the

Most often, the response to such conditions is a search for identity, the quest for a homeland - even if a fictional one - through self-discovery or self-realization; (alternatively, we may witness a nostalgic recollection of a lost world). In countries belonging to what may be called "master cultures," like England or America, this quest can materialize in an attempt to legitimize a cultural heritage (e.g., James, Eliot). In the case of "smaller cultures" or cultures traditionally influenced by a regnant society the same pursuit shifts towards uncovering a national identity. As we will see, in the case of many writers of Romanian origin, such a pursuit (and the failure to achieve its goals) is probably one of the main intellectual incentives for striving to belong to a "better culture."

In the literary realm, perhaps the most important outcome of "living in the interstice" is the fact that it allows writers to construct fictive worlds whose alterity or betweenness call for new aesthetic grounds. Salman Rushdie illustrates this idea as follows:

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in

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term *exsul* to designate an exiled person in order to avoid possible confusions with its homonym *exile* (as "condition").

memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to defend themselves - because they are so defined by others - by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier.

(Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 124-25)

We will discuss later in more detail the mechanics and consequences of this phenomenon. For now, we should only make a note of the idea that, as Andrew Gurr notes<sup>7</sup>, "*deracination, exile and alienation in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern writer the world over*" (emphasis mine).

There seems to be a considerable difference between the traditional perception of exile and the factual situation in today's world. In its old sense, the primary *raison d'être* of "exile" (the act of deportation) used to belong mostly to the political domain, most often in the form of ostracism imposed upon someone by an oppressive

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<sup>7</sup> Gurr, Andrew. *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981: 14.

authority. However, many modern examples (including the works we intend to scrutinize) indicate that this is no longer always the case. Many modern exile testimonials go beyond the traditional perception of the phenomenon in terms of punishment, loss and regret. Exile became more and more often self imposed beginning with the 20<sup>th</sup> century, becoming primarily a matter of personal choice, with rationales belonging to the intellectual domain, rather than politics. The phenomenon evolved both in size and in complexity during the last century, and in many instances new inquiries are possible, if not required, in order to approach the subject in a manner suitable for its complexity. In other words, studies of exiled artists' creations based on the idea of exile in its "classic" acception may no longer suffice for an adequate understanding of the writer's mindset.

For instance, Eugene Ionesco was already a well-regarded figure in the Romanian society (and especially in the literary world) at the time when he chose to move to France. His relocation to France is commonly attributed to the onset of the Communist regime in Romania. While this may be in part true, such an explanation does not account for his mindset at the time of his leaving, and this sole factor cannot justify the writer's decision. From a social

perspective, he might have had as many incentives to stay as he had to leave. The literary scene was split in two camps: a group of detractors and the camp supporting Ionesco in the cultural circles of the time. He was facing not only possible political persecution, but also the choice of a successful academic career. Many of his peers chose to stay, and while some suffered indeed the nuisances of the fascist and communist oppression, others succeeded in surviving, both as individuals and as authors. His decision to leave the country had to be motivated by reasons going beyond the mundane, political aspects of his life.

According to his own testimonies, the impulse must have originated *from the inside*:

"J'ai été conduit et animé en permanence par une méfiance automatique vis-à-vis des œuvres, des personnages roumains, de la culture roumaine, méfiance que mon expérience ultérieure a renforcée et justifiée."

(E. Ionesco, *Nu*, 208-209)

This was a purely intellectual "méfiance," which existed before Ionesco decided to live and write as a part of the French culture. His choice illustrates what actually constitutes the object of this inquiry: the *voluntary*

escape from a socio-cultural context perceived as detrimental by the artist, despite the fact that this act amounts to abandoning his homeland. Edward Said rightfully notes that "Exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation."<sup>8</sup> But in this particular case, as well as in others that I will peruse here, there is a paradoxical element conferring new meanings to the act of leaving one's native soil: *the main factor making the subject uncomfortable may be his own nation.* The entire phenomenon will consequently shift from a displacement accompanied by melancholy and regrets to an actively sought act of audacity. Exile, which was previously seen as an essentially "passive" phenomenon (as in imposed, rather than chosen) has to be reconsidered and described by a new term, reflecting this crucial difference. I will call it *severance* - and it will be the subject of the present inquiry.

But before we proceed with the examination of this new form of exile, let us review the evolution of the phenomenon through literary history, its multiple meanings

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<sup>8</sup> Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000: 177.



in the contemporary world, as well as other theoretical aspects.

### **Exile: A Historical Overview**

*Exsilium* in a broad sense means "to reside outside the motherland's boundaries." Obviously, in order to be operational, the phenomenon needs to take place in a context where both "motherland" and "boundaries" have meaning. In other words, the existence of a certain social structure and a system of laws are prerequisite for the manifestation of the phenomenon. As soon as these conditions were satisfied, however, instances of exile began to appear in historical records.<sup>9</sup> This prompt appearance of exile as a natural consequence of social organization can be explained (among other reasons) through the relatively rudimentary nature of the society. "Countries with a rather simple structure of power and limited social facilities (e.g., no extensive prison system) developed a kind of criminal justice that knew of only two punishments for major crimes: exile or death."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Knapp, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Claassen, 9.

The list of historical accounts of exile begins with ancient Egypt;<sup>11</sup> other early examples of imposed exile are documented in classical Greek history. The laws and procedures established by the Greeks were adopted in a very similar form by the Roman society, albeit initially not always as an official (as in prescribed by the law) form of sentencing. The way in which exile functioned and was understood during the historical span of these two civilizations still has repercussions for the way in which the notion is understood today.

Exile was defined in Roman law as *civitatis amissio* (loss of citizenship). Loss of civic status was immediate only if it was a case of *solum vertere exilii causa* (change of location because of exile), involving escape from capital condemnation or if the sentence imposed was *interdictio aqua et igni* (prevention from enjoying the privileges of water and destination. A Roman *exsul* could take up local citizenship.<sup>12</sup>

*Aqua et igni interdictio*, was an interesting category of exile, a "milder" form of the punishment. The subject was deprived of his right to water and fire - the symbols

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Tabori, 43-45.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Claassen, 11.

of the state-community. The practical consequence of this interdiction was the impossibility to survive within the boundaries of the Republic, whence the inexorability of exile. Furthermore, the law of the land no longer protected the convict (the sentenced lost all of their civil rights), which also implied that no one was allowed to offer him shelter, no one could defend him and anyone could kill him without a legal consequence. The crimes punishable by *interdictio* were considered among the most horrible, such as lese majesty (*crimen majestatis*), arson (*incendium*) and poisoning (*veneficium*). A *Leges Porciae* (ca. 200 A.D.) stipulated that the accused could exile himself before the date of the sentencing, in order to avoid further punishment. The convicts were otherwise free and unharmed, so that they couldn't complain about the harshness of the law. During the first three centuries of the Empire, exile as a form of punishment was changed to deportation and relegation.

Perhaps the first "official exile" was Cicero, whose banishment from Rome was sanctioned with the abovementioned law: *ut M. Tullio aqua et igni interdictum sit.*<sup>13</sup> However, perhaps more importantly for literary history, it is Ovid

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<sup>13</sup> Claassen, 12.

who is largely responsible for the creation of a myth of exile. Ovid's exilic poems, while ostensibly giving a view of "real exile" in the "real world," manage to reproduce for the first time an *exsul's* mindset in literary form.

Interestingly, the link between two of the major societies that shaped the Western world (Roman and Christian) has also developed under the sign of the exile: Nero actively persecuted the newly developed Christian religion, and while executions were largely predominant until the rule of Domitian, the latter emperor introduced the confiscation of goods and exile as an alternative punishment. It is perhaps due to this fact, and also to the Christian envisagement of life as an exile from paradise, that in many subsequent texts the idea of exile is often associated with death.

In the history of Eastern and Western Christianity, the concept of exile is one of the most significant spiritual themes, particularly within the tradition of monasticism. The realization of *anachoresis*, the state of total physical and spiritual solitude, was deemed possible only by means of the *singularis eremi pugna*, that is, by the complete removal of the self to the perfect solitude of the *eremum*, the hermitage, to achieve spiritual progress and contemplative union with God. This detail has a

particular significance for our study, as we will see reiterations of this procedure in modern exile-related texts, such as the writings of Claudio Guillén and Vintilă Horia.

Whereas in ancient monasticism the desire for spiritual solitude, for personal exile from the world, was generally freely sought - either as an intense aspiration towards a higher degree of perfection or as a means of a direct confrontation with the demonic temptations in order to refine the self through spiritual struggle - solitary confinement or exile was at times specifically recommended or directly imposed on a sinner so that, through physical renunciation and penitential mortification of the flesh, he or she would be cleaned of worldly attachments and be spiritually reborn.

Even after becoming the main religion on the European continent, Christianity was to be confronted with a form of exile, albeit less harsh and only temporary: in 1309 Pope Clement V moved the papal court to Avignon, from whence it returned to Rome in 1377, under the lead of Gregory XI. Short-lived as it was, this exile had significant repercussions upon the European culture. As Paul Tabori notes,

"If the see-saw in the long-drawn mortal combat of empire and papacy drove the Popes to the Provençal city, in Italy and elsewhere the changing fortunes of the Guelph and Ghibeline struggle had a direct and mostly tragic influence upon some of the greatest spirits of the Renaissance and hundreds of lesser yet important figures."

(Tabori, 69)

Obviously, the most renowned such figure was Dante. His sentence to exile pronounced by Pope Boniface VIII in 1301 and Alighieri's subsequent sufferings were to become a central issue at the root of his works and symbolism.

From this succinct review it would seem that the history of exile is intimately linked to the history of Western literature. The previous examples are but a few precedents establishing what was to become a long tradition, carried on by an entire list of illustrious personalities. One example is Montaigne, who chose a form of "monarchism" or "internal exile" abandoning all political and social activities and retiring to his castle.<sup>14</sup> The list can be continued with the names of

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<sup>14</sup> Knapp, Bettina. *Exile and the Writer: Exoteric and Esoteric Experiences: a Jungian Approach*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990: 9-11.

Rousseau and Voltaire.<sup>15</sup> Hugo wrote some of his greatest poems ("Chastisements," "Contemplations," "Legend of the Centuries") during his eighteen-year exile. James Joyce, chose to exile himself from the intellectually and emotionally distressing conditions of his native Ireland.

In each case, the displacement of the artist was perhaps the most important factor underlying his artistic expression. And while obviously exile is not a proprietary concept of the modern era, its importance grew throughout history, until it reached an unprecedented prevalence in the modern world.

### **Romanian Exile Literature**

Romanian literature offers an abundant number of exile writings/authors - notably more than many other countries. The explanation for this fact is that the common phenomenon of a 'small' culture interacting with a 'major' one was also amplified by a series of political, social and economical circumstances. Many works of (mostly francophone) Romanian exile writers are very well known/cited as archetypal examples of "exile literature" - Panait Istrati, Paul Celan, Emil Cioran, and numerous others. In point of fact, their numbers are so large that

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<sup>15</sup> Tabori, 87-90.

the phenomenon of "Diaspora writing" becomes statistically significant in the Romanian literary history to the extent where it creates an entire "genre," distinguishable and analyzable as a separate historical category. The fact raises an entire set of questions, among the most interesting ones being a few that motivated the current project: Is there a common element determining such a large number of artists to become exiles? If this is (as the facts would suggest) a collective phenomenon, are there any common points to be found in the diversity of individual biographies? Is there a certain pattern in the intellectual growth/evolution of some writers leading to similar results (in this case, exile)? And finally, how will the process of becoming an exile influence one's creations?

We mentioned before a set of authors who apparently have little in common except their Romanian origin (and at times, even this origin may be questionable). However, some details of their writings would suggest other possible connections. As noted in Ionesco's case, one could argue that the primary (and obvious reason) determining all of them to leave the country was motivated by political factors, many intellectuals choosing (or being coerced to choose) exile after the instauration of the Communist regime. While this issue was indeed an important factor,



the political-based argument alone can not adequately justify their actions. Tzara left Romania long before the country began to suffer the burdens of the Nazi and Communist regimes, and a historical overview of the Romanian diaspora will reveal that numerous (and prominent) figures of the artistic community exiled themselves as early as the nineteenth century. The examples of Caragiale and Brancusi are among the most demonstrative and notable in this regard. Both were renowned artists whose works were greatly inspired by the Romanian culture, and both succeeded to translate its essential traits in creations appreciated on a universal level. Yet they left their country of origin feeling that their adoptive societies were better suited for their artistic needs. (Caragiale repeatedly stressed the fact that he exiled himself by choice).

The questions generated by the cases described above (and most importantly, their answers) seem to point towards the "common element" we are looking for: What could possibly determine the most celebrated master of the Romanian language to leave his country only to never look back? (Caragiale) What was the reason behind Tzara's choice (and Cioran's, too) to never address their co-nationals in their native language again? What is the explanation of the

corrosive remarks about the Romanian society made by (among others) Ionesco and Rezzori? The answer is a sense of disgust concerning everything regarding the culture of their homeland. (Not exactly Tzara's idea of insurgent *dégoût*, but rather the capitulation of someone tired of a wretched existence).

The aforementioned sensation is generated by the acknowledgement of the severe limitations imposed upon the artist's spirit by the world in which they lived, followed by a stringent urge to do away with everything related to this oppressive system, and the search (not necessarily a successful one, as we will see), for a new, more fitting environment. This particular sensation appears to be intimately linked with many instances of intellectual exile. Their number seems to be high enough as to justify the designation of a particular category of exile based on it - and this study will attempt to legitimize this idea. But before focusing on the main subject, we need to look at the current status of the phenomenon of exile in today's literary landscape.

### **Exile in the Modern World**

At the present moment, when the international community begins to resemble more and more the celebrated "global village," exile writing has evolved from a category

defineable as "notable exception" into a widespread occurrence. The idea of "exotic" (hence distant) realms and the nationalistic trends of the romantic period were replaced by the "interaction" and "integration" of latter periods. "Relativity" is a newly learned concept, inherently linked with the "universality" brought forward by the modern era: "Those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties have perhaps had modernism forced upon us."<sup>16</sup> The present situation raises at least two major questions regarding exile: how, if at all, can someone become truly assimilated, given that the subject's quest for integration does not guarantee the suppression of exile, most often merely confirming the *status quo*? And how can exile be defined today, given such complex circumstances?

The current literary landscape hosts such a great number of works related in one way or another to exile that an all-encompassing definition of the term is virtually impossible. Restricting the research area to the writings dealing directly with the phenomenon itself is not

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<sup>16</sup> Eagleton, Terry, Frederic Jameson, and Edward Said (editors): *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990: 59.

necessarily helpful. We mentioned a number of contemporary authors regarded as authorities on the subject: Rushdie, Said, and Hoffmann, but they are only a few among the most notable names - there are many others. Even though their expertise on the subject is not to be ignored, we need to remember that while having considerable insight on matters like displacement, emigration, multiculturalism, etc., their opinions can sometimes be biased. Someone reading Said's or Rushdie's articles can be lead to believe exile is mainly the result of an intercultural conflict such as colonialism. Angelika Bammer and Susan Suleiman felt exiled not only from a cultural viewpoint, but also because of gender issues. When analyzing their status quo from such a subjective perspective, the great majority of the writers cannot avoid being subjective, and therefore in each instance they will make use of a definition of the term that will best suit their experience.

For instance, one of the most commendable efforts to address the subject of "exile" was directed by a collection of articles edited by Susan Suleiman, entitled *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*. The nineteen articles of the book (constituting as many testimonials about various instances of exile) are extremely informative, but elude a unique, exhaustive

definition of the concept. One of the main conclusions emanating from the text is that someone raised in a certain country cannot still be an exile (within the same culture!) in the same way as a Frenchman in Hollywood or an Inca in Spain. (For example, Marianne Hirsch discusses the status of children of survivors who, although having no real recollection themselves of their native countries, nevertheless experience a form of exile).

Another aspect rendering very difficult the postulation of a valid and generally applicable definition of exile is the fact that the consequences of the phenomenon and its influence upon the *exsul's* intellectual growth are also too diverse. While exile meant creative freedom for many, such as the artists Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, R. B. Kitaj, and Shirley Jaffe, for others, such as the director Jean Renoir, it had the opposite effect. Having left France for Hollywood after the German occupation to avoid being forced to become part of the Nazi propaganda machine, Renoir found it hard to adjust to the loss of artistic control in Hollywood, and was further handicapped because he did not speak English. For the Surrealists, on the other hand, exile was a necessity not only because of their political opposition to fascist

regimes, but also because of their artistic need for disassociation from the "real."

Last, but not least, we need to note one of the most remarkable texts on the subject of exile (and certainly one of the most relevant with regard to our study), Claudio Guillén's essay "On the Literature of Exile and Counter Exile."<sup>17</sup> The critic succinctly reviews the importance of exile in literature, and distinguishes two major types of exile writings. He associates the first with "the literature of exile," and the second with what he calls "the literature of counter-exile." The author most commonly associated with "the literature of exile" is Ovid, whose works are dominated by a sense of loss and for whom exile is the subject matter itself. By contrast, for "counter-exile" writers (one such example being Adam Mickiewicz), exile is "the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterized by a tendency toward integration, increasingly broad vistas or universalism."<sup>18</sup> These responses (i.e., texts) "incorporate the separation from place, class, language or native

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<sup>17</sup> Guillén, Claudio. "On the Literature of Exile and Counter Exile." *Books Abroad* 50 (1976): 271-80.

<sup>18</sup> Guillén : 272.

community, insofar as they triumph over the separation and thus can offer wide dimensions of meaning that transcend the earlier attachment to place or native origin."<sup>19</sup>

To sum up: this brief review of what constitutes only a minor segment among the variety of modern testimonials about exile demonstrates that every instance of the phenomenon will become personal once the axis of cultural references is established (Indian/English - Rushdie, Polish/American - Hoffmann, Romanian/French - Ionesco, etc). It should not be surprising, therefore, that exile has a wide variety of acceptions in the contemporary literary landscape; each author or critic will include very different episodes whose only common denominator is the idea of displacement under this all-encompassing "umbrella-term." Edward Said remarks that while generally speaking anyone prevented from returning home can be considered exile, there are different distinguishable groups in the bounds of the general mass. He acknowledges that today's society produced new forms of migration<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, there are currently several forms of displacement whose meanings

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<sup>19</sup> Idem.

<sup>20</sup> Said, 181. The particular case Said is referring to is "refugees."

overlap to a greater or lesser extent with the idea of exile; Paul Tabori enumerates them as follows:

Immigrant, colonist, migrant, transmigrant, outcast, (generic) gypsy, expatriate, addicted globe-trotter, expelled spouse, émigré intellectual, the "displaced persons" after World War II, the Jews in exile (as per, for example, the "exilic books"), the wandering Jew (as per Eugene Sue and other versions), and yet other exiles - not to forget a large fraction of cultural anthropologists whose voluntary internal exile is marked by hostility to the political economy, conceptual ambivalence and polarization, and the theoretical foregrounding of otherwise quotidian features of social life.

(Tabori, 30)

Let us explore further this variety of occurrences centered on the idea of exile in order to complete our review of the subject.

### **Variants of Exile**

As noted before, there is a great variety of different forms of displacement gathered under the denomination "exile." Its "classical" meaning refers (as is to be expected) to the oldest manifestation of the phenomenon: leaving a country under the pressure of the authorities. However, over time, several other terms began to be associated with the figure of the *exsul*, e.g., *expatriate*,



*emigrant* and sometimes even *minority*. Furthermore, even within these categories, a close scrutiny will reveal nuances setting apart the way in which the experience will be perceived by the subject. Lynne Young notes that "Exile, defined as expulsion or the state of being expelled from a person's native land, involves dislocation on several levels. There is physical dislocation, intellectual separation, cultural exile and the linguistic exile of functioning in an unfamiliar language."<sup>21</sup> At any rate, within the confines of the "standard" acceptance of the term, the abovementioned examples of illustrious exiles like Ovid, Dante, and Hugo are perhaps the most representative for this category. However, from a contemporary perspective, the best expression for defining cases like theirs is probably "political refugee." The main feature of this group is their willingness to return in the eventuality that the ban imposed upon them was lifted.

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<sup>21</sup> Young, Lynne: "Spiritual Exile: Translating the Bible from Geneva and Rheims." Ouditt, Sharon (editor). *Displaced Persons: Conditions of Exile in European Culture. Studies in European Cultural Transition*, XIV (2002) Burlington: Ashgate: 21-27. Young adds that "These dislocations, as experienced by a person or a group of people, are interestingly similar to the effects of the process of translation on a familiar text. (The word translation comes from the Latin *transferro*, *transferre*, *transtuli*, *translatum* meaning to carry over and across and used physically and metaphorically)."

An *expatriate* can change his physical location (from one country to another) without changing much (if at all) the cultural context, the language, etc. For instance, someone's relocation from Canada to the US may not be perceived as an exile, even though technically speaking he is expatriated. Furthermore, there are instances of Jewish people leaving their country of origin for Israel. In this case, the expatriation becomes the opposite of exile in many respects, i.e., the subject will join his nation/community, instead of leaving it. Many scholars (e.g., Tabori) consider an expatriate to be a person voluntarily displacing herself from the native culture - and thus being "exempt" from the problems facing the exile in their "cultural transplantation" process. However, as we will see, such a "transplant" is not completely devoid of afflictions.

In the case of the *emigrant*, the relocation is often motivated solely by economic reasons. The sense of nostalgia or regret commonly associated with exile is usually excluded; most often the émigré believes the new setting is better than the one left behind. Furthermore, it is very common for the newly created communities to create their own enclaves within the new culture. Changes of language, customs, etc. are minimal, if at all present.

(One can think about the Muslim enclaves in metropolitan France or the Polish population in the Chicago area). The phenomenon of emigration is governed by different principles than exile.

Not as commonly encountered in exile literature as the previous two instances, but still an important category, is the group of the *minorities*. People can be "... not expelled from but displaced within their native culture by processes of external or internal colonization."<sup>22</sup> - the case of the German *Innere Emigration* is perhaps the best known, but there is also another class which can be included here - the colonized foreign national. Indian writers like Salman Rushdie insist on their "belonging" to the British cultural context (even if running the risk of being criticized by his Indian peers;) similarly, many francophone African writers consider themselves tributary to the French literary tradition, despite the fact that the "metropolitans" are hesitant to describe them as French. Generally, many such authors would argue that moving from a colony to the capital is not exile in the sense of separation, but rather a "homecoming."

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<sup>22</sup> Bammer, XI.

Another factor to be taken into account when analyzing the multiple facets of exile is the case of "paranational" communities, "[...] communities that exist within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain culturally or linguistically distanced from them and, in some instances, are estranged from both the home and the host culture."<sup>23</sup> As we will later see in the works of Gregor von Rezzori, the nation (and implicitly the feeling of belonging) and the homeland do not necessarily share the same physical space. And then there is the example of Eugene Ionesco, where the paradigm native vs. adoptive culture has its reference points significantly displaced.

To complete our overview of the phenomenon of exile and its constitutive elements, we also need to mention here a form of community often wrongly identified with exile: the diaspora. Originally the word "diaspora" designated the forced dispersion of major religious and ethnic groups, such as the Jews and the Armenians, a dispersion

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<sup>23</sup> Seyhan, Azade: *Writing outside the nation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001: 10.

"precipitated by a disaster often of a political nature."<sup>24</sup>  
In the modern age however, greatly diversified exile and ethnic communities, expatriates, refugees, "guest" workers, and other dispossessed groups sharing a common heritage have been grouped under the same generic label of "diaspora," and the appellation became associated with just about any form of exile. Often, one or another of these sub-categories of "diaspora" may occasionally interfere with the image of the exiled artist. However, many members of a diaspora are born in the adoptive country, while others do not consider themselves exiles. Furthermore, some people may even not see themselves as belonging to their ethnic community. In short, while the concept of diaspora may be closely related to the idea of exile, exiles may not be part of a diaspora, and diaspora may not imply exile.

While this tentative classification of various forms of displacement does not lead us yet towards a compelling definition of exile, it can be useful in distinguishing between instances of actual intellectual exile and other forms of migrations engendered by different motivations.

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<sup>24</sup> Chaliand, Gérard and Jean-Pierre Rageau. *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*. Translated by A. M. Barrett. New York: Viking, 1995: xiv. (Also see Seyhan, 11).

The next step towards identifying the "true nature" of exile should be an etymological analysis of the word.

### **Etymological Aspects of the Term "Exile"**

An early attempt at a definition of "exile" can be found in Roman (Latin) literature. This instance presents a particular interest not only because of its historical value, but also because it introduces the main elements around which the term exile will be defined subsequently. A good starting point for the analysis of exile is provided by Robert Edwards, in an article from *Exile in Literature*:<sup>25</sup> "The model is the Roman writer Publius Syrius: 'Exilium patitur patriae qui se denegat.' In the same article, J. Wight Duff suggests a different (and very interesting) interpretation. Taking *patriae* as a dative with the verb *denegare*, he translates: 'He suffers exile who denies himself to his country.' An alternate rendering, which preserves the order of the phrasing, brings the opposition between the public and private dimensions of exile into highlight: 'He suffers exile from his homeland who denies himself.' I find this particular interpretation valuable, not only because it can encompass virtually any instance of

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<sup>25</sup> Edwards, Robert. "Exile, self, and society." Lagos-Pope, Maria-Ines (editor). *Exile in Literature*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1988: 15.

exile, but also because it shifts the entire concept from a primarily socio-cultural perspective towards a broader perception, centered around the individual (the subject, rather than the context). All the necessary factors for defining the "equation" of the exile are present: the self, the act of denying (renouncing something either in the geographical or temporal dimension), homeland, and suffering. It should be noted that this particular definition does not include language, which is considered a major factor for the genesis of "exile" by many scholars. Some, like John Spalek, consider it essential:

"... It is fitting that the writer in exile is most often regarded as the exile per se. The quality that gives him this representative status is the tool of his trade: his native language, which he cannot abandon without simultaneously surrendering his identity with the culture he represents. The problem of identity does not affect a mathematician, an architect, or a painter in the same way. Their tools and means of communication are much more easily understood and do not require the labor of 'translation'."

(Spalek, XII)

An interesting element in the etymological analysis of the term is brought forward by Paul Friedrich, who notes that "the word exile comes to us via the Latin *exilium* from

the Greek *alasthai*, "to wander" [...]."<sup>26</sup> In Latin, the derivation of the term *exsilium* shows clearly that disjunction is essential to the notion of exile, but scholars are less certain whether the stress falls on an act of separation (*salire, slatare*) or the place from which one is divided (*ex solo*, "from native ground").

In their *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine*, Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet incline toward the latter as the preference of Latin writers, as Cicero gives indirect support of that usage, explaining that the criminals and the impious are exiles, even if they do not change their residences ("*etiamsi solum non mutarint*").<sup>27</sup> Isidore of Seville<sup>28</sup> derives the term from "*extra solum*" - an etymology widely accepted even among today's scholastic circles. At any rate, in each case, the central idea is

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<sup>26</sup> Friedrich, Paul. "Binarism versus synthesis: Eastern European and generic exile." *Realms of exile: nomadism, diasporas, and Eastern European voices*. Rădulescu Domnica, editor. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2002: 159.

<sup>27</sup> Ernout, A. and A Meillet. *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine: Histoire des mots*, 4th ed. Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1959: 207.

<sup>28</sup> Isidore of Seville, Saint. *Etymologiae*. Paris : Belles Lettres, 1995: 5.27.28.



that of separation, of displacement, be that physical or just intellectual.

Personally, I consider the elements in the definition given by Syrius (self, denial, homeland), to be sufficient. They are applicable to any instance of exile, and the addition of new elements to the equation will make of any example just a particular case of a general setting. The language barrier is one such additional element: it can be an important factor in generating a conflict between the native culture "homeland" and the "adoptive" one. However, it is not indispensable. Many bilingual writers' choice of language was not necessarily consistent with their exile status (Ionesco, Beckett). Moreover, as Asher Z. Milbauer notes in *Transcending Exile*, "My personal and professional interest in transplantation in general and literary transplantation in particular directed my attention to writers with the ability to write in an acquired language. Active speakers often have enormous difficulties writing clearly in their own language, though it comes to them naturally and they use it reflexively. Why, then, one might ask, would a foreigner undertake such a painful and exhaustive endeavor as mastering a new language in order eventually to make it into a medium of his art, a means to

reach an audience, an instrument of intellectual survival?"<sup>29</sup>

I also concur with Andrew Gurr's idea that "The artist is exiled by what might be called *the mutual consent of the exile and the society* sending him into exile."<sup>30</sup> (Emphasis mine) In addition, many other artists felt exiled in their own homeland. For example, the phenomenon of *Innere Emmigration*,<sup>31</sup> about which Charles Hoffman says that "I should like to define it as the attitude of writers who felt no longer at home in their native country (i.e., Germany or in countries under German control), either because of official disapproval or because of their own convictions."<sup>32</sup> As we will see, writers like Gregor von Rezzori leave their "geographical" homeland in an attempt to get closer to their supposed native language and culture only to find out that they still don't belong - and he is not an isolated example of this situation. His is but one

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<sup>29</sup> Milbauer, Asher Z. *Transcending exile: Conrad, Nabokov, I.B. Singer*. Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1985: xii.

<sup>30</sup> Gurr, 25.

<sup>31</sup> For *innere* read: internal, as in "on the inside"; inner - in German = interior.

<sup>32</sup> Hoffmann, Charles. "Opposition und Innere Emigration." Lagos-Pope, Maria-Ines (editor). *Exile in Literature*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1988: 118.

of many examples showing that an exile does not have necessarily to live in a foreign community.

Instances of physical distance between the writer and his native culture (which can be either a motivational factor in the creation process, or a subject in itself, as illustrated by Vintilă Horia's case) are not by any means in themselves defining traits of exile, but rather the outcome of their lifestyle, which is to say, a matter of personal choice. Mary McCarthy has made a useful distinction between expatriates, in whom she sees a wholly voluntary detachment from their original home, and exiles, "The banished victims deracinated and tortured by the long wait to go home."<sup>33</sup> (She assigns Henry James to the first category and Joyce to the second). She regards the "expatriate" as a rather hedonistic escaper, typified by Fitzgerald, Hemingway and the American community of Paris in the 1920s. We might add to Mary McCarthy's distinction between an *exsul* and an expatriate the point that most expatriates tend to be migrants from one metropolis to another. However, as noted before, classifying a writer as merely an "expatriate" (and thus dispensing with most of

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<sup>33</sup> McCarthy, Mary. "Exiles, Expatriates and Internal Émigrés." The Listener, 86 (1971): 705-8.

the problems implied by "exile") is most of the time, if not always, insufficient.

It is obvious that there are too many instances of cultural conflict that are (rightfully or not) covered under an all too general notion of "exile." No singular definition of the term would be able to encompass the diversity of these instances. However, we will need to define the term at least in the context of this particular work. A good starting point for a generic designation is the one suggested by Paul Tabori, who in his *Anatomy of Exile* defines an *exsul* as "Someone who considers his or her displacement as temporary even though it may last a lifetime, or someone who inhabits one place and remember or projects the reality of another."<sup>34</sup> However, a satisfactory "working definition" of exile will have to: a) include the aforementioned elements from the definition advanced by Syrius (self, denial, homeland),<sup>35</sup> and b) allow the inclusion of most "real-life" examples while also underscoring the aspects of exile that are of particular interest for the present study. My following attempt to postulate a definition focuses primarily on the

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<sup>34</sup> Tabori, 27

<sup>35</sup> The primary sense considered in this case is "country"

intellectual aspect of the phenomenon, while remaining on a very general level, in order to be applicable to as many instances as possible:

An exile artist is the artist who acknowledges his status of outsider in relationship with his cultural context.

To sum up: I will not attempt hereby to devise an exhaustive definition of the term. The above definition is to be considered as a "working tool" which, as I mentioned, should hopefully cover the largest area of the word's semantic field, while simultaneously allowing a perception of the subject which will best suit the purposes of our inquiry.

### **Exile and Severance: The Mechanics of a Phenomenon**

In the previous sections we reviewed several possible definitions of the term "exile" by distinguishing their constitutive elements and alternate meanings. I would like to re-evaluate the definition of the notion from a different perspective; specifically, a perspective focusing on the dichotomy of the two elements underlying any instance of exile: the "self" and the "other" - the main axis around which all the other elements of this relationship will revolve.

A review of various instances of the phenomenon reveals that "exile" is, in the end, a function of the self; in other words, a writer will consider him/herself exiled as long as he/she feels exiled, regardless of location and cultural context. Viewed as such, the theme of exile will become intimately linked with the issue of identity, most often in the particular form of cultural identity: the perceiving of the self as an exile is nothing but a sub-category of perceiving the self. The mechanism of this perception is described by Paul Ricoeur in *Soi-même comme un autre* as follows: the definition of an individual must be made by ways of pointing out the differences that separate a particular person from the social class to which he belongs. (In a way, this process is the reverted procedure of classification, where the details are left out in order to allow the grouping of elements by sets of similarities).<sup>36</sup> This definition of the *soi* can be made either at the first person (self-definition, reflexive) or third person (describing someone, active).<sup>37</sup> This task of (self) assessment becomes, however, much more difficult, if

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<sup>36</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Soi-même comme un autre*. Paris: Seuil, 1990: 39.

<sup>37</sup> Whence the differences between the "objective" classification of some authors as exiles by scholars, as opposed to their self-perception of belonging to a minority (see Rushdie).

possible at all, in the case of exiled persons, once the references are shifted (I no longer belong there, but here) or nullified altogether (I no longer belong there, but I don't belong here, either). (A consequence of this is the "identity crisis" with which many exile writers are confronted). At any rate, the sentiment of being exiled often begins to exist at the very moment when someone acknowledges his "non-belonging" to the native community - which amounts to giving up the primary reference system. A good example of this situation can be found in Gregor von Rezzori's *Memoirs*, in the fragment where he describes the conflict between himself and some of his co-workers (more on that later). This acknowledgement is, as we will see, an essential component of the phenomenon of severance, and the fact that it is also essential for the occurrence of exile (at least in its "intellectual variant"), justifies, I believe, the designation of the former as a sub-category of the latter (i.e., the severance is a type of exile).

#### **Definition of the "Severance" as an Element of Exile**

It would seem that renouncing the "primary reference system" is a crucial act that underlies many occurrences of exile. I will name this form of "renouncing" severance. I prefer to use the term *severance* not only because it denotes "giving up," but also because its use in exile-

related inquiries suggestively underlines the idea of "displacement." It should be noted that the severance is a voluntary, chosen action (as opposed to being imposed, as often assumed in the case of exile). Its rationale/motivations subsist predominantly in the mental universe of a person, and much less in the daily aspects of their life (a necessary distinction which allows an almost complete exclusion of aspects like politics, economy, etc). There are relevant illustrations of this situation, i.e., Rezzori's perception of the Romanian culture and his acid remarks pertaining to some of its less flattering aspects. The core of this attitude is, in my opinion, directly related to the "he who denies himself" of Syrius. The entire process can be contained within a single term, the *severance*, under the following definition:

I define as "severance" a person's attitude of estrangement pertaining to her native culture, a sentiment which will eventually constitute the fundamental factor motivating the person's active choice of becoming an exile.

This "severance" leading one to becoming an exile is essentially an intellectual/psychological process. Julia Kristeva made a very captivating remark about the condition of the exiled in support of the idea that there may be a



factor placing the responsibility of becoming an *exsul* on the shoulders of the displaced person: "Should one recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within?"<sup>38</sup>

In my view, the answer is yes, particularly in the case of an artist. Often, a writer's displacement is virtually independent from his location. He may have a peripatetic biography, and feel permanently exiled - but not because of being distanced from his homeland, but rather because his intrinsic psychological makeup. I believe this is clearly illustrated in the case of our three authors: none of them managed to construct a completely valid identity in the context of the culture chosen as their new shelter. Their severance may be not only from a motherland, but from the idea of motherland in general. Tzara's rejection of a coherent artistic identity can be related to this fact. Vintilă Horia tried to fabricate an imaginary nation state in which he would fit in after failing to do so both in his native and his adoptive homelands. Finally, von Rezzori is all too painfully aware that he can't blend in his newfound

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<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991: 14.

homeland: he refers to himself with the generic (and ambiguous, in this case) term "European," after feeling displaced in both the Eastern and Western parts of the continent: "I was brought up in [...] European traditions [...] I presume to be as much at home on this side of the Elbe as on the other."<sup>39</sup>

### **Etymology of "Severance"**

We saw above a few brief highlights of the rationale that led me to believe that there is, indeed, a phenomenon underlying many instances of exile which is both unique in its manifestation and has a consistent presence: the severance. I would like to further explain the sense of the word (in the context of this paper) by analyzing its etymology. The following meanings of the word 'severance' are found in the Oxford English Dictionary, second edition, 1989:

Severance:

[...]

The division of a joint estate into independent parts; *the destruction of the unity of interest in a joint estate.*

[...]

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<sup>39</sup> Rezzori, *The Death of my Brother Abel*, 72-73.

*The separation of two or more parties that are joined in a writ, as when one is nonsuited and the other is allowed to proceed in the action.*

[...]

I highlighted the keywords of particular interest for our case. The choice of this word for designating the unique phenomenon I'm trying to define becomes evident once we understand that its definition covers all the semantic implications of the concept. Here are the most important ones:

- *"The act or fact of severing; the state of being severed"* The severance of the exile occurs by choice. It can be either an "active," willful effort of separating oneself from their roots, or a more "passive" acknowledgement of an existing fact (state). In both cases, the choice takes place when the individual admits the existence of an estrangement (not belonging). A physical displacement may or may not accompany this mental event.

- A *"separation"* (from the cultural context) is one of the prerequisites for the existence of the exile/displacement.

- A *"construction"* (or in this case, alternatively, an existence) *"between two or more objects"* can be related to the state of living *"betwixt and between"* - or in other

words, not belonging either here or there, a specific condition of the exile.

- "*The separation of two or more parties that are joined in a writ, as when one is nonsuited and the other is allowed to proceed in the action.*" Although the primary application of this sense is law-related, its meaning becomes particularly useful when applied to the analysis of a process of separation/exile, materializing in a single word a complex succession of facts: the parties (i.e., the writer and his culture) are joined in a writ - which is to say, a pre-existing, "given" bond; one party (the person) acknowledges that the other (his culture) is *no longer suited* and chooses to separate himself from it. As we will see, this is what happened in the cases analyzed in the following chapters. We will notice this phenomenon reflected in Tzara's *dégoût*, Vintilă Horia's *God Was Born in Exile* (albeit in an "inverted" form), and Rezzori's scornfulness; the process of severance is clearly distinguishable in their texts. Moreover, I believe that the same pattern underlies many other instances of literary

exile - in particular, those associated by Claudio Guillén with what he calls "the literature of exile."<sup>40</sup>

The OED also makes an interesting reference to the origins of the word: "[adopted from Anglo-French *severance*, Old French *sevrance*, from *sevr-er*: see SEVER (verb) and -ANCE.]" A further investigation of *sevrer* (in Le Robert) reveals the following definition:

Sevrer:

1. Cesser progressivement d'alimenter en lait (un enfant), pour donner une nourriture plus solide.
2. Littér. Priver (de qqch. d'agréable).

The implications of these French meanings are perhaps less direct than in the English word. Nevertheless, given the situations described above, the original sense of the word invokes (on a metaphorical level) images fitting perfectly the progression of facts leading to exile: the original cultural "essence" (associated with the milk) fed to a subject is replaced with the more consistent supplies of the new context.

Going even further down the etymological path, we discover that both *severance* and *sevrer* originate from the Latin *separatio* and/or *separatim* [apart, separately,

<sup>40</sup> Guillén, Claudio. "On the Literature of Exile and Counter Exile." *Books Abroad* 50 (1976): 271-80.

*differently*]. In this sense, the separation which is the essential component of the exile becomes further detached from its possible affiliation with the idea of punishment. Furthermore, the connotations of "differently" support the idea that being exiled does not necessarily imply a physical displacement (i.e., change of geographical location) for, as mentioned before, one can be an outcast in his own country.

To sum up, I believe that on account of both the literary examples cited here and the linguistic significances covered by the homonymous term, we can acknowledge the existence of a phenomenon associated with exile. This phenomenon is sufficiently attestable and common enough to justify its use as a distinct concept. I called it *severance*.

### **Literary Corollaries of the Concept**

Both theorists and exiles themselves have long debated whether the experience of becoming displaced is predominantly one that invigorates or mutilates. Certainly, for some, the sense of emancipation, of critical distance, of renewed identity, of fusion or tension between cultures and languages is interpreted as productive - leading to the conclusion that originality of vision must almost necessarily derive from the transgressing and transcending

of frontiers. However, for others, physical displacement means rather rejection, alienation, anguish, and on occasion even suicide.

The pressures of exile can - and often are - seen mainly as constraints. But they can also produce benefits, and these benefits need to be assessed with care. The most obvious benefit of being exiled is, I believe, the insight given by the distance interposed between the subject and its original social context. The *exsul* will not only gain the perspective which will allow him to see his home clearly but he also will be faced by immediate and pressing comparisons he will have to make. As Andrew Gurr notes, "Kipling derided the "stay-at-home" person from a perspective of an expatriate fully aware of his intellectual superiority stemmed from his wider cultural horizons. In a similar spirit, Somerset Maugham declared that one positively must live in a minimum of three countries before one can begin to understand one's own nation state."<sup>41</sup> (Note the similar idea of exile as a necessary means for maturation and intellectual growth mentioned before in the historical overview beginning with early Christian texts). Gurr goes on to say that this

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<sup>41</sup> Gurr, 25.

encouragement of travel as means of personal growth (traveling in order to accumulate experience) needs to be delimited from the enforced form of voyage which is exile. "The *exsul* does not leave home with the intention of acquiring the experience of the casual traveler. The pressures on him are negative, which is to say that he is impelled not to visit other countries but simply to leave his own. The exile leaves on an impulse to escape, not to enjoy travel."<sup>42</sup> While the consequences of traveling for pleasure and traveling out of necessity may be similar, the important difference to consider when evaluating a testimonial of exile is the compulsion to escape. The fact that in the case of the severance the final, decisive impulse comes from within makes yet an even bigger difference in an analysis of literary texts.

The implications of this new concept are numerous: understanding and accepting the phenomenon of severance is useful not only because it allows us understand exile from a fresh perspective; acknowledging the severance as a main psychological factor in an author's intellectual evolution can also yield a better "insight" into their creations. The severance is often translated into artistic expressions

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<sup>42</sup> Idem.



that render their creators unique. It is my hope that constructing three case-studies based on this concept and the works of Tristan Tzara, Vintilă Horia and Gregor von Rezzori will prove the validity of the term while also revealing new connotations of their writings.

For instance, Tzara's actions faithfully follow a description of the exile as discussed by J. Kristeva: the "shattering" of the repression represented by his native society (and his young persona) is what leads him to eventually cross a border into a foreign country. "Exile always involves a shattering of the former body."<sup>43</sup> I strongly believe that this "shattering" (read: materialization of the severance) was one of the main causes leading to the poet's contribution to the Dada movement. Tzara was, in a way, induced to invent the Dadaist denial of any norm in order to avoid his experiments becoming "mainstream," and thus being caught in the trap of complying with a set of rules (even if those rules would have been invented by him); this would have amounted to giving in to the pressures of the community, i.e., to becoming part of the system. Denial does nothing but to endorse the original facts: replacing them with

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<sup>43</sup> Kristeva, 30.

something else would create a new tradition. His solution was to be always, as many accused him, "consistent only in his inconsistency." Tzara was perhaps *the* prime example of "the foreigner within."

Gregor von Rezzori's writings are another illustration of a "severance case." His uniqueness resides mainly in the fact that this severance from his origins is also a severance from the past. His exile takes place just as much in the temporal plane as in the spatial one. He doesn't renounce as much his country of origin (which he himself finds difficult to define) but rather his past; and his alienation occurs when his present self (the author's voice) acknowledges that the subject of his novels (his former self) is a completely different person. Another interesting aspect of his writings is that - as highlighted in the novel *The Snows of Yesteryear* - he touches directly upon one of the connotations of "severance" mentioned in the section discussing the etymology of the term: weaning. He dedicates an entire chapter to Cassandra, his wet nurse, whose character represents "the primeval essence of our country embodied in one of its own chosen daughters."<sup>44</sup> He

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<sup>44</sup> Rezzori, Gregor von. *The Snows of Yesteryear*. Translated by H.F. Broch de Rothermann. New York: Vintage, 1991: 22.

remembers having "suckled the milk of that soil, with all its light and dark powers" from her, and indeed his (albeit inconstant) fondness for his native land is due in great part to this woman. However, the youngster's awakening to the world, which - as we will see - coincides with the emergence of his severance, is almost simultaneous with their separation - a notable fact, especially if we take into account the significance of this metaphor in the economy of Rezzori's writings.

Vintilă Horia has a similarly interesting literary career, albeit of a completely different nature. He was forced to leave the country by the political circumstances of the time (and by his political orientation), choosing to live as a French intellectual and to become a francophone writer. However, after an initial success his relationship with the adoptive cultural milieu took an unfortunate turn, and he found himself violently rejected by the French literary scene. His peers became reluctant to acknowledge him as one of their own because of the same reason which forced him to leave his native country: his political beliefs (although admittedly his alien status did not exclude the recognition of his artistic merits). Consequently, the novelist found himself exiled once more (and this time perhaps unexpectedly), into a "cultural

interstice" situated between a realm to which he could not return and a society where he could not find complete acceptance. His physical existence/location was, of course, mostly irrelevant with regard to this interstice: his feelings of estrangement were essentially the same whether he lived in South America or Europe. Horia's reaction to the events turning him into an outcast is yet again a prime example in which an author's displacement is the motivation behind his literary creations: he builds for himself a fictional world where his personality can finally find a long-awaited serenity.

These are but a few introductory examples of "severance" chosen from modern Romanian literature; three of them will be explored further in our study. I chose to focus mostly on Romanian literature because of my familiarity with the domain, but I believe that the phenomenon is just as noticeable in other national literatures. *Exile is an aspect of a process of alienation which is less culturally dependent than a first glance would suggest.*

The "severance" becomes visible as a form of self-imposed exile, a stepping-stone in the artist's struggle for a better existence (in other words, a form of intellectual growth, rather than pecuniary comfort). The

attainability of this goal is, however, questionable. Nevertheless, the perpetual transience in which the subjects find themselves during the process seems to be the ideal form of existence an author could hope for: even though if not completely objective, (and thus allowing the reaching of an "universal truth"), at least always above the mere subjectivity of someone contained within a singular system. Julia Kristeva seems to agree that this is perhaps the most desirable state of mind for a great artist:

"Whether a constraint or a choice, a psychological evolution or a political fate, this position as a different being might appear to be the goal of human autonomy."

(Kristeva, 41)

Indeed, if the artist strives to be a different being, he will always necessarily find himself in some form of exile. Moreover, he may even have to voluntarily separate himself from his peers in order to dispense with any inhibition interfering with the creative process, be that the reticence to speak up, or the limitation of his discernment due to the narrow worldview attainable from within the confines of a single culture. Another scholar

who agrees about the benefits of the artist's severance is  
Andrew Gurr:

"Distance gives perspective, and for exiles it is also the prerequisite for freedom in their art. Freedom to write is a major stimulus to exile, and exile creates the kind of isolation which is the nearest thing to freedom that a twentieth-century artist is likely to attain."

(Gurr, 17-18)

The following chapters will explore in detail different literary materializations of this phenomenon.

## Tristan Tzara: The Evasion of "The Approximate Man"

### **A Puzzling Personality**

Take the works of a celebrated modern poet.

Take a pair of scissors.

Cut out at random a few writings that are representative for the said author.

The selection will resemble him.

*And here you have a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a charming sensibility, albeit beyond the understanding of the vulgar*

It is indeed sometimes difficult to understand Tristan Tzara's complex personality. While every "randomly selected" fragment of his work will be indeed representative for a particular aspect of their author's personality, the ensemble of his writings forms a complex entity which eludes a precise definition.

How could we reconcile, for instance, the absolute nihilism of a declaration such as "let us spit on humanity" with the interest for an art "reflecting the aspirations of the masses towards a general well-being and universal peace"? What are the common traits between the young "terrorist from Zürich" and the active member of the French

Communist Party, author of "*Une route Seul Soleil*"? Finally, how could one account for the passion of a poet for the anagrams dissimulated in Villon's *Testament* - when his is primarily known for his partisanship for absolute spontaneity in the artistic act and inventor of the *Exquisite Corpse*?

And yet, despite the apparent heterogeneity of "the approximate man's" personality, it is possible to ascertain a particular trait conferring a degree of coherence to the long series of his apparently contradicting actions. Paradoxically, this "unifying principle" materializing in the artist's perpetual struggle for the liberation from the everyday routines is based on the idea of "disorderly thinking," a conception amounting to a passionate and persistent refusal of any logical organization of the poetic discourse. This "intentional disorder" has materialized in a disruption of the mechanisms of the language at the level of Tzara's texts, and on a more general level instilled the Dada movement with its taste for the confusion of literary genres and esthetic categories.

The defining trait of Tzara's *Ars Poetica* is thus unsurprisingly the *evasion*. An evasion illustrated not only by his texts, but also by his life-story, a life which he



described himself as a perpetual succession of acts of "elusion" and "cheating:" « Je triche, évidemment, parce que je vis entre les rapports de l'ennui, des satisfactions, des prétentions, des obligations humaines »<sup>45</sup>. Obviously, the most important issue he was trying to elude was the "normalization" of his own intellect, the assimilation of his persona with any kind of social order or category. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the artist's actions (at least from this study's perspective) is the nature of this evasion; Tzara was trying to escape from nothing other than *himself*, that is to say, the instances of his self-image he (negatively) perceived as developing into well-defined, "crystallized" personalities, with a clear public function and (all too) easily classifiable by his peers. This phenomenon was the motivation behind his repeated "official refutations" of any assertions situating him at the helm of the Dada movement - a movement whose existence he eventually ended up rejecting. Even more importantly, this endless evasion was the main source of the poet's creative energy.

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<sup>45</sup> Tzara, Tristan. "Faites vos jeux." *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Flammarion, 1976, v.i: 246.

The idea that he was running *from* a particular issue leaves open the question whether he was also looking *for* something at the same time. I personally would respond affirmatively. In point of fact, the particular object of his searches is one of the main matters addressed by the present inquiry: Tzara's works are the testimonial of his relentless pursuit to reach the status of a truly "universal" artist, to become the superlative incarnation of a creative mind whose essence, realm, and scope would overcome any scholarly classification (classification which, according to his beliefs, would have rendered his actions futile, common, i.e., mundane in the worst possible way). His ideal image of himself was that of a free spirit open to any artistic gesture, whose undertakings, in their turn, reach his audience directly, regardless of their cultural background. His striving for a truly "universal artistic language" was illustrated by his passionate interest in "exotic" arts and cultures - i.e., "Black poetry," and his collections of tribal masks.

Perhaps one of Tzara's most remarkable achievements as an artist is that despite the vastness - both in quantity and in scope - of his work, whose assessment is further complicated by his aforementioned fondness for confusion and destruction of the literary discourse, he somehow

managed to remain true to himself, or better said - to the ideal image of the poet towards which he perpetually aspired: the "artist without frontiers" animated by the purest Dada spirit. In an analysis of the poet's intellectual growth, Henri Béhar notes that his entire work follows a dialectic evolving - as indicated by the titles - from "L'Antitête" (which should read: the anti-man) to "L'homme approximatif" to "De memoire d'homme" in a succession of proceedings focusing around the idea of a conquest of the self. Tzara confronted the conflicting world around him with the negation of Dada (which is by no means a nihilism), then with the negation of the negation, but not without learning from the lessons of incoherence and deconstruction - all with the intention of recapturing the spontaneous expression.<sup>46</sup>

The reference points of our poet's journey are already well-known, from his birth in Moinesti on April 16, 1896 to his death in a Paris apartment on the Eve of Christmas in 1963. We will try to retrace again the life-story of "Dada's godfather" while focusing on the psychological

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<sup>46</sup> Béhar, Henri. "Preface." Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Flammarion, 1976, v.i: 8.

elements motivating his actions and thus altering his artistic career.

### **The Early Years**

Samuel Rosenstock was born in a small Romanian provincial town to the family of a moderately wealthy businessman. Everything about the circumstances of his birth prefigured what should have been an exemplarily uneventful bourgeois existence. Except for two important details: the acute sensibility of the youngster and a rather archaic, if not retrograde society (not entirely indifferent to the idea of anti-Semitism). The rare moments when he reminisces about the world of his childhood usually reflect a kind of "inverted nostalgia," which is to say that even those distant memories of his were already overshadowed by the desire to escape, to construct a new life "far from the Carpathian foothills."<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, there seems to be a tacit acknowledgement of a certain influence exerted by this primitive world upon the future poet's creations:

À quel moment commence ma jeunesse ? Je ne le sus jamais. Quoique j'eusse des données exactes sur le

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<sup>47</sup> Buot, François: *Tristan Tzara, L'homme qui inventa la révolution Dada*. Paris: Grasset, 2002 : 15.

sentiment que ce changement d'ages mineurs déterminera en moi et que je fusse si accessible à son style coulant et délicieux. Des lueurs myopes seulement, par instants, se creusent dans le passé déjà lointain, avec des mélodies rudimentaires de vers et de reptiles insignifiants embrouillés, elles continuent à nager dans le sommeil des veines.

(Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 266)

The young Samuel spent his childhood moving to and fro between the country with its dream-inciting landscapes and a small city where the scant contacts with modernity were just enough to arouse his interest and leave him wanting more. Even later, during his studies at the Schemitz-Tierin institute (a private high school), his main contact with the world at large were his literature courses (and in particular the French classes). These details shed some light upon the context of his intellectual formation, but even more revealing are his own recollections about this period: his young self already feels estranged in a *milieu* perceived as conformist and dreary:

Mes années exagérément déprimées me barraient la route. Leur volume était insuffisant pour contenir les vibrations et la chaleur dont je me sentais capable. Les grandes allures que j'ai rencontrées m'ont poli, leurs brosses savantes m'ont rapetissé, - une

bouteille vide le long de laquelle les jours glissaient en tangentes sans s'accrocher aux aspérités qui pourtant renfermaient des grains de riche volupté. Tandis que mes amis se contentaient d'être « types » et combattaient avec acharnement à coups de mots spirituels pour leur suprématie dans le groupe, je pris le parti de me tenir à l'écart et de lier avec certains d'entre eux le nœud des sympathies accommodantes, discrètement basées sur la malléabilité du sourire.

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 270)

In general, as François Buot remarks, when it comes to this period "Tzara's recollections are obscure and his memory deceitful." The scarce available information outlines the figure of a very serious young man, posing well-dressed in a few pictures with an attitude behind which one can already guess the taste for the spectacular of the future artist. Indeed, "extravagant" and - most importantly - "image" are the keywords here, as it was around this time that the young poet first attempted to forge a new identity for himself. His first literary attempts coincided with the adoption of a new name.

Samuel made his literary debut in the pages of *Simbolul* (*The Symbol*) under the pseudonym of S. Samyro. The paper, like any high-school publication, was to be short

lived and its impact negligible. However, a certain detail confers it with a particular significance: it was the brainchild of Tzara and Marcel Janco, a couple of young enthusiasts who were to become two of the most illustrious names in the history of the Avant-Garde. In addition, the journal was published under the auspices of Al. Macedonski, (arguably the most important Romanian symbolist poet) and of Iosif Iser (one of the greatest illustrators of his time). *The Symbol* was a venture deserving its place in literary history - even if for the sole reason of having brought together two generations of legendary names.

We can already witness, even at this very early stage, the beginning of a "tradition" in Tzara's intellectual quest, i.e., the apparition of the above-mentioned habit of constantly attempting to escape from his former self. Fittingly, and perhaps not by coincidence, the birth of "Tristan Tzara" is marked by a rupture. The first occurrence of "Tristan" coincides with the abandoning of the project that was *The Symbol*. However, in another gesture that was to become typical for him, the author had chosen his name because of its significance in the symbolist movement (via Wagner's opera); the change highlights the rupture with the past while at the same time acknowledging it as the foundation of a new episode in the

young artist's spiritual quest. Typical gesture, because in the same spirit he will write later Romanian verses even at the very peak of the dada period - just like he will go on to publish Dadaist poems long after the demise of the movement.

But the emblematic separation from his old persona carries yet another set of connotations that further enhance the idea of separation. His chosen pseudonym (Tristan Tzara) is much more than just a simple *nom de plume* - it is a label which puts the relationship between our poet and his native country in perspective. The interpretations offered by this label greatly support the possibility of interpreting his chosen exile as a form of severance. The first name, Tristan, is not a common Romanian name; while not unknown, it is mostly associated with the idea of "affected" and "literary" (for obvious reasons). Its most interesting feature in a Romanian cultural context is that it can be interpreted as "the sad one" (in Romanian trist = sad). The poet's chosen last name (Tzara) means "country" (the only small difference being the use of a Western orthography, instead of the usual diacritic: "ț"). The meaning of the resulting syntagm is evident to anyone familiar with the Romanian language: "He who is sad in his country." Even though Tzara never



"officially" confirmed this interpretation, it always was common knowledge among his friends; he himself was aware of the fact and never denied it. (When confronted directly by Sernet with the translation "triste au pays" he answered smiling - "peut-être"). At any rate, as Henri Béhar remarks, « on n'a pas assez montré qu'en se cherchant un nom - comme on place sa voix - Samyro, Tristan Ruia [...] Tristan Tzara, enfin, le poète se libérait des influences en les pervertissant »<sup>48</sup>

Tzara was notoriously reserved about discussing this early period of his life and anything having to do with his native country. The same Claude Sernet, who undertook the task of editing his first poems and tried to gather biographical information pertinent to the volume exclaimed: « C'est à croire que le trouble - fête, le féroce trouble - conscience qui se démenait sur la place publique eût l'ascendant privilégié d'un mystérieux personnage sans passé<sup>49</sup>. » Nevertheless, there are a few fragments scattered around his vast number of texts suggesting that his

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<sup>48</sup> Béhar, Henri. "Notes." *Tristan Tzara, Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Flammarion, 1976, v.I : 632.

<sup>49</sup> Sernet, Claude. "Preface." *Tzara, Tristan. Les Premiers poemes, presentes et traduits du roumain par Claude Sernet*. Paris: Seghers, 1965: 3-12.

feelings relative to anything Romanian were, for the most part, negative. On a personal level, one can only guess the series of frustrations Tzara had to go through as a child. Everything, from his family to the entire society seemed hostile:

Lambeaux de muscles, doublures déchirées saupoudrées d'odeurs vieillotées, impuissance et indignité, sang douteux et compromis ; ainsi paraissent aux yeux du monde les revirements de l'ordre social, quand un de ses enfants, après avoir annulé sa vie, cherche avec dépenses d'inquiétude et de volonté que la famille juge inutiles, une autre conscience que celle qui fut mise gratuitement à sa disposition. Je passe sous silence un chapitre douloureux d'injures, de terreur, de malédiction, de fureur, d'intrigues, d'outrages, d'horreur, de haine. Car au dernier moment, avant le départ, mon père sentit l'infranchissable barrière couper le lien de nos deux vies, et devant cette rupture qu'il savait définitive, il pleura. J'étais mort pour lui, crispant des mains acides dans sa gorge, j'emportais une vie amère qui ne lui appartenait plus, pour alimenter un long voyage si amèrement mendié aux bizarres calembours du sort. L'inconnu aurifère éblouissait déjà l'incandescence d'un rêve écervelé. »

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 275)

The most important consequence of the sum of these experiences is the way in which they influenced his creativity - and this is perhaps the only point where the author admits a direct relationship between the young student from Bucharest and the future artist living in Europe's capitals. Here, again, we have proof that the main sensation governing his spirits at the time was the need to escape, to do away with the past and anything related to it: « Mes années exagérément déprimées me barraient la route. Leur volume était insuffisant pour contenir les vibrations et la chaleur dont je me sentais capable. »<sup>50</sup> According to Tzara's own testimony, his young self was already nurturing what was to become the Dada spirit, and the maturation was an evolutionary process, rather than revolutionary. When his long-time friend suggested "Poèmes d'avant Dada" as title for the collection of texts he had written in Romania, his answer was the following:

Poèmes d'avant Dada [...] laisserait supposer une espèce de rupture dans ma personne poétique, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi, due à quelque chose qui se serait produit en dehors de moi (le déchaînement d'une croyance similimystique, pour ainsi dire: dada) qui, à proprement parler, n'a jamais existé, car il y a eu

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<sup>50</sup> Tzara, Tristan. "Faites vos jeux" v.i: 248.

continuité par à-coups plus ou moins violents et déterminants, si vous voulez, mais continuité et entre-pénétration quand même, liées au plus haut degré à une nécessité latente.

(Tristan Tzara, "Letter to Saşa Pană," 17 Jan. 1934).<sup>51</sup>

The general consensus seems thus to be that while the "Romanian" period yielded no significant artistic production from Tzara's part, it was useful and important in that it prepared the youngster for the future. Interestingly enough, Tzara's "career" is seen as such only after he made his voice heard by an international public. Coincidentally, his artistic ego "crystallizes" during the same period; whether his success was due primarily to this universal exposure or to his talent remains open - his longtime friend and colleague, Ion Vinea who stayed in Bucharest, never enjoyed more than a moderate local success. Some critics (such as Serge Fauchereau) consider his early attempts (in particular those signed Samyro) as "the first experiments of a sensibility which has not yet

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<sup>51</sup> Tzara, Tristan. "Letter to Saşa Pană," 17 Jan. 1934. Popa, Mircea: *Din dosarele exilului românesc: Corespondența dintre Alexandru Busuioceanu și Vintilă Horia (I)*. Revista de istorie și teorie literară 43 (2), (Avril - Juin 1995): 197-208. (In original in French).

found its own way to express itself."<sup>52</sup> Others, like Eugène Ionesco see in his *Premiers poèmes* the elements of an embryonic surrealism, or perhaps the manifestation of a "proto-Dada" spirit. The truth is probably somewhere in-between, meaning that while these are not creations really worth labels such as "Dada" or "surrealist," their *spirit* certainly announces these future poetic idioms. Jean Cassou provides us with an excellent synopsis of the *Premiers poèmes*:

Nous sentons seulement qu'ils sont des *premiers* poèmes, donc qu'un avenir est en eux, qu'ils sont gros d'avenir, gros d'impatience. Et alors là, nous touchons la vérité: ces poèmes, nous y reconnaissons le futur Tzara dans la mesure, simplement, où nous rendons compte que l'impatience est le moteur, l'agent essentiel de la poésie de Tzara. Impatience qui se fera bouillonnante, exaspérée et grandiose. Mais qui, alors, en cette aurore de solitude provinciale, est toute empreinte d'une étrange et douce tristesse.<sup>53</sup>

I personally believe that for this particular opus, the key word is indeed "solitude provinciale." Texts like

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<sup>52</sup> Fauchereau, Serge. "Tristan Tzara et l'avant-garde roumaine." Critique (300) : May 1972.

<sup>53</sup> Cassou, Jean. "Premiers poèmes de Tristan Tzara." *Revue de l'Association pour l'étude du mouvement Dada*, (no. I, October 1965): 65-68.

"*Vacances en province*" are essentially reflections of such a mindset, while at the same time illustrating their author's oscillation between the influence of Symbolism and his own mannerism: *Descendons dans le ravin / Qui est Dieu lorsqu'il bâille / Mirons-nous dans le lac / Plein du frai vert des grenouilles / Soyons pauvres au retour / Et frappons à la porte de l'étranger / Comme le bec des oiseaux dans l'écorce du printemps...* Alternatively, one distinguishes the rhythm of a Romanian folk song: *Pan de mur fendu / Me suis demandé / Aujourd'hui pourquoi / Ne s'est pas pendue (Voix)*. Finally, while still marked by the same "country spleen," other texts are closer to what was to become Dada (*Dans les trous bout vie rouge*).

Jacques Bersani saw in *Furtuna și cântecul dezertorului* (*The Storm and the Deserter's Song*) the first signs announcing the future style of the poet, advocating that it was "la guerre [...] qui arrache au jeune Tzara ses premiers accents véritables."<sup>54</sup> But as G.F. Browning notes, "despite the importance of World War I in provoking Dada, this poem's "accent véritable" was not preserved in Zürich,

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Bersani, quoted by G.F. Browning. Browning, Gordon Frederick: *Tristan Tzara: The Genesis of the Dada Poem or from Dada to Aa*. Stuttgart: Heinz, 1979: 40.

and Dada was not a Guernica."<sup>55</sup> One can certainly attribute a great deal of weight to Tzara's attitude towards war and the consequences it had upon his fate and actions, but only in combination with his feelings towards his native country, and inasmuch as it determined him to choose the way of exile. The same G.F. Browning justly observes that "Dada's posture before the war is not to be likened to the moral outrage of the pacifist, but instead to the subversive evasion of the draft-dodger."<sup>56</sup> He offers as proof a very informative story in which Tzara fittingly uses a form of "Dada dementia" in order to evade recruitment.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Browning: 40-54.

<sup>56</sup> *Idem*, 54.

<sup>57</sup> He quotes Fritz Glauser who describes the events as follows: "It happened that I was in the position to offer a service to Tzara. Romania needed soldiers. Tzara had received orders to report. However, a Zürich psychiatrist had written a report: dementia precox, youthful mental illness. Armed with this report, Tzara had to appear before a board of doctors which met in Berne and he chose me for his companion. On the way we read the report of the psychiatrist. It was very amusing. As proof for the illness of his patient, the mind doctor quoted poems by his patient which more than clearly proved an obvious case of insanity. Tzara played the role excellently. He let his chin hang and delicate spittle strands drooled on his crookedly tied tie. I each time carefully wiped them away. The questions of the Romanian doctors who were assembled in the conference room of the hospital, I had to answer for him. Tzara limited himself to mumbling "ha" and "ho." [...] Surely

At any rate, it would seem that at the time of his departure Tzara was ready in spirit to take on the international public, even though he was yet unsure about the particular way he will chose for doing so. (Hugo Ball noted at the time of Tristan's arrival in Zürich that "he was still reading poems created in an obsolete style"). It will take him some time to completely leave behind the literary influences which dominated his adolescence and to perceive the pulse of the European Avant-Garde. For now, at any rate, the most important for him was the fact that he was able to leave behind a country whose atmosphere was much too leisurely for his taste and begin a new life in one of the West's most cosmopolitan cities of the time: Zürich.<sup>58</sup>

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it wasn't too hard for Tzara on this day to act like a little catatonic stupor [...] Only when he was certain that he was deferred (a certificate was pushed into my hand on which this was stated) did he bring himself to his first joke. I led him stumbling to the door, where he then turned and spoke loudly and clearly: "Merde," and as emphasis he added "Dada" (Browning: 55).

<sup>58</sup> This is how Richard Huelsenbeck describes the city at the time: "*Bahnhofstrasse*: [...] was more of an international promenade in those days. Here, one might see refugees from all over the world [...] In the liberal atmosphere of Zürich, where the liberal newspapers could print whatever they pleased, where magazines were founded and antiwar poems recited, [...] we could scream out everything hat we were bursting with. (Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*: 11 - 14).



## Zürich

Most critics associate this period of Tzara's life with the bohemian life of Cabaret Voltaire which will eventually develop into a Dada "movement" - and rightly so. What some biographers omit to highlight, however, is a crucially important detail: for the poet, this is the age of countless searches and experimentations in his quest for an identity. He was reluctant at first to approach the foreign society which he perceived mostly as hostile, being (as we will see in a moment) still marked by the disgust towards the one he had just left behind; but he needed to find a place among his newly discovered friends - and not only that - he needed, most of all, to ascertain himself:

« J'ai fait de fréquentes concessions à ma pudeur et donné des preuves empressées d'indulgence en acceptant des réjouissances ornementales et des rapports avec ces jeunes heureux et satisfaits. Mais malgré mon désir d'assimilation, je restai un étranger pour eux. A force de vivre isolé, quoique entouré du bruit vide, mais frais, essayant de prendre part à leurs farces et cérémonies de camaraderie, je devins peu à peu un *étranger pour moi-même* »

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, emphasis mine)

This remarkable choice of words, "étranger pour moi-même," is not by coincidence the same as the phrasing used

by Julia Kristeva in her attempt to uncover the quintessence of an exile's spirit. This particular phrase is excellent proof that Tzara chose to become an exile by choice, rather than forced by the circumstances. A very interesting question at this point is who exactly is the "other self" whom he perceives as a stranger, or, better yet, what it did represent.

A number of hints would suggest that the identity left behind is nothing else but *Samuel*, the provincial boy representing much of what the poet hated and wanted to forget. (We will see how reluctant he was to get in touch with anything having to do with his youth, and keep up the relationships he had back home, including his family). The initial attitude of his companions did nothing to remedy the situation: they saw in him the incarnation of a "primitive spirit" of sorts, uneducated, and, on the whole, inferior; a sort of "second-class intellectual" whose fraudulent attempts to win a place on the literary scene were only in part excused by the prominence of his brilliant spirit.

Huelssenbeck's recollection of Tzara is extremely relevant in this aspect. Its analysis allows us to perceive the viewpoint of the society confronting the young exile, which, combined with the poet's own testimonies, make

possible the reconstruction of the social context he was living in, with all the details responsible for his mindset at the time.

First of all, it is worth mentioning that the discourse is declaratively toned down, leaving the reader wondering how an "uncensored" version might have looked like: "I am writing an obituary, a kind of encomium, and at this moment I would like to leave aside many things I might have said otherwise."<sup>59</sup> But despite the (only partial) restraint of the German artist, the picture emerging from his characterization is at times nothing short of insulting: "Tzara was a "natural Dadaist" a sort of *self-styled barbarian*, who wanted to put to fire and sword the things that we had designated as the goals and objects of necessary annihilation - a whole collection of artistic and cultural values that had lost their substance and meaning"<sup>60</sup> (emphasis mine). The possibly unflattering meaning of "natural" is promptly confirmed - and even reinforced - by "barbarian," and the depiction is only worsened by the addition of "self-styled." Was the young Tzara nothing more than an uneducated peasant? Apparently, yes, according to

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<sup>59</sup> Huelsenbeck: 102.

<sup>60</sup> Idem.

his Western comrades: "It was easier for Tzara to carry out the work of destruction than for Ball, Arp, or myself, because *Tzara had never experienced the preconditions* for the whole mass of false values that we so greatly opposed. Tzara drew part of his admirable energy from a nonexistent reservoir. Unlike Ball, Arp, or myself, he had not grown up in the shadow of German humanism"<sup>61</sup> (emphasis mine). Whether consciously or not, Huelsenbeck's apparent praise is at the same time a reproach: the values he mentions, false or not, are in fact elements of a culture instilling the Germans with self-importance - a detail further underlined in the following phrases: "No Schiller and no Goethe have ever told him *in his tiny native town* that the beautiful, the noble, the good should or could rule the world. Tzara never suffered from a conflict with the fear that if culture were destroyed, something essential could be destroyed along with it, something irreplaceable, precious, mysterious, that might possibly never rise again out of the ruins"<sup>62</sup> (emphasis mine). Everything seems to work towards the idea that Tzara was nothing but a country boy who had hitherto no contact with civilization, or at least with its Western

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<sup>61</sup> Idem.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, 103.

variety. This is not surprising, seeing that he was coming from a place considered by many to be uncivilized *par excellence*: "In his *uninhibited* (and justified) feelings against culture, he never felt the need to bow with his torch before the basic ontological problem of man and society. As a native of the Balkans, he couldn't feel this need, and he lived and rode on like the leader of an invisible army of Langobards who are *indifferent to the good things that might be wiped out with the bad*"<sup>63</sup> (emphasis mine).

The eventual implication of the obituary is nothing else but the fact that Tzara's taste for "cultural destruction," even though converted into a poetic credo (and thus promoted to the status of valuable ideology), is essentially ascribable to his dubious cultural heritage! While Huelsenbeck goes on to argue - rightfully so - that these very features were some of the crucial elements that made Dada possible, it is hard to ignore the impact such an attitude would have had upon the young Romanian exile.

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<sup>63</sup> Idem.

## The "Dégoût" and the Beginnings of an Ars Poetica

Tristan was all too aware of both his limitations and of his peers' opinions; his initial reaction was to isolate himself:

Dans le peu de respect qu'ils me portaient je ne pouvais démêler la quantité de moquerie. Cependant l'incertitude me devint insupportable et ne pouvant pas les détourner de leur jeux [...] je me détachai lentement de ces choses superflues, avec la noire combustion de mon caractère.

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 277-278)

Being too ambitious to renounce his inborn desire for becoming the center of attention, he adopts a cautious attitude and blames himself for his lack of social success. His sensitiveness generates a frustration which will be the cornerstone of an attitude soon to make its impression upon the literary world: the notorious Dada *dégoût*:

J'étais dur dans mes jugements et je tenais à mon injuste détachement [...] j'étais méfiant, incrédule, soupçonneux, taciturne.

C'est ainsi que naquit mon dégoût. Sans haine et sans systèmes de perfectionnements sociaux, il s'était enraciné en moi, renforcé par les refoulements de mon enfance ; il s'adapta à ma vie qu'il accompagnait parallèlement et devint un élément poétique de révolte latente et sans appel. Je tenais à mon dégoût avec une

secrète jalousie comme à une acquisition précieuse et passionnée, consacrée par une douleur dont je me croyais le seul dépositaire.

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 279, emphasis mine)

The dégoût in its incipient, social form had a twofold nature making it that much more intense for its bearer. At this point the young artist was torn between his repulsion for "his old self" and his entourage. The spirit of the young boy is assaulted by events, sensations and thoughts which overwhelm his personality - a personality hitherto used to the tern atmosphere and retrograde mores of a provincial city:

Des événements corrosifs attaquent le métal propre de mes jours. Dans tout autre endroit, ils n'auraient été que des plaisirs un peu singuliers, ici ils devenaient des passions qui faisaient d'importantes ratures dans ma façon de vivre ; ils ont écrasé, broyé ce que je croyais de verre dans ma sensibilité, ou suscité une opposition féroce et une puissance anormale dans les actes contraires à ma nature. L'insistance de ces coups qui me poursuivaient me devint bientôt familière, et j'arrivai sans peine, inconsciemment, à me construire une vie fausse d'abus, de défaillances, de déguisements et d'alarmes.

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 276, emphasis mine)

Such a concurrence of devastating experiences (devastating at least in the youngster's hyper-sensible imagination) makes Tzara's temporary alienation and anxiety understandable. A very interesting detail is his attempt to fabricate a "new life" which he perceives as "false." His conscience was still functioning according to the old norms and references inherited from home, and perceived the actions of this newly emerging persona as peculiar, exaggerated - in a word, foreign. What we are witnessing here is the discovery of the new Tristan, the worldly artist, by an authorial voice still belonging to Samuel, the timid adolescent. This fragment of Tzara's memoirs reconstructs in a subtle and maybe subconscious manner a conversion: the crucially important process at the end of which a provincial character is replaced by a cosmopolitan spirit. G.F. Browning remarks that an analysis of this period's texts will show that this is the turning point where the real Tzara emerges: his "poetry used to be about girls and the countryside. Now it was about itself. It had



been about fantasy love and metaphysical grief. Now it was about the expression of his dégoût."<sup>64</sup>

In a dramatic turn, the "self-styled barbarian" will find a way to make the most of his anger. The social alienation experienced by the poet found its place in his creations, converted into artistic modalities of expression. True to what was to become another custom of his in times of distress, he knew how to channel his feelings in the activity he did best: writing. The following confession reveals the direct connection between his creativity and the anguish triggered by his exile:

Pendant longtemps ce que j'écrivais à l'improviste était la matérialisation de mon dégoût envers tout et surtout envers moi-même. Contrairement à la plupart des créateurs, j'écrivais pour détruire le sentiment qui me poussait.

(Tristan Tzara, *Faites vos jeux*, 261-262, emphasis mine)

In a fascinating way, he manages to put to use many things he inherited from the "previous life" he so much loathed. The influences of Tzara's upbringing and native country are identifiable in a great number of the works he created during the "Zürich era" - and even later. The

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<sup>64</sup> Browning: 43.

extent and nature of these influences varies greatly. However, in their entirety, they undeniably constitute one of the factors conferring the poet's creations with their distinctiveness.

One of the ways in which he exploited his "childhood baggage" was to recycle (in the strictest sense of the term) some of the early poems written in Romanian, which in their original form were (as Hugo Ball remarked) "dull" and "conservative." He deconstructed them in order to rebuild new texts from the scraps, brutally reducing or severing the poems and combining the resulting fragments in a manner not too different from the forthcoming method of "extracting words from a hat."

G. F. Browning assimilates Tzara's transition from his native country to the Zürich period with the evolution from poems like "Nocturna" (a Romanian poem) to a French variation thereof entitled "Nocturne de Hamlet," itself destroyed and transformed into "Le cierge et la vierge," which will finally become, in its turn, part of "La première aventure..." The main method used here is a "scissoring" of the initial, intelligible text, followed by a collage whose aim is to render it incomprehensible. Tzara continued to use this method (including the use of old Romanian material) in many of his poems, dada and post-

dada. The meaning of the aggression put to use in this collage technique can be attributed to the author's desire to negate his original poetic universe, through the annihilation of its laws (the most obvious destruction occurs at the level of the language, but social conventions and national traits are also addressed).

An interesting question about the entire process is what exactly Tzara's aggression was directed towards. His letter to Jacques Doucet, (dated October 1922) will allow us to identify a few such elements:

Comme je ne réagissais que par contraste, tous mes poèmes de 1916 n'étaient qu'une *réaction contre les précédents, trop doux et soignés* ; ils étaient d'une brutalité excessive, contenaient des cris et des rythmes accentués et mouvementés.

(Tzara in Sanouillet, 571, emphasis mine)

Certainly, one of the main things he was reacting against was the mentality of his old self: soft, melancholic, slow (*doux*) and perhaps even more importantly, conformist and outdated (*soignés*). While an innovative reaction against these features is certainly understandable, it would be no different from any other such development in literary history. Tzara's *significant* innovation is presented in his following paragraph, once

again linking his contributions to the literary world with two issues closely related to his exile status. A first declaration, « En 1916, je tâchais de détruire les genres littéraires »<sup>65</sup> can be certainly related to Huelsenbeck's remark: Less constrained by a tradition deeply rooted in history, he finds it easier to attack the central principles of the literary world.

The second declaration shows us his *modus operandi*:

J'introduisais dans les poèmes des éléments jugés indignes d'en faire partie, comme des phrases de journal, *des bruits et des sons*.

(Tzara in Sanouillet, 571, emphasis mine)

The important element for our study here is "des bruits et des sons." This indicates that Tzara was attacking not only the literary discourse, but also discourse in general - which is to say, language, by annihilating the content of the words and reducing them to an empty shell of sounds. The idea is already known, but what is particularly interesting for us is the fact that this adversity towards language originates in Tzara's displacement. The linguistic barrier confronting each exile acquires in his case epic proportions, becoming, together

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<sup>65</sup> Sanouillet, 571.

with the famous *dégoût*, the main motivation behind his artistic accomplishments. I personally fully agree with the idea advanced by Elmer Peterson:

Some of the gratuitous word-play Tzara delighted in may in part be explained by the fact that, although well schooled in French, he did not learn French as his native language. French words had a curious resonance for him, and he felt no restraint at all in using them in new and unexpected ways. [...]

(Peterson, 10)

The "empty shells," the sounds of the discourse, are thus converted from mere carriers to subjects carrying a message of their own; but this radical metamorphosis was only possible because of the poet's radically different perspective upon the French language - the outsider's perspective.

Michel Sanouillet also attributes to Tzara's displacement his evolution from a "traditional" stance to the radical style which will turn him into one of the most innovative poets of the twentieth century:

Ses poèmes de cette époque jalonnent les étapes de son refus, graduel mais définitif des subtilités post-symbolistes qui caractérisaient encore ses derniers vers roumains et, simultanément, de son abandon aux séductions d'un nouveau langage, primitif

et incohérent, délivré des contraintes de la syntaxe  
et de la logique, rendu plus apte ainsi à traduire  
sans les trahir les mouvements de son être intérieur  
[...]

(Sanouillet, 21, emphasis mine)

As Elmer Peterson points out, arguably the main feature of Tzara's dada poems is that "the emphasis is on the sound rather than the meaning."<sup>66</sup> Let us examine a representative fragment from this period's creations, illustrating the occurrences described above:

LA FEMME ENCEINTE:

quatre cents chevaux soixante chameaux  
trois cents peaux de zibeline cinq cents peaux  
d'hermine  
son mari est malade  
vingt peaux de renards jaunes trois peaux de  
chelizun  
un grand oiseau en vie Tyao  
ty a o ty a o ty a o  
et quatre beaux fusils

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<sup>66</sup> Peterson, Elmer: *Tristan Tzara, Dada and Surreational Theorist*.  
New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971: 11.

Mr. CRICRI	}	zdranga zdranga zdranga zdranga
Mr. BLEUBLEU		di di di di di di di di
PIPI		zoumbaï zoumbaï zoumbaï zoumbaï
Mr. ANTIPYRINE		dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi

(Tristan Tzara, *La première aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine*, in *Tzara*, v. I: 78-79)

There is an abundance of details awarding an attentive reading with numerous hints about Tzara's displacement, struggle, heritage and evolution. Some of them, while relevant in that they contribute to the restoration of the poet's mindset at the time, have a rather anecdotal value; among these we could mention the ubiquitous grammatical mistakes<sup>67</sup> and the fact that the sonorities uttered by the characters are commonly employed to reproduce the sounds of a Romanian gypsy band. Much more important, however, is the way in which language is manipulated. The first part of the fragment still retains a loose resemblance to a meaningful message; but as the enumeration progresses, it becomes more and more obvious that its sole *raison d'être* is to convey

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<sup>67</sup> E. Peterson, among others, remarks that "grammatical mistakes abound in Tzara's writings at this time" (Peterson: 228).

musicality. The reader/spectator is given "warnings" that he should not look for meaning in the discourse; son mari est malade breaks up any "logic" that could be developing in the text, accentuated progressively by "chelizun" and "Tyao," and culminating with the eruption of sounds produced by the four characters. The assembly of sounds builds up progressively until the meaning is completely lost, in a "wake-up call" of sorts, the function of which is described by Elmer Peterson as follows:

This is pure "sonorous inanity" but with a purpose, the purpose being to point out the hollowness of words and confirm the belief that rational communication is often absolutely impossible.

(Peterson, 11-12)

This "sonorous inanity" and the message it conveys is certainly an interesting feature for a poem, but perhaps even more interesting is the probable origin of the idea. Tzara's initial difficulty in assimilating the French language as reflected in his creations brings to mind the testimonials of other exiles, such as Eva Hoffman, who remembers her first day of immersion in the new language as a levitation of sorts in a cultural interstice where meaningless words were enveloping her in a mass of sounds emptied of any content. The sensation is recognizable in



creations such as Mr. Antypirine's *Adventures*, and it certainly facilitated the development of a number of dada techniques.

### **Exile and Poetics - Possible Correlations**

These techniques were later to be followed by a number of disciples. Dada ideas were employed by movements like *Bruitism*, which eventually shifted from the original "destruction of language" into the musical domain. Within the boundaries of the literary world, another trend indebted to the Dadaist revolution was *Lettrism*. Not surprisingly, the leader and theoretician of that movement was Isidore Isou, another francophone poet of Romanian origin, just like Tzara. Their common affinity for treating the French language as a collection of sounds is at least in part due to the fact that for them it was a second language. One of Isou's particularities is that his efforts are concentrated around linguistic issues, rather than artistic. Following in Tzara's steps, (and perhaps influenced by the numerous trends like "alitterature," "antiroman" and "anti-play"), he conceives a number of "antilinguistic" creations whose original motivations can be attributed to his perceiving of the language as *extraneous*, an entity separated from the process of reasoning.

Apparently, the innovativeness of many exile writers originates in their estrangement. Tzara's case is by no means singular. The distinctive styles of other celebrated exile artists like Beckett and Ionesco are also attributed to their approach towards the French language "from the outside." Rosette Lamont points out that they share the tendency to turn language from a means of communication into a collection of meaningless sounds whose main purpose is to "re-echo the void" of their existence. While she associates this void with the existentialist nausea, I believe that (at least in Tzara's case) it can be also attributed to the anguish generated by his displacement.

There is another interesting question pertaining to Tzara's outcast status. Given his position situated in the « linguistic interstice » many exiles find between the original and the adoptive culture, was he attempting to destroy his native language, the new language, or both? The answer is probably both. Unlike other exiles - like, for instance, Vintilă Horia - who tried to overcome their relocation by assimilating as many languages as possible (and thus becoming an "insider" to the new culture) Tzara attempted to destroy language in general, and therefore, any language, retaining perpetually his "outsider" condition. His aspiration towards a better, more

intellectually stimulating space was endless. He left Romania for Switzerland only to move later to France, where he will eventually find that even Paris was too boring for him.<sup>68</sup>

This cosmopolitan spirit is clearly reflected in his actions. His successes at *Cabaret Voltaire* did not keep him happy for long. He wanted to find himself at the cutting edge of the artistic world, and international recognition for his ideas. This is how Richard Huelsenbeck remembers him at the time:

[as early as 1916] Tzara concentrated on his correspondence with Rome and Paris, remaining the international intellectual playing with the ideas of the world. He told us about Picasso and cubism, he knew about the futurists, not only Marinetti, but also Carrà, Boccioni, and Severini.

(Huelsenbeck, 18)

A vast assortment of experiences and activities such as the ones described above naturally brought considerable changes in the young artist's personality. By the time he

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<sup>68</sup> This is how Jack Lindsay remembers Tzara in Paris, in 1959: "I felt that he was suffering from strain. He remarked about Paris, 'A heartless place, always after the latest sensation. Nothing lasts.' He seemed weary and I felt that he no longer found it at all easy to hold his own in the only way that satisfied him. He thought the political situation was stagnant and depressing." (Lindsay: 225).

was about to leave Zürich, Tzara was profoundly transformed. No longer was he the provincial taking pleasure in the contemplation of country landscapes. He was now a Westerner fully assimilated to the modern ways of life - so much so that he found himself at the very forefront of this life, in a symbiosis where his self and modernity not only needed, but also stimulated each other. His influence upon modern art is well known; the following fragment shows the extent to which he valued modern civilization as an intellectual stimulus:

La circulation et le bruit des grandes villes sont devenus un complément indispensable à mes défauts nerveux. Mes yeux ont besoin de cette distraction impersonnelle, mes jambes, mes bras, mon cerveau, ne fonctionnent que s'il y a autour d'eux un mouvement similaire. De ce stimulant, en apparence cérébral, sont parties chez moi les plus hardies initiatives.

(Quoted by Georges Hugnet in *Dictionnaire du Dadaïsme*, Paris: Simoën, 1976)

The brief and scarce accounts about the feelings he had about his homeland generally tend to assent on the fact that those feelings were negative. The following such testimonial proves the direct relationship (albeit possibly not acknowledged consciously by Tzara) between the famous *dégoût* and the culture from which he emerged:

Je suis depuis hier soir à Bucarest, je pars ce soir à la campagne et je ne désire que retourner - soit à Paris, soit autre part. Les Balkans et la mentalité d'ici me dégoûtent profondément [...] je m'ennuie ici *horriblement* et je ne suis que pour 24 heures à Bucarest. (Bucarest, 28 juillet 1920)

(Tristan Tzara, *Letter to Picabia*, in Sanouillet, 501)

It is obvious that at this point, the mature Tzara had very little to do with his native country anymore, and (obviously) with its customs. This repugnance was so strong that he even preferred to carry out his correspondence with his Romanian friends and colleagues (like, for instance, Saşa Pană) in French, instead of their common native language. Furthermore, and perhaps even more surprisingly, he constantly avoided visiting his parents, despite their repeated pleas - his (not always disclosed) motivation being the loathing of everything Romanian.<sup>69</sup> The image of the country impregnated in his memory was extremely

<sup>69</sup> François Buot points out instances of these refusals constantly throughout Tzara's biography. His usual attitude and arguments are described as follows: "d'habitude, Tzara est très laconique avec ses parents. Il les aime et voudrait les voir mais c'est la Roumanie qu'il ne supporte plus. Quand il écrit il valorise toujours cette nouvelle vie qu'il s'est choisie. Ses occupations et sa réussite sociale sont autant d'arguments pour ne pas prendre un billet pour Bucarest. (Buot, 181).

disparaging: an Oriental state, secluded into itself, with rare instances of enlightenment.<sup>70</sup> The "country boy" confronting only a few short years ago the mentality of the West (through its representants like Ball and Huelsenbeck) has become now completely assimilated.

There are, however, a few fragments (written later in his life) like the following showing that some of his childhood memories were still warmhearted; this opens the question whether Tzara was truly and completely detached from his cultural heritage:

*C'est en Moldavie, sur les contreforts des Carpates que, il y a plus de quarante-neuf ans, je suis né. Jamais le souvenir de mon enfance passée dans ces pays auréolés par la splendeur du soleil et le mystère du monde ouvert à mes jeunes yeux, ne m'a quitté. Je ne puis évoquer qu'avec émotion ce pays dur, où les valeurs essentielles de la vie, sous leur aspect rude et tendre à la fois, si proche de la nature, ont gardé la fraîcheur de la jeunesse du monde.*

(Tzara, quoted in Buot, 380, emphasis mine)

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<sup>70</sup> His opinion was briefly altered after the instauration of the Communist regime; influenced by his communist beliefs, he saw in the new social order the opening of a long-awaited era of progress. However, Tzara soon realized that the country's "new image" was nothing but the result of the Communist propaganda.

But a closer analysis will show that even such an apparently benevolent message does in fact support, and perhaps even reinforce, the artist's detachment. The above declaration offers us two notable pieces of information: first, an attentive reading will reveal that Tzara's fondness is directed towards the *country* in its material aspect rather than towards its people; in his memories, the idea of *community* is overwhelmed by the impressions pertaining to nature. But even more importantly, we must note the tone of his discourse and the position from which it is being voiced. Expressions like "pays dur," "valeurs rude(s)," "proche de la nature," and "fraîcheur de la jeunesse du monde" - all of these elements disclose an attitude that is strikingly similar to the one Huelsenbeck had when he described the young Tristan, namely the Westerner's condescension towards the civilization of the Balkans. Tzara's severance from his origins was now complete.

### **The Paris Era**

The details about this new era in the poet's life are well known; the "Paris correspondence" mentioned by Huelsenbeck included personalities like Paul Dermée, Francis Picabia, André Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault. This assiduous correspondence, combined with the

ever-increasing success of the Zürich shows, convinced him to move to Paris in 1919 where he was awaited (according to Breton's testimonial) "a little like Messiah." Once he arrived, he started a relentless effort in order to "spread the word of dada" and make his creations known.<sup>71</sup> The events that followed, from the tumultuous years spent with "Tout-Paris" at *Le boeuf sur le toit* and elsewhere until his quiet and frustrated semi-retirement of his last years, are now literary history, and beyond the scope of this study. What we will try to reveal instead - keeping with the objective of our inquiry - is the relationship between his creations and his exile status.

The real value of Tzara's undertakings during the Paris years is still a matter of debate for the critics. Some, like Elmer Peterson, think that his post-dada activity is unjustly overlooked, and that "it should be understood that his thirties and forties were as productive as his twenties."<sup>72</sup> Others, like G. F. Browning, tend to

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<sup>71</sup> This is how Soupault describes his activity: "A few weeks after his arrival, he exploded. He deployed a tremendous activity. His hotel, to the great terror of the manager, became a sort of headquarters. Tzara had become an impresario, magazine director, ticket seller, publicity chief, typographer, editor, organist..." (Soupault, in *Les Lettres Françaises*, no. 109 (24 mai 1946), 4, quoted in Peterson: XXI).

<sup>72</sup> Peterson: 83.



appreciate them less, arguing that they “offered no new anti-poetic solutions,” and that for the most part Tzara tended to live off the innovations from the Zürich era and the glory of days past<sup>73</sup>. According to him, not only were there no true poetic innovations in Paris, but even more importantly, dada ceased to exist once it became a movement.

For Tzara there was a definite change from Zürich to Paris. Dada’s transplant marked the end of his dada poetry [...] Tzara began to regret that, inevitably, poetic activity, however anti-poetic, *was susceptible to becoming literature* - to be read by future writers and, one day, *treated seriously by the critics*.<sup>74</sup>

(Browning, 192, emphasis mine)

These two opposite views represent the extremes of a broad spectrum of opinions - and as usual, the truth is

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<sup>73</sup> Tis opinion is actually shared by several of his dadaist comrades, like Huelsenbeck and Ball.

<sup>74</sup> Which is, of course, exactly what happened. The idea was initially supported by Michel Sanouillet, in *Dada à Paris* (published prior to Browning’s volume) Sanouillet argues that “ne pas créer est impossible [...] que Tzara pulverize les mots, en voici un poème; que Picabia brise une bouteille d’encre, un tableau est né; que césar de nos jours mette au pilon une automobile, il en sort une sculpture. Que Duchamp, visant à la destruction totale de l’acte créateur, cesse de peindre et de s’exprimer, il octroie l’existence à un mythe. Rien ne se détruit; tout se transforme.” (Sanouillet, 429).

probably somewhere in between. Critics advocating the value of Tzara's "adulthood" texts are right in that we will find among them many of his best poetic productions. Despite his temporary "transgressions" - i.e., "the surrealist episode" and his political involvement, Tzara always remained true to his dada spirit, and continued to create accordingly. But in order to be able to perceive the continuity between his ideology from his earlier years and his later ventures, we must remember that, in his view, dada was not and could not be a literary movement in the traditional sense of the term<sup>75</sup>. He insisted that dada was rather a state of mind, and a creation method deriving from it, and was always quick to sanction any enterprise deviating from this principle. He announced as soon as 1924 that:

Le Mouvement Dada est mort. Mais certains, par commodité, voudraient communier dans un même élan négateur ou plutôt former une coopérative de leurs petits talents. Ils s'affirmèrent autrefois ennemis d'un ordre arbitraire, mais c'était pour adopter finalement un nouvel ordre qui ne le cédait rien au précédent. [...] Je l'ai déjà écrit, le mot Dada fut

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<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that despite his repeated declarations on this subject, Tzara nevertheless did everything within his power to popularize dada both among artists and the public - which is to say, to create a trend.

choisi pour ridiculiser les écoles littéraires. Dada ne pouvait pas devenir école et il ne faut pas faire le jeu de ceux qui voudraient le contraire.

(Tzara in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 23 II 1924, reproduced in Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, V. I)

A statement like this reinforces the idea that, despite their unquestionable poetic value, the post-Zürich creations brought no truly innovative elements to literary theory. G. F. Browning's explanation of this relative stagnation gives it a particular significance for our study:

Underlying the repetition of old solutions was perhaps a decrease in *dégoût*. Too successful, too happy, Tzara lost the desperate inspiration that came to him usually during the doldrums of Dada's "off-seasons."

(Browning, 194)

Again, we see a link between the phenomenon of severance and an artist's creativity. Once the initial drive (the aversion towards his origins) faded away, so did the vivacity of his spirit. And I believe that one of the main reasons for the disparition of this drive was the fact that the revolt against the "unsophisticated" and "dull" society Tzara left behind lost its object (or "raison d'être") as he progressively became assimilated in the

Western world. Indeed - even though it could be argued that this happened against his will - he was becoming more and more an icon of the literary institution.

### **Severance and Creativity - A Close Relationship**

The previous quotation amounts to acknowledging - once again - the importance of the exile for Tzara's creativity. The initial impetus starting off his artistic career was generated by his *dégoût* - the same disgust pushing him to perform the act of severance from his original culture. Once the severance was accomplished, and the feeling abated, Tzara could not find a similarly stimulating sentiment.

Matei Călinescu, a celebrated critic thoroughly familiar both with the artist's work and with Romanian culture also supports the idea of a direct relationship between Tzara's artistic vocation and his upbringing:

When they left the country, Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco were both fully *prepared* for the total intellectual revolt of the dada movement, to the emergence of which [...] they both contributed to a large extent. It would be otherwise impossible to explain how, only a few months after his settling in Zürich, Tristan Tzara could have become one of the coalescing elements of the young intellectual's group which the war [...] had determined to seek refuge,

resenting the world in which they lived in, in Switzerland [...] Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck [...]

(Matei Călinescu, in *Preface to Sașa Pană*, 19)

The amendment I would like to bring to Călinescu's declaration is that while - as pointed out in the previous pages - the Romanian origins of Tzara undoubtedly played an important part in the forging of his poetic arsenal, his major realization, the contribution to the birth of dada, was motivated by - and coincides with - the severance from his cultural roots. Yes, he was certainly Romanian.<sup>76</sup> But Tzara could only become an artist of international fame instead of remaining a moderately successful poet in his native country, like most of his peers, because he was *unlike* them. Jack Lindsay's memories of him reproduce very well the image of his persona, simultaneously disclosing his nationality *and* his detachment from it:

Small and neat, *he looked more and more Rumanian as he aged*. Or perhaps I felt this Rumanian aspect of him more acutely after visits to his homeland in 1952 and 1953, when I often thought for a moment that I saw

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<sup>76</sup> Many testimonials of his peers (Breton, Soupault, Ball, Huelsenbeck, etc., etc., point out as main traits his Romanian accent and/or appearance.

him coming down the street. *And yet those other Rumanians were not really like him. They lacked the intense intellectual awareness of his face, the acute responsiveness to every nuance of what was going on around him,* the satiric half-smile that was liable to intrude and tighten the curved lines and the sides of his mouth. Only in that flickering glint of amused and penetrating awareness could one recognise anything of the resolute devil-may-care comely lad of the Zürich photos of Dada-days.

(Lindsay, 214, emphasis mine)

A very interesting question rising here is to what extent we can attribute Tzara's artistic destiny, his spirit of revolt, and his severance to his nationality. There seems to be a long list of precedent (and consequent) cases proving the propensity of Romanians for both modernity and the rejection of their society; one such notable example is that of I.L. Caragiale, perhaps the most celebrated Romanian prose-writer, who left the country as a result of his utter disgust with its mores. Another famous case is the one of a writer so revolutionary and in some ways so close to Tzara's spirit that many critics see him as the most important forerunner of Dadaism. Urmuz was a fascinating author who managed to leave his mark in Romanian literary history despite the extremely small

number of texts he left behind. His writings reflected the acute awareness "of a profound crisis pertaining to the concept of literature itself," as Matei Călinescu remarked.<sup>77</sup>

This list of examples could go on and on, suggesting a possible "natural" or "inherent" link between Romanian culture and the inborn predisposition of its members for both modernity and disgust. Yet one could argue that while Tzara was indeed eager to leave his native country, his artistic aspirations would have pushed him to leave just about any other country he would have lived in - had he been born somewhere else. After all, he left Zurich for Paris. The argument is certainly valid. However, while in Tzara's case his nationality was incidentally Romanian, his desire to "escape" is just as representative for the phenomenon of "severance" as any other example. The fact that we could arbitrarily change the elements of the equation (e.g., imagine that he was born in Russia, for instance) underlines the validity and the universality of the phenomenon. The question whether it is more a trend in one nation than another remains to be debated. For now,

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<sup>77</sup> Călinescu, Matei. "Preface." Pană, Sașa. *Antologia literaturii române de avangardă*. București: Editura pentru literatură, 1969: 20. (my translation)

what we need to note is its very existence and its importance as a motivating factor for the artistic act.

### **Closing Thoughts: Tzara - an Ideal Case of Severance?**

What can be said, in conclusion, about the legacy of one of the twentieth century's most innovative and celebrated artists? More importantly for us, where does this particular case fit in the general outline of the phenomenon of "severance?" The answer to the latter question naturally follows the answer to the first. We can understand severance if we can understand Tzara, for Tzara was severance. His creational process was based on the very phenomenon, initially when he detached himself from the Romanian cultural legacy, and later on when he tried to avoid any convention likely to "entrap" him in a conformist existence. The poet's tireless yearning for the novel, for the different, (which amounts to a desire to evolve, to constantly refresh his worldview) is described by Jack Lindsay as follows:

(Tzara) turned always into the world of bitter and often desperate change, mortally entangled with it, yet at the same time grasping the otherworld of poetry, the immediate satisfaction and the paradisiac core.

(Lindsay, 216)



This perpetual change, which can also be seen as an endless succession of severances, represents in a nutshell the essence of the dada spirit. It is also the main legacy of the artist, not only in the form of his texts, but also as a lesson in poetry. In academic terms, it materialized mainly in "the sabotaging" of literature (as an institution) and the rejection of any system. But we must not forget that the ultimate goal envisaged by Tzara was the merging of poetry with reality, the fusion of the social with the aesthetic, and that in his case the severance was one of the main driving forces of his artistic inspiration.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the extent to which his art influenced modern society. It is easier, however, to establish the fact that the reverse was true: many experts will agree that Tzara was an emblematic product of his world. Richard Huelsenbeck labeled him as "[...] nothing but the product of a dehumanized and depersonalized era."<sup>78</sup> Elmer Peterson's synopsis of the Dada phenomenon revolves around the same idea:

Dada has far greater significance than Tzara admits, for it is a symptom of a nineteenth- and

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, in *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 104.

twentieth- century *crise de conscience*. Dada is a consequence of a gradual dissolution of values in the Western World which reached a point of crisis in the second decade of this century.

(Peterson, 189)

What we have here is a paradoxical situation where we see confirmed both Tzara's aspiration to become a herald of the modern society, and at the same time the influence (and importance) of his retrograde background. Yes, he succeeded in synthesizing "the Western World's *crise de conscience*" like few others but this was mostly due to his "lack of creative inhibitions," as Huelsenbeck noted.<sup>79</sup> His evaluation of Tzara supports the validity of this apparently impossible paradigm: there had to be a "savage" outside the influence of Western moral values to have the insolence to destruct them as radically as he did, but *in a poetic gesture carrying on the literary history of the West*.

Tzara was a barbarian of the highest mental and esthetic level, a genius without scruples. Dada would have never survived without his lack of qualms. No matter how one may judge it.

(Huelsenbeck, 103)

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<sup>79</sup> Idem, 103.

The poet's merit in the development of the movement does not, however, end with his destructive attitude reinforced by his "lack of qualms." Tzara's assiduous efforts to popularize the Zürich group's activities and - more importantly - to elaborate the ideological framework behind them is arguably his greatest contribution to the literary world. Many works referring to the history of the movement acknowledge the poet's key role in its advancement (e.g., see Buot, Hugnet, or Verkauf); one the best articulations of this argument is offered by Michel Sanouillet:

[...] sans minimiser les qualités individuelles des autres protagonistes, on doit convenir que c'est à l'action collective, incessamment prônée et organisée par Tzara, que Dada dut de pouvoir se définir empiriquement et de ne point s'enliser dans l'ornière qui l'eût fatalement conduit à n'être qu'une nouvelle école littéraire.

(Sanouillet, 20)

One might claim that developing such an ideological framework amounts to merely substituting one system with another, but we must remember that the objective of Tzara's experiments was to situate the artistic act outside any conventional structure. Yes, there may be a certain system underlying his philosophy, but this is an "anti-philosophy"

supporting in a way the idea of a "non-system" in art. This is perhaps one of the best arguments allowing us to reconcile the assertions that he facilitated the apparition of a "movement" (which would amount to complying with a set of rules) with his adamant refusal of such a classification for the followers of his ideas. His actions may all have been guided by a certain method, but the goal of this method was to constantly refresh his modalities of expression. Tzara's perpetual "evasion" reflects his wish to uphold the authenticity of his literary undertakings.

At any rate, beyond the evaluations of his colleagues, friends, and critics, the most important testimonial concerning the real meaning of the dada concept and its personal implications is the poet's own:

Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est la poésie... Si je ne prends pas l'engagement de ne plus écrire, c'est d'abord parce que je ne suis pas sûr de moi, et ensuite parce que toute méthode poussée jusqu'à ses extrêmes conséquences me paraît une restriction de l'individu, restriction qui n'est autre que la formule même de la littérature ... *Dada a été une aventure purement personnelle, la matérialisation de mon dégoût.*

("Tristan Tzara va cultiver ses vices," in *Journal du Peuple*, April 14, 1923. Quoted in *Dada à Paris*, 378, emphasis mine)

This is perhaps the most important statement bringing together the idea of "severance" and its reflections in the literary world. As we have seen, Tzara's *dégoût* was for the most part generated by his resentment toward his intellectual origins, which turned him - albeit only temporarily - into an outcast of the society whose member he aspired to be. His efforts to overcome this impasse, by negating everything about his cultural past, were to be transposed into the principles of one of the twentieth century's most celebrated artistic movements. And while obviously Dada and its theories cannot be limited to Tzara's creations, his impact upon both its genesis and popularity were crucial. It was important enough, I believe, to grant the assertion that Dada is a prime example of the situation where the severance is channeled towards positive ends, becoming a major source of artistic inspiration. Another aspect making Tzara's case of "severance" a "privileged" example is the transformation of the artist's personality from an entity limited to the confines of a single (and marginal) culture into a truly cosmopolitan spirit. Tzara's career is a demonstration not only of severance's benefits, but also of its *necessity* for the artist's spiritual growth.

## Gregor Von Rezzori and the Doctrine of the Parallax

*Exile accepted as a destiny, in the way we accept an incurable illness, should help us see through our self-dellusions.*

Czeslaw Milosz

### **An Interchange of Cultures**

Direct access to reality. That wasn't such a good idea. Romania is a surrealist country. It's no coincidence that such prominent Church Fathers of Surrealism as Tristan Tzara and Eugène Ionesco were born there.<sup>80</sup>

The author of the above statement, Gregor von Rezzori, is fully entitled to his conclusion: he shares with his colleague not only the setting of his childhood, but also a similar intellectual evolution. However, the study of von Rezzori's texts can offer us more than just a repetition (and hence also a confirmation) of Tzara's ideas. The Austrian-born writer will elaborate on personal experiences very similar to the ones recounted in the previous chapter; yet naturally his literary undertakings use a different style, focus on different issues, and have different

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<sup>80</sup> Rezzori, Gregor von. *Anectodage (A Summation)*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996: 48.

intentionalities. We will thus find in his works not only a number of ideas assignable to a tradition founded by Tzara, but also several original annotations.

The first chapter revealed the correlation between exile and the personality of a poet whose nature drew the experience of displacement near its ideal, theoretical form, Tzara being an archetypal artist in an absolute exile. In Rezzori's case, the author tends to transform his persona (much more than his predecessor) into an object of his creations, rather than their cause. His predisposition for self-analysis entails commentaries with psychological, social, and political connotations, the association of each of these topics with the author's exile status contributing towards the crystallization of a panoramic depiction of "displacement" and its literary reflections. The Central Europe emerging from his writings (and particularly Austria-Hungary, one of the reference points in his cultural journey) allow the development of a very original worldview regarding several notable contemporary issues. Rezzori's testimonials, with their detailed and sharp analysis, prove observations such as Adam Wandruszka's - that "the dying Empire reflected, indeed anticipated, the problems, cultural and political, concerning the twentieth-

century man.”<sup>81</sup> And these testimonials do not merely highlight these problems - they also offer possible solutions.

The novelist’s critical eye is met with an aspiration for objectivity in a spirit influenced by both his unique style and his upbringing. He chooses to acknowledge both of these as predominantly Romanian (an important detail to be discussed shortly), reminiscing (often fondly) about “My Romanian homeland,”<sup>82</sup> the country where he “had suckled the milk of that soil, with all its light and dark powers.”<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, his memoirs are dominated by a philosophy which is best described by the author himself:

As you'll have realized I'm a dyed-in-the-wool cynic (my only line of defense against a cynical world). My attitude with regard to the conditions in this world is Romanian: I believe in nothing (which means: in everything).

(Rezzori, *Anecdote*, 114)

This incorrigible cynic will eagerly point out the shortcomings of every social context he will cross - and in particular those of his Romanian peers. Much like in

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<sup>81</sup> Wandruszka, XX.

<sup>82</sup> Rezzori, *Anecdote*: 139.

<sup>83</sup> Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*: 7.



Tzara's case, Rezzori's spirit will refuse any potential assimilation, striving to rise above the limitations of any national structure in a realm of universal values and objectivity, attempting to analyze with detachment a number of (often antagonistic) cultures from the "vantage point" reached at the end of his spiritual quest. The novelist arrived early in his life to the conclusion that cultural dissonances were the product of a parallax effect caused by the diversity of the contexts (and implicitly, of the perspectives) from which different people were contemplating the same matter. Furthermore, and in a natural progression, he also learned to acknowledge the formative powers of every social convention as well as how to avoid them, never letting himself become regimented by external influences, be they parents, lovers, or comrades. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of von Rezzori's (self) analyses is his permanent awareness about the relative merit of any cultural value - as illustrated by the abovementioned parallax effect. One of the author's main credos was that many of a community's standards - such as a nation's way of life - had little value in absolute terms. For him, the only constant and viable principle when it came to dealing with differences in identity and beliefs was the recognition of the "other":

But then, what difference does it make who is what? We are not simply and resolutely one thing or the other. Not in this dynamic time. Sometimes, a man is both and yet neither, a blend of nothing and everything. People like us, for instance - writers, among others, literary agents coping with different realities. A refugee's fate. An émigré's destiny. We lost our true fatherlands and then forgot them among the lotus eaters. Or elsewhere, while passing through, you see, passing through history, through our personal neuroses.

(Rezzori, *The Death of my Brother Abel*, 16, emphasis mine)

But this attitude was the outcome of a learning process as fascinating as it was long; let us follow its main stages.

### **A Different Kind of Nation**

The environment of von Rezzori's childhood was a very complex one. The members of his family, while of a very diverse lineage, considered themselves (at least initially) to be Austrians. However, the territory where they lived was a prime example of the proverbial "melting pot," where several populations coexisted in a milieu loosely identifiable as "Romanian." Consequently, Austria and Romania will become two cultural poles defining the axis around which the future novelist's identity will revolve.

The conflict among these poles is described in the following fragment (interestingly, the situation observed almost a century ago is still recognizable today):

The remote spot in the eastern borderland of the former Habsburg - and hence ancient Roman-Empire [...] was located at a meeting point (or chafing point, if you will) between two civilizations. One, the Western, had not endured long enough to bless the land and people with more than an infrastructure (as it would be called today) geared to technological colonization; it had then promptly girded itself to destroy what little there was of the indigenous culture. The other, likewise at the defenseless mercy of the steppe winds from the east, opposed the Western in the spirit of a fatalistic resignation to destiny; but along with that it had, alas, a propensity for letting things go, run to seed, degenerate into slovenliness.

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 10)

To further complicate matters, the state where our writer was born was intrinsically fragmented, both politically and ethnically. One of the best descriptions of this fragmentation can be found in the works of Oszkar Jàszzi:

In this vast empire, which concentrated more than fifty-one million inhabitants in an area of two hundred and sixty thousand square miles, were almost

ten nations and twenty more or less divergent nationalities in political or moral bonds. These constituted two distinct states (Austria and Hungary), seventeen provinces or crownlands in Austria, an "associated country" with Hungary (Croatia-Slavonia), a "separate body"- (city and harbor of Fiume) annexed to Hungary, and a province of colonial nature (Bosnia-Herzegovina) - all of them with distinct historical consciousness and more or less extended territorial autonomy.

Jászai, Oskar. *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929.

Obviously, as Anatol Murad remarks, one could not speak of an "Austrian nation" per se, because unlike most "nation-states," the population of the Habsburg Empire was not composed of one single, or at least predominant, national group. It was made up of many different nationalities instead, none being preponderant.<sup>84</sup>

The extreme ethnic diversity of the Empire's territories is probably best illustrated by the author himself in a passage recounting the atmosphere of his

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<sup>84</sup> Murad, Anatol: *Franz Joseph I of Austria and His Empire*. New York: Twaine, 1968: 11.

hometown (Czernowicz),<sup>85</sup> with its intricate web of intercultural relationships - an atmosphere representative for the life in many Austrian territories. Arguably, growing up in such a diverse environment, where the presence of the "other" was the norm rather than the exception, was the main factor laying the ground for the development of Rezzori's broadminded personality later on:

The Romanians [...] remained largely isolated from those who spoke other languages [...]. The so-called Bukovina Swabians—settlers who had established themselves in the region in the times of Emperor Joseph the Second—segregated themselves in a flag-waving Greater Germany clannishness, casting nostalgic sidelong glances at Bismarck's Second Reich. The Ruthenians refused to have any thing to do with either former Austrians, who they felt had treated them as second-degree citizens, or the Romanians, who cold-shouldered them in return. Poles, Russians and Armenians had always congregated in small splinter groups and now more than ever kept to themselves. All of these despised the Jews notwithstanding that Jews not only played an economically decisive role but, in

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<sup>85</sup> Chernivtsi (Чернівці), Romanian: Cernăuți, German: Czernowitz, Polish: Czerniowce, Hungarian: Csernovic, Yiddish: Chernovits, Russian: Черновцы, Chernovtsy. A city in Northern Bukovina. Since 1991, it is has been part of Ukraine. It was the site of the first Yiddish language conference.

cultural matters, were the group who nurtured traditional values as well as newly developing ones.

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 65-66)

It would be probably useful to briefly scrutinize how this diverse society was able to function, such an analysis allowing us to understand better the elements contributing to the shaping of Rezzori's personality and the historical circumstances of the world in which he grew up. Moreover, it will facilitate our perception of the author's importance in the domain of contemporary cultural studies. The social, political, and cultural issues discernible in his unique portrayal of Austria-Hungary foreshadow a number of contemporary issues such as cultural identity, nationalism, or "altermondisme,"<sup>86</sup> some of which we will review later on.

Despite its very appellation, it is easy nowadays to overlook the "imperial" quality (as in: colonial establishment) of the state ruled by Franz Joseph, mostly

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<sup>86</sup> Various aspects of globalization are seen as harmful by public-interest activists. This movement has no unified name, "Anti-globalization" being the media's preferred term. Activists themselves, for example Noam Chomsky, have said that this name is meaningless as the movement's aim is to globalize justice. Indeed, "the global justice movement" is a common name. Many activists also unite under the slogan "another world is possible", which has given rise to names such as *altermondisme* in French.

because the archetypal image of the term is largely associated with the British, Spanish, and French models: a European metropolis ruling over an assortment of colonies literally situated over the seas. But in actual fact the administration of the Dual Monarchy functioned on similar principles, the only difference being that both the metropolis and its dependent territories were located on the same continent - as Gregor Rezzori's description attests: "The Austrian monarchy in those days stretched all the way to the southeastern corners of Europe: a colonial empire whose colonies happened to be located contiguously on the same continent."<sup>87</sup> However, at the time of his birth, the state was only a mere vestige of a past world order and was disintegrating fast, due to what Oszkar Jàszi called "the centrifugal forces."<sup>88</sup> In order to counteract these forces the Emperor strived to consolidate his territories

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<sup>87</sup> And the examples could continue almost indefinitely. Just to mention another notable opinion, Adam Mickiewicz described Austria as "a society modelled on the pattern of the English East Indian Company." (Mickiewicz, quoted in Jaszi, 8).

<sup>88</sup> Some of the most important of these "centrifugal forces" identified by Jàszi were feudalism and the nationalism of the subjugated populations. They were "centrifugal" in that they stimulated the dissolution of the social order as opposed to the "centripetal forces" (e.g., the Army, the Church) which helped it to remain in a state of equilibrium. (Cf. Jàszi, 215-366).

in a single, politically homogenous landmass (illustratively, the very slogan chosen for the state was "*indivisibiliter ac inseparabiliter*").<sup>89</sup> This plan failed to materialize for a number of reasons, analyzed in detail by Jàszsi and others,<sup>90</sup> but arguably the most important factor

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<sup>89</sup> As Jàszsi noted, "In this vast empire there was going on, during more than four hundred years, an effort to keep together this variegated mosaic of nations and people and to build up a kind of universal state, a "supranational" monarchy, and to fill it with the feeling of a common solidarity" (Jàszsi, 3).

<sup>90</sup> From Jàszsi, 1929: "It cannot be sufficiently emphasized, however, that in no important issue of the monarchy were there wanting men who predicted with an amazing insight the consequences of a policy motivated by a criminal light-mindedness. That was the case in face of the absolutism of Metternich. The same was now true in regard to the neo-absolutism of Francis Joseph. I could quote, if space would allow me, a long series of eminent men who understood that this centralization, based on the imperial bayonets, must lead to collapse and only a system of a well-balanced federalism which would satisfy the national aspirations of the various peoples of the monarchy could maintain the state. But federalism without local government is an empty word. It is perfectly clear that the system of absolutism was entirely incapable of solving the problem of the monarchy. It was even unfit half a century before in the hands of such a genius as Joseph II, who at least knew what he wished to accomplish and who tried to remold the empire on the basis of a vast and logical (though an essentially erroneous) scheme. But how much more was the system of Francis Joseph, which tried to apply the old methods of his ancestor without any true conception, without any ethical ardor, sentenced to a fiasco in a period when even the most modest popular fragment of his monarchy reached the totality of national consciousness." (Jàszsi, 103) See also Kann 1977, Murad 1968, Wandruszka 1977, and Pauley 1977.



was that "the Austrian system was entirely incapable of establishing any kind of a *popular* state consciousness." (Jászai, 447, emphasis mine) In other words, the government was unable to reconcile the spirit of national identity of the various populations under its rule with the unconditional allegiance to the Imperial House demanded from them in order to preserve the integrity of the state. Franz Joseph tried to address this issue with sustained and sincere efforts, rewarded with moderate success. However, they were eventually annihilated by the discrepancy between his aims and the methods used in their implementation: he was trying to rule with antiquated methods populations growingly aspiring towards a modern way of life. This is how Bruce Pauley describes Austria-Hungary during the last years of its existence:

The dual state of Austria-Hungary was a late nineteenth-century museum piece. After 1871 it was one of the only three major European states (along with Russia and the Ottoman Empire) not organized on a national basis. The Habsburg Monarchy, or simply Austria, as it was frequently but inaccurately called, *bore a striking resemblance to a medieval feudal state*. A loose confederation of territories varying in size, national composition, and history, the principal tie of its components was a common allegiance to a

single monarch. To a rigorously logical mind, the Dual Monarchy was an absurd *anachronism*.

(Pauley 1, emphasis mine)

These key concepts, *anachronism* and *feudalism*, were highlighted by a number of scholars,<sup>91</sup> and there seems to be a general consensus about the fact that the only element keeping the Empire's "ethnic assortment" together was the monarchism.<sup>92</sup> Again, let us refer to Jàszì for a description of the phenomenon; of particular interest here are the details referring to the Imperial Army:

It is highly characteristic that the traditional oath taken by the soldier was purely and simply an oath of *vassalage toward the Emperor* and his official officer staff, *without a single word of any duty of the soldier toward his fatherland, people, or constitution.* [...]

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<sup>91</sup> See Jàszì, 435, and Wandruszka, XVII-XVIII.

<sup>92</sup> Rezzori remarks, as a corollary to the ethnic diversity described above, that the society still managed to maintained its unity/functionality because "[...] in the end it was all the same. It made no difference whatsoever which of the many nations of this imperium these lords belonged to with their little flags and their liegemen and serfs; it made no difference what language they spoke or what costume they wore. For they were all vassals and subjects of the Emperor and the Empire." (Rezzori, Gregor von. *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*. New York: Vintage, 1991: 200).

It created *not a state consciousness but a professional consciousness* for the imperial service. Therefore, any progress in national and cultural development of the various peoples lessened this professional solidarity and strengthened the national, strictly opposed to the imperialistic super-state.

(Jàszi, 437, emphasis mine)

The initial effectiveness of this monarchic rule was due to the fact that the entire system was held in place by the sacred, ubiquitous image of the sovereign. Pauley remarks that "Monarchism was a *principle easily understood by even the most simple-minded peasant. It avoided the abstract nature of nationalism* by demanding loyalty, not to a people, but merely to a single person."<sup>93</sup> The concept had its benefits, in that it obscured the differences between majorities and minorities; the only thing required from any individual was unconditional loyalty to the Emperor.<sup>94</sup> As such, "in nineteenth-century Austria the principle was neither exclusive nor totalitarian, making no demands for

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<sup>93</sup> Pauley, 22, emphasis mine.

<sup>94</sup> Franz I is credited with the famous remark when someone was referred to as an Austrian patriot: "Is he a patriot for me?" (Murad, 16)

religious, linguistic, or social uniformity.”<sup>95</sup> This detail is particularly important for our study: as we will see in Rezzori’s case, the principle proved to be such a strong factor in his father’s frame of mind that he let his attachment to monarchism completely alter his life.

As far as the Austrian society (and obviously, the author under scrutiny here) is concerned, I believe that Pauley’s theory offers a very plausible explanation for the system’s failure, a failure which will greatly affect Rezzori’s life. Monarchism was the factor that eventually precipitated the Empire’s downfall: as the large masses were (even if belatedly) exposed to the principles of the Enlightenment, the idea of “divine rule” started to be questioned. The Empire’s decay was gradual and steady, starting at least as early as the nineteenth century,<sup>96</sup> and Franz Joseph’s death in 1916 was the factual ratification of an already accomplished process: the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Once the last icon of the old regime, the Emperor himself, disappeared, there was no other force capable of holding the system together. The “centrifugal

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<sup>95</sup> Murad, 16.

<sup>96</sup> E.g., Jászai quotes predictions about the Empire’s dissolution dating from 1813.

forces" latent in the defunct Empire's society took full advantage of the opportunity. The nationalist currents set off to accomplish their long-awaited objectives, dismembering the territory into several smaller states, founded by the ethnonations<sup>97</sup> previously under Habsburg rule. These events, however, left the "real Austrians" (German ethnics) living in these territories - such as our author's family - in very delicate positions. This socio-political context and the subsequent turn of events contributed greatly to the shaping of Rezzori's intellect.

### **Cultural Identity as a Matter of Choice**

The major alteration of Europe's boundaries presented in the previous section gravely disturbed all the

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<sup>97</sup> Ethnonations, [...] have also been described as 'nations without a state', or variants of the same ('stateless nations' 'smaller nations'), by such writers as Hroch (1985, 1998), Keating (1996, 1997), Conversi (1997), McCrone (1998), and Guibernau (1999). It is clear that few, if any, of these groups would describe themselves as ethnic groups or its equivalent in their languages. This is partly because ethnic groups have come to be associated with 'minority status' and 'outsider [migrant] status' (see also below), both of which are utterly inconsistent with the primarily political claims that the ethnonations wish to make (cf. Kymlicka, 1995). Their claim, rather, is that of an ethnie, a people with a historical claim to be a descent and culture community lodged in a territory which is 'home', but it is of an ethnie which does not accept the legitimacy of the state within which it is enmeshed. (Fenton, 9).

populations living in the former Austrian territories, but probably the former Austrians living on their properties situated in these former "colonies" - such as von Rezzori's family - were affected the most.

After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Bukovina became part of Romania. While in Austrian times its linguistically and sartorially kaleidoscopic mixture of people had given an attractive touch of color to the placid and mannered everyday life of a flourishing crown land, the opposite now occurred: a thin foil of civilization appeared to have been superimposed on an untidily assorted ethnic conglomerate from which it could be peeled off all too readily. Neither my father nor my mother belonged to the indigenous population. *Each in his or her own way lived in a kind of exile: they had both ended up in a colony deserted by its colonial masters.* Hardly anything remained of the former social world they had inhabited—however confined and provincial it must have been here under the double-headed eagle [...]

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 65, emphasis mine)

The redrawing of Austria-Hungary's borders after the Great War cut violently through the assortment of factors piecing together the national identities of the former imperial subjects in Central Europe. The reconciliation of

the new political status quo with the norms of the old social order became a dilemma for those who had to choose which element was to prevail in defining a new self - e.g., religion over language, social status over ethnicity. Often, the decisive factor was reduced to one's free will, but the inherent irrationality of such a resolution compelled the individuals analyzing themselves objectively to acknowledge the fallacy of their option. Consequently, many of them experienced - to use Rezzori's own expression - a "deprivation of existential legitimacy."<sup>98</sup>

But in the end they had to make a choice and this choice was motivated by the way in which they were preconditioned by their social milieu, which is also to say, by their cultural background. It can be probably said about Gregor von Rezzori that he is the upholder of such a great number of traditions that in his case the very meaning of the concept is annihilated by their diversity. Indeed, his composite upbringing was one of the most important factors determining his spiritual evolution. As Larry Nucci notes, "whether we are born male or female, tsar or serf will affect our reading of the moral meaning of situations. Within different social categories and

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<sup>98</sup> Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 49

public roles we also operate as individuals. We are capable of independently assessing the moral meaning of practices and social events.”<sup>99</sup> Consequently, our own individual biases, opinions, and interests alter our orientation toward the morality of social situations just as our belonging to a given community acts as an external force shaping our view of things. The way in which we read the essence of a given situation’s moral elements is influenced by who we are as individuals and not simply by our position in relation to the social system.<sup>100</sup> In other words, our “nature by birth” (or better said, our early childhood education) will decisively shape our worldview in the future, in addition (and independently from!) the influence of our later social status, which may change.<sup>101</sup> The main consequence of these remarks bearing an interest for our study is the fact that Rezzori will develop an attitude towards morality which will allow him to adapt to each situation he will encounter - and at least one of these

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<sup>99</sup> Nucci, Larry. “Reflections on the Moral Self Construct.” *Moral Development, Self, and Identity*. Lapsley, Daniel K. and Narvaez, Darcia, editors. Mahwah: Erlbaum, 2004: 111-132.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Nucci, op. cit.

<sup>101</sup> Rezzori offers a very informative firsthand description of such a situation.



adaptations will involve a severance. This issue will be discussed in detail later, but for now let us analyze the nature of the author's unique, byzantine (pun intended) upbringing.

Rezorri's two main "inheritance lines," are illustrated by the characters around which he builds the chapters of the autobiographical novel "*The Snows of Yesteryear*:" the Eastern European one, represented by Cassandra<sup>102</sup> (his nurse) and the German-Austrian one, represented by Bunchy<sup>103</sup> (his governess) and his father. To put it briefly, it is probably safe to say that von Rezzori generally saw himself as a Romanian of German extraction and education - albeit to be sure, no single definition would adequately fit his complex personality. Perhaps it is

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<sup>102</sup> In all fairness, Cassandra's ethnicity was uncertain. "We never were able to determine her nationality with any degree of certainty. Most probably she was a Huzule - that is, a daughter of that Ruthenian - speaking tribe of mountain Gorals, who, it is said, are the purest-bred descendants of the Dacians who fled before the Roman invaders into the impenetrable fastness of their forests. Yet Cassandra just as well could have been a Romanian - that is, a product of all those innumerable populations who coursed through my country during the dark centuries of the decaying Roman dominion." (*The Snows of Yesteryear*, 43) However, on account of my personal experience with very similar characters, I will associate her with the Romanian culture - even if she were Ruthenian, the differences would be in effect negligible in this instance.

<sup>103</sup> Bunchy (or Miss Strauss, by her real name) was from Pomerania.

best to refer to his own words to describe the dual nature of his intellectual heritage:

[...] highly civilized Old Austrian skepticism, its loathing of exuberance and impetuosity, the love of tradition and the respectful loyalty to the state - [I] devoured all this as thoroughly as it had the other elements that were in [Uncle Hubert's] blood, as it were, derived from the land where he had been born and bred: Balkan cunning and its all-defusing sense of humor, Oriental mellowness and its phlegm.

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 16-17)

As already mentioned, this "duality" will govern the entire process of his intellectual formation. Interestingly, the crucial moment in his childhood marking his "awakening to the world" is generated by displacement.

[The Austrian countryside] is more enticing and gives much more evidence of the human imprint than the Carpathian land that remains my true home; nevertheless, this Austrian landscape is an intimately familiar part of myself. For my mother, the church and the tiny village nearby were merely admonitory markers of our bitter existence as refugees, but for me they signal my awakening to the world.

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 12)

Also related to the ideas of displacement and shift between cultures is a detail of crucial importance for our

study: the young Gregor experiences a weaning when his wet nurse (Cassandra) is replaced by a governess (Bunchy). Admittedly, this "weaning" was rather intellectual than physical given the author's age at the time, but he nevertheless stresses the particular aspect of "nursing" when referring to the relationship he had with the woman: "I felt all my life that, nursed by Cassandra, I had suckled the milk of that soil, with all its light and dark powers..."<sup>104</sup> As such, their separation fits seamlessly one of the meanings of "severance" discussed in the first chapter (sevrer). And indeed, this is a form of severance, even though slightly altered. The boy is forced to end the close relationship with "the primeval essence of our country embodied in one of its own chosen daughters"<sup>105</sup> and replace it with the strict supervision of Bunchy's "Bismarckian Germanness"<sup>106</sup> [sic]. The decision in this case is not made by the subject himself (and it shouldn't be expected from a child), but by his parents. Nevertheless, Cassandra's primitive influence is replaced with the advanced education tendered by Miss Strauss, and it is probably safe to say

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<sup>104</sup> Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 7.

<sup>105</sup> Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 22.

<sup>106</sup> *Idem*, 235.

that Rezzori lives through a first form of severance. Albeit involuntary, this "cultural upgrade" foreshadows the second separation from his roots, the one he will make voluntarily. At any rate, the novelist recalls the event vividly, and allots a significant space for its description, thus proving it to be an important factor in both his biography and the economy of the novel.

Not unexpectedly, the consequence of Rezzori's shift between two cultures is a twofold displacement. The most important (and natural) consequence of Rezzori's "hybrid heritage" is that while familiar with both cultures, he felt like an outsider in both of them:

I was lonesome in both places. In Vienna I was lonesome as a little boy who came from a now remote country of the Balkans and lived with old people and fools. At home, in the Bukovina, I was lonesome as the little snob with a foreign education who tried to avoid contact with others of his age.

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 203)

Interestingly, the frustration generated by the contact with his "truly" Western colleagues is very similar to Tzara's disappointment about his relationship with his Zurich comrades - and arguably, just like in the Dadaist's case, this experience will lay the ground for the future literary expressions of the young artist.

[...] for my Austrian schoolmates I was but a Balkanic gypsy from the remotest southeastern backwoods. The untainted Germanness extolled by Hauff and Schnorr von Carolsfeld was denied me forever

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 220)

But unlike his Surrealist colleague, he is not ready to give up on his ties with his native country just yet.

I knew my true roots were right here in this country which, notwithstanding its variegated historical fortunes and constantly changing national flags, official languages and custom tariffs, had imprinted on the medley of races that lived on its soil an unmistakable, undeniable stamp.

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 220)

He will acknowledge his ties to this "peculiar territory" in similar statements all through his life and in most of his works, with a remarkable consistency. However, the occasional fondness for the landscapes of his childhood memories will not prevent him from being at the same time one of the most astute critics of the country and its society - his book "Tales from Maghrebina" being the most eloquent example in this regard. The occasional pleas defending his bonds with Romania are not to be interpreted as a "claim of citizenship" but rather as proof that our author has learned over time to retain the best aspects of

its culture while keeping a safe distance from its confines. For cultural identity - as he himself acknowledges - can be reduced ultimately to a matter of choice, and it is never truly a stable entity.

### **Adopting and Rejecting a Culture...**

The first awakening of young Rezzori to the insubstantiality of the concept bearing the vague designation of "cultural identity" - and a lesson in relativity - was his father reaction to the political changes on the European scene after the Dual Monarchy's dissolution.

My father's monarchism has proven to be more enduring than his Austrian patriotism: he prefers the monarchy with a foreign language to the now exclusively German-speaking republic of the shrunken Austrian rump state, contrary to my mother, who feels like an exile cast out in an inferior culture, a world full of menacing forces, including climatic ones.

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 19)

In a similar manner, he will choose his own identities (quite a considerable number of them) for the rest of his life. And the first one he chose consciously and wholeheartedly was a Romanian one. Partly due to the circumstances, but also as a reaction against the self-importance and condescendence of the Western world's

representatives (mostly his Austrian colleagues and relatives, but notably also his father, who is one of the most remarkable among these figures), Gregor embraced the Eastern fractions of his diverse family tree "with the newfound pride in his Phanariot forebears" in an attempt to better assimilate himself into the country chosen by his father:

By tracing some rather remote lineage of my pedigree until it found root in Rumania, I was able to justify my newly discovered love for that country and my claim to belong there not merely as part of a former Austrian minority but by inheritance. Then I exchanged my first name, Arnulf, for the third of my Christian names, Gregor, which also happened to be the Christian name of some half-Greek, half-Russian ancestor originating in Bessarabia and beautifully outfitted with a Turkish wife.

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 222)

The young artist sets out to explore his new capital, Bucharest, with as much enthusiasm as fascination. "Intoxicated," he immersed himself in this novel "dimension of the world that had preciously been a fairyland" enjoying its atmosphere "swirling with life, color, adventure." (Rezzori, *Memoirs ...*, 73) He started "combing through the Mahalas" of Bucharest this exploration being for him

something of an exotic adventure. He peered with curiosity "into the lives of the other species," and progressively, the "pitiabile ugliness," the "wretchedness," and "brutality" governing the life of this species lost its repulsiveness in the eyes of the surveyor who began to understand that all these sordid features "had no value per se but achieved real significance only in counterpoint with the rest." The "sloppy conglomeration of Balkan disorder and faceless modernity" slowly took the shape of a complex, but nevertheless ordered picture. (Cf. Rezzori, *Memoirs*, 93, 152) This shift in Rezzori's perception of Bucharest's environment is also a good exemplification of the "parallax effect" discussed previously, and arguably one of the main instances contributing to the shaping of his way of thinking.

Just as importantly, this episode is a second instance in the writer's life where we can identify a form of severance: after the first, "forced" one, recounted above, when he shifted from the East (Cassandra's influence) towards the West (Bunchy's education), this time he experiences a "reverse severance," finding the Austrian society predestined by his parents to be a home unsuitable for his personality.



I disowned my parents, charged them with living in the past, with refusing to learn anything from the catastrophe of 1918, and I declared my independence from their notions of order and their values.

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 72)

Rezzori chose to live as an ordinary Romanian, instead as a member of the German speaking high society he left behind. (He cut his links with the family during this period: "What really cast me away here [in Bucharest] was defiance").<sup>107</sup> It is interesting to note that this severance occurs not only on an ethnic level, but also on a social one; we can distinguish each of these factors as a separate element contributing to his motivation. Gregor's revolt is addressed against the overconfidence of the members of an advanced culture (his Viennese colleagues) as well as against the arrogance of the upper social class (the majority of his family). In a way, living in Bucharest was for Rezzori a form of voluntary exile from all these elements conflicting with his beliefs and aspirations - a very good example of the intimate link between severance and exile, and how the former induces the latter.

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<sup>107</sup> Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 71.

Dwelling eagerly "in a future world of immeasurable promise that seemed to lie ahead of him," Rezzori began to feel truly at home among the people of the city, making friends, finding lovers. And for a while he lived under the illusion that he really belonged to this new environment - until an unfortunate incident brings him at stakes with some of his former friends. To his great surprise, he will discover that he was in reality a misfit in Bucharest, too; moreover, and ironically, his rejection was due to both of the elements from which he had just tried to detach himself a short while ago: the cultural and social sides of his personality:

These men, whom I had all liked, whom I had considered my friends, were standing around me as enemies. They had not just become hostile after my faux pas, which I regretted already. No: they had always been hostile to me; *they had never considered me as one of their own*, never taken me seriously. *I had always been fundamentally different for them, someone of a different race.* And they despised this different race to which I belonged, *and I probably repelled them all the more for trying to ingratiate myself by acting like one of them [...]*

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 135, emphasis mine)

This was arguably one of the most important moments in Rezzori's life; it is certainly extremely important for our inquiry. Tired of having to worry constantly about "fitting in" in one society or another,<sup>108</sup> he decided at that point not to worry about whether he truly belonged to the milieu in which he had to live. He did conform to the standards of the (numerous) environments he had to become a part of for the rest of his life, but never again did he attempt to secure a status of "legitimacy" among the peers fate brought around him. While with the objectivity characterizing him he continued to acknowledge all of the elements making up his cultural heritage, he imposed upon himself never to become "emotionally involved" with any culture.

Something must have happened to me. *Something basic in me had shifted, had broken and crumbled—and it was the ground under my feet.* No longer did I feel I belonged to a caste enjoying authority by dint of universal respect. Rather, it was a caste that blemished me, as though I were Jewish. And no matter what I did, *I could no more change my nature than a Jew could.* The most painful humiliation of all was how

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<sup>108</sup> There a number of social contexts to which Gregor had to adapt. E.g., there was the familial one ("provincial high society"), the Viennese one, and the "layman" society at home.

I had been rebuffed by the men I had tried to ingratiate myself with. *That would never happen again, I promised myself [...]*

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 136, emphasis mine)

This event is a paradigmatic illustration of the phenomenon of severance, and Rezzori's great merit is to offer us a firsthand testimonial, accounting for most of the details involved in the process. (Along the same lines, the entirety of his story provides us with the similar benefits of having a psychological development leading to severance narrated in detail by the subject himself). *This* is the most important instance of severance in the author's intellectual evolution, and also the one that fits the "generic" definition of the term. He had an emotional experience amounting to an epiphany: "Something basic in me had shifted, had broken and crumbled-and it was the ground under my feet." At the same time, he became (painfully) aware of the fact that he did not belong to the society he lived in, and at the same time identified the cause of his displacement: "And no matter what I did, I could no more change my nature [...]" Coincidentally these events took place at the time in his life when he was really striving to become independent, and in a historical conjuncture

where the European world was about to undergo profound changes, shortly before WWII. He left the environment where he found himself rejected, leading the rest of his life in a perpetual attempt to recover from the loss of "existential legitimacy:"

I am seeking the other half of my life. Like Aristophanes' lovers, I am seeking a lost part of my own self, the other half of an original dual. It went astray at some point or other [...]

(Rezzori, *The Death of my Brother Abel*, 19)

### **An Invented Self**

From a purely biographical point of view, Rezzori's life-story after this event can be described as a long succession of wanderings. He went back to Vienna "sporting a huge Phanariot mustache," but the war forced him to move all across Europe. The most important points of these tribulations were his stays in Germany and in Italy, the latter country also being the place where he finally settled. But this geographical enumeration reveals little about the writer's mindset. Unsurprisingly, after having gone through several rejections, he revolted not only against the societies that disappointed him, but virtually against any society - or, better said, against any social

conventions. Looking back on his life story, he acknowledges that "hatred has been his constant companion - smolthering hatred."<sup>109</sup> A hatred powerful enough to be named a hatred of humanity - as the author himself admits.

Very possibly this hatred of humanity can be attributed to the fact that the person expressing it felt that his existence had little in common with any of its constitutive elements. This is one of Rezorri's most relevant self-descriptions:

I am nothing. Not only stateless by citizenship, but rootless by blood, *déraciné par excellence*: truly without a fatherland or a father, a fellow who doesn't know who his procreator is, and whose mother deserted

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<sup>109</sup> "[...] hatred has been my constant companion. Smoldering hatred. Not brightly pure like that hate inflaming the young man in Bucharest leading his tattered old mother through the verminous crowd as though escorting a beautiful woman onto the dance floor. Good clear hatred belongs to the pathos of youth and a young man bursting with testosterone can afford it. The misanthropist's proud hatred of the riffraff who go on and on about how good how noble how gentle and pleasing in the sight of God how full of brotherly love they wish to be yet who don't stop killing torturing and harassing one another lying stealing and slandering. Hatred of the stupidity that believes in everything good beautiful and true while participating in every kind of wickedness hatred of the base subservience that over and over grits its teeth and bows its head to power hatred of greed envy falseness and everything else that runs counter to the beautiful good and true that everyone believes in [...]" Rezzori, Gregor von. *The Death of my Brother Abel*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1985: 91.

and betrayed her nation, a fellow who is neither here nor there, unbaptized, with no religion, suspiciously polyglot, devoid of any tie to any tribe, to any flag.. but of course in quest of all those things.

(Rezzori, *The Death of my Brother Abel*, 22)

Not unexpectedly, his severance and sensation of displacement will make him to refer to the Romanian nation not only from the position of an outsider, but also with a condescending attitude:

Romania has been a nation for barely a century and a half and never tasted freedom before. So Romanians are still in a state of political infancy and will have to work their way through all the various phases of development before reaching maturity;

(Rezzori, *Anecdote*, p. 72)

Along the same lines, the Romanians were described as "[...] a people that from the start had been trained to wear its yoke submissively and in which God forbid some rebellion might ferment."<sup>110</sup> For them, disorder is a way of life, and one of their essential traits is a "disarmingly innate genetically determined slovenliness."<sup>111</sup> This

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<sup>110</sup> Rezzori, *Anecdote*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> Rezzori, *Anecdote*, 107.

adversity is addressed even against his own self - namely, the young Rezzori who lived in Romania, who was "displaying a pure distillate of provincialism."<sup>112</sup> Declarations like these - and there are a great number of them spread along the pages of his novels - indicate a mindset strikingly reminiscent of Tzara's *dégoût*. "Les Balkans et la mentalité d'ici me dégoûtent profondément," "ce pays dur," "renforcé par les refoulements de mon enfance." We may ask ourselves how one can reconcile the harshness of some of Rezzori's statements about Romania with the concomitant declarations of allegiance and affectionate remarks addressed to the same country. An explanation addressing this apparent discrepancy is offered by Valentina Glajar: "Many reflective passages, however, are written from the perspective of the seventy-five-year-old Gregor, who looks back on history and his own story with the knowledge of a lifetime. Contradictions thus arise, because *the reader has to distinguish between the different narrative voices and perceive the irony involved.*"<sup>113</sup> The derogatory remarks belong to Rezzori just as much as the appreciative ones, the differences being attributable to the particular mood

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<sup>112</sup> Anecdote, p. 58.

<sup>113</sup> Glajar, 25, emphasis mine.



of the author *at the moment when they were expressed*. At any rate, the multitude of occurrences hinting at a latent form of *dégoût* in Rezzori's novels (not to speak of the flat-out disdain observable in *Tales of Maghrebina*) prove at the very least that his severance from the Romanian society was motivated by a myriad of details accumulated in his conscience over time. All in all, (and notwithstanding his genuine affection for his homeland) the lasting image of the country emerging from the writer's memoirs is one of a fascinating, but hopelessly outdated land. A world he had to leave behind.

### **Severance and Identity**

The ability to "do away with the old" associated with the idea of severance is arguably the main explanation for the fact that the character emerging from the literary self-portrayals of Gregor von Rezzori overcomes graciously the identity crisis caused by the re-drawing of Central Europe's boundaries. To put it very briefly, Rezzori re-discovered the old Augustinian adage that we are nothing but "pilgrims through time." His intellectual evolution started from a complex cultural background, whose elements the writer attempted to acknowledge objectively. However, (or rather consequently), he did not accept these elements indiscriminately, distancing himself from them by means of

impartial analysis. He became aware early in his life that he "... grew up with the *myth of a lost bygone world*, golden and miraculous."<sup>114</sup> (Emphasis mine). The subsequent lesson learned from this "awakening" was that the concept of "relativity" was becoming more and more important in the new world order; these experiences were to become arguably the fundamental factors making possible the adjustment of his inner self without unbearable consequences. Here is how he justified the differences between the personality of his sister and his own:

[...] the distance between my sister and me, a distance set by our difference in age, [...] became an unbridgeable one of principle, indeed of culture: we belonged to two different civilizations. She had been born before the general proletarianization of the postwar era, in a world that still believed itself to be whole, while I was the true son of an era of universal disintegration. The foundation of her good breeding lay in the self-assurance, however deceptive, of an imperium basking in glory and resting on a punctilious system of rules of comportment and behavior. In contrast, I grew up in the dubious shakiness of one of those successor states described, rather derogatorily, as the Balkans. That this would give me the advantage

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<sup>114</sup> Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, 16.

of a more robust psychic makeup, which greatly facilitated my adaptation to our changed circumstances, in due time received dramatic proof.

(Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear* 28)

He subsequently adapted to each of these circumstances with virtually no qualms with regard to the social order left behind (a learned skill, as we will see), preserving a perpetual status of "outside observer" vis-à-vis each of them. Consequently, he found himself cast off in an "interstice" between the discourses and practices of the societies he passed through, in close contact with all of them yet not fully integrated in any - the paradigmatic situation of the exile. One of the literary consequences of this status - and also the element linking it to the idea of severance - is the way in which writer points out the shortcomings of the Austrian society, its formal and overly pompous aspects, with the same critical eye as those of the Romanian spirit (wretchedness, slovenliness, brutality, are only a few adjectives that keep reoccurring in his memoirs). His twofold displacement (inherently linked with his severance from his roots) allowed him the unique and privileged position of an analyst intimately familiar with his subject matter, and yet sufficiently detached from it as to allow him its objective evaluation.

Usually the loss of national identity - as the one experienced by Rezzori's family as well as countless other Austrian subjects and described previously - leaves the individual in a state of cognitive dissonance, which often generates tragic consequences. By extension, a similar loss of identity and the ensuing cognitive dissonance is the reason behind many exile testimonials expressed in a tone of desolation. However, for the reasons presented above, our author was less affected by the changes forced upon his life by history. To be sure, von Rezzori was not very troubled (at least when contemplating his fate in retrospect) by the alteration of his identity, let alone its cultural variant. Not only did he construct a multitude of personalities for himself over time, but apparently he even enjoyed himself in the process.

After gaining a status of relative "cultural independence" as a consequence of his severance, he fully understood that "identity" was an abstract concept, and as such, he found its use pertinent mostly in its figurative manifestations - namely, as a pretext for the literary renditions of his ego. He repeatedly insisted that the self-references from his texts belonged as much, if not more, to the fictional realm as to reality. He

categorically (and repeatedly) warned his readers about this issue:

I am a fictional version of myself-but it is my public reality. I have three of them (to name only the most important).

They come from three language zones. I live in all three simultaneously in a multiple present. Each is heralded by one of my books. Not in the chronological sequence in which they were written but according to the advent of these works in each linguistic realm. Since they have to be translated they appeared in temporal leaps that do not correspond to my biography. At various junctures and with quite different books I made my mark in the German Italian and Anglo-Saxon literary industries and *each time showed the reading public a different face.*

Whether it is my true face is another matter. For even an old man like myself is still in evolution. Particularly in his writing.

(Rezzori, *Anecdote*, 227, emphasis mine)

The common element in each of these instances of "Rezzori's public versions" is obviously the fact that they are literary personas, each with a life and a justification of its own - loosely based on the same factual reference.

"The thing that made them all one and the same person was: dreaming. When he thought *I*, he felt as if

he were dreaming himself up: Somnio, ergo sum - I dream myself up, therefore I am."

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 250)

Naturally, and in keeping with his propensity for the allegorical, von Rezzori is at all times conscious about the fact that because the only true value of the characters / self-representations he creates belongs to the literary realm, their significance will change not only according to the "spur of the moment mood" with which he will look back upon his biography, but also according to the particular way in which each reader will perceive the respective variant of Gregor von Rezzori emerging from the text. His creations anticipate and illustrate the most modern scholarly studies concerned with the idea of "identity." For instance, in one of the most remarkable fragments where Rezzori sums up his life (and simultaneously his take on the concept of identity) he demonstrates that the numerous instances in which he summons up an image of himself are as many occurrences of distinct persons with different traits determined by the circumstances in which they lived. All that these persons have in common is their name and the fact that they can be convened by the same mind - the detached spirit of the author reminiscing about times past:

"it was not just one life which, these days, formed and would go on forming [...] , but a half dozen different lives, lived in different eras, in different countries, in different languages, among totally different people; his name had had a different ring, had been pronounced in different ways, his costume had changed with, his tailors and barbers, with the fashion of his environment, [...] he certainly looked different at sixty from what he had looked like at forty, at twenty, a man with totally different characteristics [...] through all this, he had unshakably said "I" to himself, he had never felt any doubt as to his identity. He raised his eyebrows ironically whenever he heard or read the phrase that someone was "seeking his identity" like some lost or never possessed object that was rightfully his [...]"

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite* 244, emphasis mine).

Rezzori's artistic take on the theme of identity is complemented and confirmed by many contemporary academic works addressing the same issue. The previous quote belonging to him (and the two others preceding it) is a literary articulation of virtually identical ideas postulated by many scholars, like for instance the assertion that "identity today becomes a freely chosen

game, a theatrical presentation of the self.”<sup>115</sup> The fact that “he had never felt any doubt as to his identity” even though his personality crystallized in many different forms corresponding to as many locations and points in time substantiates Stuart Hall’s vision about the nature of the concept in today’s world:

identities are in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions, *being therefore constituted within, not outside representation. They arise from the narrativization of the self but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity [...]*”

(Hall, 4, emphasis mine)<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Kellner, Douglas. “Popular Culture and Constructing Postmodern Identities” Lasch, Scott and Jonathan Friedman, eds. *Modernity and Identity*, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1992: 34.

<sup>116</sup> Hall also adds: “They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. [...] Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.”



Along the same lines, we can note the warnings addressed by Rezzori to his readers. The first informs them that they are dealing with a "public," "fictional version of himself"; the second states that this figure is likely to change - not only in function of the "language zone" (read: culture) to which he is supposed to belong, but also (and most importantly) because the author undergoes a perpetual evolutionary process. A "theoretical counterpart" of these statements can be found in Judith Butler's analyses:

"identifications belong to the imaginary, never being fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability."

(Butler, 105)

Finally, perhaps the main idea emerging from Rezzori's texts and arguably one of his most important legacies is the lesson he teaches us about the essentially ethereal nature of our character. Some people see this nature as a constant, immovable part of their being, but Rezzori knows better after the innumerable metamorphoses his persona had to go through, proving it to be "virtually experimental," "interchangeable," and "hypothetical." Again, his literary endeavors are supported by scholarly works, like for

instance Zygmunt Bauman's postulation that "Though all too often hypostasized as an attribute of a material entity, identity has the ontological status of a project and a postulate. To say 'postulated identity' is to say one word too many, as neither there is nor can there be any other identity but a postulated one."<sup>117</sup> Bauman adds that identity is essentially nothing more than a "projection" of a self whose image can vary in function of the external factors generating a reaction of the subject (what is demanded and/or sought upon what is). In addition, the given manifestation of the self can also be perceived differently by different observers.

It can thus be said that there are too many variables involved in the equation whose result is "identity" to allow an immovable definition thereof (even at a single point in time). Identity, by its very nature (as a postulated idea, rather than an immovable fact) can only be inadequate and/or incomplete. Rezzori is not only fully aware of all these issues - he even turns them into pivotal elements in the economy of his writings.

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<sup>117</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt: "From Pilgrim to Tourist - or a Short History of Identity." Hall, Stuart and Paul du Gay, editors: *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996: 18-36.

## **Severance and Morality**

There are a multitude of identities speaking through Rezzori's authorial voice, and in great part this multiplicity is ascribable to the fact that there were a number of severances in his life. But changing one's identity - and implicitly undergoing a severance - calls for a certain attitude concerning morality. To put it another way, the act of giving up on a system of values previously governing one's life has moral ramifications which need to be surpassed, if one is to find inner comfort. As Larry Nucci notes,

If instead of adopting a static moral identity, we remain open to the ways in which we attend to moral components of social life, then the possibility exists that we will be open to moral disequilibrium. In essence, we can be more or less open to moral self-improvement-not only in the sense of development but in the ways in which we frame the moral meaning of social events or relationships. When we change those ways in which we orient toward the social world, we change a part of who we are. The direction of change will generally be toward the moral.

(Nucci, 128-129)

But sometimes a "moral" choice is impossible. For instance, the identity crises experienced by the Austrians

after the fall of the Habsburg Empire were to a great extent attributable to their inability to overcome the moral impasse of having to repudiate some of the values previously governing their lives. Rezzori himself admitted that his protean personality occasionally brought him at stakes with his sense of ethics:

I experienced a moral death by suffocation. All my images banded together to strangle me. There was nothing to balance the scales against my dissolution crudeness ignominy fraudulence false pretense and deceitful promise. [sic]

(Rezzori, *Anecdote*, p. 236)

But in the end the writer managed to overcome this dilemma, learning to deem any social system (and implicitly its values) to be as good as the other.<sup>118</sup> In this regard he elaborated a philosophy similar to Foucault's take on the issues of ethics and morality.<sup>119</sup> For Foucault, the moral

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<sup>118</sup> Which, let us remember, is also a way of saying that none of them is truly valid in absolute terms.

<sup>119</sup> Ethical practices, for Foucault, were distinguished from the domain of morality, in that moral systems are, by and large, systems of injunction and interdiction - thou shalt do this or thou shalt not do that - and are most frequently articulated in relation to some relatively formalized code. Ethics, on the other hand, refers to the domain of practical advice as to how one should concern oneself with oneself, make oneself the subject of solicitude and attention, conduct

system (and the laws behind it) was nothing more than a possibility among many, a form of alterity represented by the restraints of the obsolete "world who saw itself as a whole." Embracing a new nationality did not amount to treason; it was merely the product of a "self-concern" allowing him to "most accurately assess the place one holds in the world and the system of requirements into which one is inserted."<sup>120</sup> ["... mesurer au plus juste la place qu'on occupe dans le monde et le système de nécessités dans lequel on est inséré."] The following "confession" provides us with three important pieces of information regarding this issue: first, that Rezzori consciously adopted such a behavior, second, that he accepts each of these "ad hoc" personalities as his own, and third, that he felt able to justify the actions of each of his former personalities:

All my images superimposed without causality:  
yesterday's identity not to blame for today's; today's  
not effacing yesterday's: each existing in its own  
right. Each one a skin. Taken together they are a  
single rounded entity: the onion that is me.

(Rezzori, *Anecdote* 236, emphasis mine)

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oneself in the world of one's everyday existence. (Cf. Nikolas Rose, in Hall, 128-150).

<sup>120</sup> Foucault, 518, my translation.

The fact that he was ready to take responsibility for each of these identities (and to account for the rationale behind their actions) did not exclude the awareness about their culpability in a certain social context. With his characteristic commitment to objectivity, he admitted that he may have been occasionally guilty of infringing one social convention or another. However, he overcame the impending remorse by realizing that keeping with the moral consistency associated with what could be called an "immovable character" would have amounted to ruling out the prospect for one's intellectual evolution.

The others believed in being strong characters, formed once and forever. Their identities (assuming they believed they had them) had, at best, grown over their faces like iron masks. He shed his own identity at will, studied it, put it away, put on another one, in which he studied himself again, as watchful as ever, always finding himself guilty in one way or other. His identities were forged not from the iron of a steadfast lifetime but from extremely light, virtually experimental and interchangeable materials, and they had not become second nature to him; although they were merely hypothetical, like molecular models scientists construct, he would find himself in each of them. Every one was undeniably I to him.

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 256)

Evolution is a term describing a dynamic process which implies - in fact, mandates - the movement of a subject from a given, old setting to a newer, better one. If the said "setting" (read: context) happens to be a culture, the subject undergoing the evolutionary process may need to renounce most of the elements of the environment to which he previously belonged - and by which he is preconditioned. This is where he will be confronted with a moral choice, and also the point where the concepts of severance and morality intersect. A subject heavily preconditioned by a cultural context will be entrapped by its set of norms, and unable to "make the switch," but this also amounts to saying that he is unable to evolve. His position with respect to his environment will be one of "loyalty" - or one of "indoctrination" - depending from which side of the system the definition is made (i.e., from the inside or from the outside). In this respect, Rezzori follows Tzara in his quest for a position of independence, situated above any social constraints - the ideal, desirable condition for an artist's spirit. The ideas of severance and morality are (to a greater or lesser extent) incompatible, but it would seem that at least in the case of these artists, the benefits of their intellectual growth have outweighed the nuisances ensuing from their moral culpability.

### **Socio-political Connotations**

There is another aspect about Rezzori's writings bearing a particular relevance in today's world. His attitude vis-à-vis identity (an attitude underlied by the experience of his severance) carries a message with significant socio-political connotations: any modern formulation of "national identity" should avoid relying on geo-political criteria in order to have a claim to viability, for, as Judith Squires notes,

Whereas the forces of globalisation would seem to require that citizenship becomes deterritorialised, the forces of nationalism would seem to require that it becomes reterritorialised. The nature of the relationship between nationalism and globalisation is of course extremely complex, but minimally one should note that, whilst they pose radically different challenges to traditional citizenship discourses, *they both work to undermine the fixity of the territorial boundaries in which citizenship might operate.*

(Squires, 232, emphasis mine)

The literary persona that von Rezzori managed to "dream up" solves this apparent logical impasse, contributing to the revelation of a modern 'identity' formula; this, I believe, might be the author's greatest legacy. It is also worth noting that the severance was one



of the main elements making possible the genesis of this persona. His upbringing allowed him, as we have seen, to have an intimate knowledge about the societies he came in contact with. But on the other hand his repeated, deliberate cultural shifts (caused by his feelings of estrangement, and thus intimately linked with the concept of severance) provided him with a freedom of perspective probably unattainable otherwise.

What exactly is the essence of Rezzori's legacy regarding a modern formula of identity? The assortment of factors enumerated above materialized in the literary realm in the form of his fictional portraits, whose characteristics foreshadow Lawrence Grossberg's proposition for an "alternative conceptualization of the self."<sup>121</sup> These conceptualizations are based on the idea of "belonging without identity, [...] related to *the project of constructing a form of knowledge that respects the other without absorbing it into the same* [...]"<sup>122</sup> A similar project is, I believe, one of Rezzori's main undertakings. For instance, his statement "We are not simply and

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<sup>121</sup> Grossberg's study seems to be at the forefront of the contemporary studies concerned with a formulation of "identity" fitting the complex socio-cultural contexts of the modern world.

<sup>122</sup> Grossberg, 103, emphasis mine.

resolutely one thing or the other. Not in this dynamic time. Sometimes, a man is both and yet neither, a blend of nothing and everything"<sup>123</sup> revolves around the notion of identity following a similar line of thought.

Rezzori's unique perception of the obscure force linking together the different snapshots of himself taken at various points in time offers us yet another memorable testimony: he ascertains the fact that due to the inherently elusive, ever-changing nature of one's spirit, it is practically impossible to pin down a singular, all-encompassing definition of "identity" - and correspondingly, neither of its domain-dependent variants (ethnic, social, etc.). Echoing his thoughts, I would like to reiterate, *in lieu* of a conclusion, a non-definition (or anti-definition) of "national identity" as formulated by Gerold Schmidt, which can be easily extrapolated to incorporate the concept of "identity" in its entirety: "National identity must be accounted one of those modern political catchwords that have little intellectual or rational meaning, but for that reason are all the more

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<sup>123</sup> Rezzori, Gregor von. *The Death of my Brother Abel*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1985: 16.

loaded with indeterminate emotional content.”<sup>124</sup> This is, I believe, a lesson worth remembering and the starting point from which any comparative study should begin.

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<sup>124</sup> Gerold Schmidt, quoted in Boerner, 187.

## The Imaginary Worlds of Vintilă Horia

Les roumains ont un penchant pour les spéculations ésotériques.

Sanda Stolojan

### **A Remarkable Way to Tackle an Unremarkable Exile**

The story of Vintilă Horia and the fate of his works constitutes a very interesting case where the consequences of the expatriation upon the psyche of an author led to a unique reaction on his part. Initially his exile was essentially true to the standard acceptance of the term. However, his personal intellectual evolution led him to an attitude towards expatriation which, while sharing most of its features with "regular" cases of exile, also contains elements of severance. The relationship between these elements distinguishes him to some extent from the two other authors under scrutiny here, but nevertheless, as we will see, his works can be included in Guillén's category of "counter-exile literature."

Vintilă Horia was born on December 18, 1915 in Segarcea, Romania and died on April 4, 1992, in Collado-Villalba, near Madrid. His education was outstanding (as was to become his erudition, later on); he completed his

studies in law, literature and philosophy at universities in Vienna and in Italy. His high professionalism attracted before long the government's attention and he became a member of the Romanian diplomatic corps, as a cultural attaché in Rome and Vienna. But beyond diplomacy, literature always remained his main personal interest. Inspired and encouraged by well-known right-wing thinkers, he started to make a name for himself on the Romanian cultural scene. He published a first volume, *Procesiuni*, in 1935 and - more importantly for his future - undertook a prolific journalistic activity in the periodical *Sfarmă Piatră* which he also edited. If his affinity for nationalism and the beliefs of certain reactionary currents (movements beginning to emerge at the time of his intellectual formation) is perhaps less flagrant (albeit clearly recognizable) in his literary texts, the articles he wrote as a publicist are much more relevant in this aspect. His declarative sympathy for political leaders like Hitler and Mussolini would come to haunt him for the rest of his life.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> In 1946 the Romanian government sentenced him *in absentia* for a long list of offenses. While not all of them were truly founded, a few were probably justified. Notable examples are the eulogy of Hitler and his régime in articles such as *The Moral Value of The Tripartite Pact*

The communist coup leading to the instauration of a Soviet-friendly government in the summer of 1944 had a profound influence upon the writer's future. Not only did he lose his position with the consulate in Vienna; the event marked for him the beginning of a long series of tribulations. He had to seek refuge in Italy, then in Argentina, and later on in France and in Spain.

Subsequently, the life of Vintilă Horia was for all intents and purposes a perpetual exile. His stays in Italy, Argentina, France, and Spain mark as many stages in the writer's spiritual evolution. And yet he never ceased to dream about returning to his native country. His texts naturally mirror his destiny, the theme of the exile taking up a privileged place in the economy of his works. He dedicated an entire *Trilogy* to the subject; the first volume, published in 1965 being *Dieu est né en exil (God Was Born in Exile, English version in 1961)*, followed by *Le chevalier de la resignation* (1961) and *Persécutez Boèce!* (1987)

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(in *Sfarma Piatra*, March 1941) and *The Acclamation of Courage (Sfarma Piatra*, February 1941) and his blatant anti-Semitism in articles like *Why Romania's Youth Was and Will Always Remain Anti-Semite (Sfarma Piatra*, April 1941). Quotes from Petcu, Adrian: "Vintilă Horia - un condamnat al 'justiției populare.'" Rost June 2004 [http://romfest.org/rost/iun2004/horia\\_condamnat.shtml](http://romfest.org/rost/iun2004/horia_condamnat.shtml).

In this initial phase Horia's story closely matches - as noted before - the common definition of exile. Case in point: he was forced to choose expatriation for fear of political persecution. There were millions of other exiles sharing the same destiny, i.e., fleeing a country where a communist system was about to be instated. In this respect his unexceptional status of political refugee would not grant the inclusion of his writings in this study. What is remarkable, however, is the way in which he reacted to the events governing his fate - and their reflection in his literary works.

In order to understand both the reason why Horia had to exile himself and his conduct during the course of the following years we must remember that he was strongly indoctrinated. The ideologies governing Vintilă Horia's mentality were largely the same as those of a group which, while sizeable, was only a minority of the general population.<sup>126</sup> Its nationalism, echoing the political

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<sup>126</sup> The political faction of the group was known as *The Legion of the Archangel Michael*, later renamed as the *Iron Guard*. The movement was fascist in nature and it emerged soon after the end of the Great War. It gained popularity until its demise at the end of WWII. Typically for an organization of its kind, its discourse stressed nationalism, anti-Semitism and violence, but it differed from fascism and Nazism in that it emphasized religious values, and in particular

discourse of Nazi Germany and Mussolini's fascist Italy, were only moderately successful with the Romanian public. As we will see, a sizeable segment of the country's *intelligentsia* dismissed the reactionary propaganda of this movement and the unrealistic theories underlying it. Horia, on the other hand, not only held the group's ideology in high esteem - he even continued to remain faithful (one might say, obsessively faithful) to its beliefs long after history had proven them wrong. It can be said, in certain aspects, that our author was already an outsider of sorts with regard to his society even at the time when he was still in the country. The following confession supports this idea; when speaking about his educational process, not only he remembers it as a pressure on the part of the society to "enlist" him, but he is actually proud of trying to resist it:

Je luttais désespérément contre une puissante alliance de volontés extérieures unies pour me combattre, pour m'obliger à rentrer dans les rangs, à lui ressembler. Je n'ai jamais cédée, tout en passant mes examens, à la limite du bien et du mal, j'ai

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Orthodoxism. All of these values are essential in the economy of Horia's novels.



toujours poursuivi dans ma voie, avec une ténacité qui, de loin, m'impressionne.

(Vintilă Horia, Journal d'un paysan du Danube, 156)

Paradoxically, the young rebellious spirit who valued his independence ended up completely engrossed in the ranks of a community that was even more retrograde than the rest of the society. The fact that he chose freely to support a particular group does not change the fact that he was indoctrinated; the only consequence of this choice was his inability to recognize (at least in the beginning) that he was separating himself from the majority of the nation.

There are several elements in Horia's status also identifiable in the life and works of the other authors discussed here, (and most other exile writers) supporting his inclusion in a group validating the idea of "severance." Here is what Alain Vuillemin had to say about him and several other exile writers:

Ces textes sont des aveux en effet. Ils sont plus des confessions déguisées pour autant que les personnages imaginés soient des reflets de leurs auteurs. Il n'est alors que de les lire et les déchiffrer dans cette perspective pour comprendre au moins en partie pourquoi *ces écrivains ont été prédéterminés à s'exiler*. Et, au risque de paraître se

livrer à des confrontations hasardeuses, cette démarche peut révéler par d'autres détours que ceux des études biographiques comment l'aventure d'un départ forcé, telle qu'elle a été subie par chacun, tend à se transformer dans ces romans en l'équivalent d'une espèce d'épreuve initiatique douloureuse, vécue comme une excommunication, une expiation et une mutilation.

(Vuillemin, 144, emphasis mine)

In Vintilă Horia's case, the most important factor relating him with the idea of severance is probably his position of an outcast due to his allegiance to the mystico-nationalist minority. Another common point is that he attempts to compensate for his loss by dedicating himself to literary activities. In the same way as Tzara, he channels his frustrations and sufferings towards artistic ends, using them as a stimulus in the creative process. The frustrated writer finds refuge in art, in the imaginary worlds of his texts, where he alone dictates the rules and has no authority to obey, as the following paragraph proves. It is worth noting that his disdain for social institutions is evident once again - in his view, the rules instated by people (and not dictated by a divine authority) being worthless.

Ce qui se trouve au fond de nous-mêmes participe au mouvement et constitue notre moteur secret et, aussi notre idéal, souvent peu clair, inavouable. Pour mieux le cacher nous nous fabriquons un masque, qui est le signe extérieur de notre fausse adhésion aux systèmes légaux. *Seul l'art nous permet de participer sans crainte au mouvement révolutionnaire, à notre propre mouvement condamné par les constitutions, les églises, les polices, les manuels etc. Plus nous aimons l'art, plus nous désirons secrètement nous libérer.* Car une œuvre d'art échappe aux sbires et au billot, nous permettant de vivre, en l'aimant, de plain pied avec notre propre moi.

(Vintilă Horia, Journal d'un paysan du Danube, 30, emphasis mine)

However, while he is not alone in the enterprise of building fictitious worlds as a means to escape the torments of exile, he stands out from the group of writers selected for this study in that his imaginary "reconstructions" of the missing territory have little in common with reality and/or his memories. Instead, his creations are utopian visions of a country that would fit Horia's ideals, a country which he would not have to leave. This very interesting mechanism deals with exile by making its cause disappear - even if, admittedly, only in the subject's imagination.

Another aspect in which Horia differs from the group of writers included in our analysis is the way in which the author perceives his relationship with the motherland. Tzara was conscious of his severance from his native country and most likely he was even proud of his evolution from an individual relegated by the confines of his (retrograde) society towards a protean personality enjoying the freedom and refinement of a cosmopolitan world. By contrast, Horia not only felt at all times that he still belonged to his country. The rejection of his peers led him to stray on the path of delusion, trying to convince himself that his utopian visions were in fact "closer to the spirit of the nation" than the factual reality of his homeland.<sup>127</sup> This is how he described himself in an interview towards the end of his life:

First of all, I am not a Romanian-born Spanish or French writer, but above all, a Romanian. Second, I see Romania the way it should be seen by a Romanian, always from the inside, from within the style preordained forever by the horizon in which he was born. [sic]

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<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, it is true (as we will see) that towards the end of his life he began to realize the awkward position in which he situated himself.

(Interview in *Romania Literară*, Sept. 1991, my translation)

Two details stand out in this declaration: first, that he considers himself to be an integral part of his country despite his displacement, and second, that he was unyielding in his belief that his vision was "genuine." This kind of attitude is identifiable to a greater or lesser extent in most of his writings, but arguably it is best illustrated in the novel which secured him the prestigious Goncourt Prize, as well as in the occasional comments related to the volume in which he tried to validate his ideology. (Other significant details pertaining to the ideas presented above are also to be found in later writings such as *Mai sus de miazănoapte*.<sup>128</sup>) Let us first elucidate a few details of Horia's most important novel and its relationship with the socio-political context, both at the time of its publication and at the present.

### **Literary Works and Political Disputes**

The Sixties were for the most part a decade driven by social movements and ideological disputes. It was the peak

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<sup>128</sup> Vintilă Horia, *Mai sus de miazănoapte*. Bucuresti: Cartea Românească, 1992.

of The Cold War, and the furious political debate between the Eastern and Western camps was leaving its marks on all of the aspects of their respective societies. The literary domain was no exception and in France the "Vintilă Horia affair" was probably one of the most illustrative cases for such a situation. The story is well-known: the prestigious Goncourt Prize was awarded in 1960 to the Romanian-born author for his book *Dieu est né en exil*. However, it was never actually presented to him, "because of the political past of the author, fortuitously revealed."<sup>129</sup>

At that stage in his life Vintilă Horia had chosen France as his adoptive country, and its language for his literary enterprises. He conveyed his exilic experiences in several books, for one of which the Goncourt Academy decided to reward him its prestigious prize. But the success of Horia's integration in his adoptive culture did not stop there. The recognition associated with the Goncourt prize was a reinforcement of previous positive receptions of his work: the foreword to the first edition of the novel, written by Daniel-Rops of the French Academy

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<sup>129</sup>

The French public was aware of Horia's right-wing orientation; one of the reasons why he was awarded the prize was precisely his ideological profile. However, apparently no one knew exactly how far his sympathies went.

amounted to an "official accolade," according to Olivier Boura.<sup>130</sup>

However, the consecration by one of the most distinguished Catholic writers of his time became one of the several factors that contributed to Vintilă Horia's misadventure. The acclamation by the intellectual Right of a book openly contesting the Romanian régime prompted an immediate response from the latter; the conflict was soon joined by the French communists. The left-wing press launched a defamatory campaign aimed at the dissident and orchestrated by *L'Humanité*. The newspaper published documents revealing the reactionary affinities of the novelist, and the ensuing scandal took on such proportions that he felt compelled to decline the prize "because of his love for France and his respect for the Academy."<sup>131</sup> The ideological war was too intense at the time and the Goncourt Prize too big a stake for the politicians in Bucharest to ignore that it was being awarded to one of their most vehement opponents. Vintilă Horia thus fell victim to his adversaries' political intrigues, who managed

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<sup>130</sup> Boura, Olivier. *Un siècle de Goncourt*. Paris: Arléa, 2003: 220.

<sup>131</sup> Horia's official argument for declining the prize. (Boura, Olivier: *Un siècle de Goncourt*: 220).

to engineer his virtually complete elimination from the French literary scene. After the brief (and highly disputed) success of the novel died out, the compromised writer had to leave France and (re)-start his literary career from scratch in Spain - the Franco régime being perhaps the only one capable of "overlooking" the author's controversial reputation.

But today these issues belong to the past; ideologies have changed or disappeared, and the Romanian society is about to re-evaluate the importance of its authors affected by the adversities of the communist era. In this new context, Vintilă Horia's works raise several questions: what is the author's *real* heritage, once the old political controversies are set apart? In other words, can we attribute a "pure" literary significance to his works, leaving aside their political implications, as he would seem to advocate? Furthermore, will his writings be integrated in the national patrimony with the same ease as they were initially adopted by the French society? Finally, what useful information pertaining to the issue of exile can be drawn from an analysis of his texts? The answers to these questions depend largely on several factors, among which two are of particular importance: the circumstances



motivating the creation of the texts and the context of their reception.

### **Imaginary Countries**

*God Was Born in Exile* is written in the form of a personal journal - the apocryphal chronicle of Ovid's exile in Tomis, an ancient Roman colony in the Thracian territories. The last eight years of the poet's life evoked in the text correspond each to a chapter of the book, marking the phases of an Ovidian metamorphosis - literally and figuratively.

The Latin poet strongly dislikes the country at first, which initially seems to him primitive and hostile. However, the displacement will eventually cause him to reconsider his worldview, and the arrogant Roman citizen initially exasperated by the banishment among the barbarians ends up as a devout adept of the unique civilization gradually unveiled before his eyes. Ovid goes through a succession of progressive mutations that will radically change the way he perceives his environment, and consequently his spiritual life. This complex process whose main phases are the maturation, the conversion, and the deliverance has an essentially religious character - but we need to take notice of the fact that the religion presented here is significantly different from the Christian religion

in its substance, and most importantly, that its character is antagonistic to Catholicism. What we have here is - as we will see later - a custom-made version of Christianity, altered according to the author's beliefs.

As we already mentioned, the reader will recognize in Ovid's tribulations Horia's own intellectual evolution. He will in fact reveal later in *Journal d'un paysan du Danube* the real experiences underlying the developments described in a poetic manner in the text. The novel's objective is to offer an exemplary model of the ideal spiritual development of the exiled artist, who, according to the author, *must* undergo the experience of exile in order to fully develop his creative potential. This is how he sees the effects of exile upon one of his fellow exiled writers:

The effect exile had [on him] was this Dantesque miracle one might call a surplus of knowledge, which sheds new light upon things, and renders common values less relevant, allowing previously imperceptible outlines of ultimate meanings to emerge from the shadows.

(Vintilă Horia, *Journal d'un paysan du Danube* 89, my translation)

Notwithstanding the implicit afflictions of the exile, there appears to be - from the artist's perspective, in any case - at least one significant advantage to be drawn from

the position into which the émigré is forced. The non-exiled artist, as an integral member of his society, has his perspectives limited by the predetermined nature of his cultural horizon. The mores of his community are immutable, and consequently limiting; the real value of any standard underlying the society's customs cannot be documented from within the system. One needs to detach himself from the structures of his community and attempt to analyze it from the outside - i.e., from the perspective of an objective, ever-doubtful observer ready to question the elements in the nation's spiritual life that may appear as "given" to the person who never had the opportunity to exit the system. In this aspect, at least - and despite his repeated complaints about his fate as an émigré - Horia seems to agree that a severance from the motherland can be beneficial.

Ovid's journal is hence to be read as a demonstration of the ways in which displacement can amplify the artist's intuition, facilitating his access to revelations beyond the reach of the "non-initiated," to "ultimate meanings" necessary for one's redemption, otherwise inaccessible. Reading the novel one discovers, along with Ovid, that

"exile is a necessary purgatory on the path to salvation,"<sup>132</sup>  
as Marina Mureșanu remarks.

But in order to reach the state of deliverance crowning this intellectual quest, the poet must first overcome the difficulties of expatriation. The way in which Vintilă Horia tackles these difficulties is to build fictional universes whose main function is to replace the native country left behind. He acknowledges the fact that he writes because of "the irrepressible urge to build a past of his own, to reestablish the contact with a part of his own self which was lost."<sup>133</sup> Vintilă Horia's imaginary worlds thus reveal their function of "alternative realities," essentially subjective and fictitious in nature; they are reflections of the poet's interior universe, and as such owe their existence to his imagination, and much less to an "objective" reality. The author himself acknowledges that one of the main effects of exile upon him was his search for a refuge in his own fantasies:

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<sup>132</sup> Mureșanu: 121.

<sup>133</sup> Horia, Vintilă. *Journal D'un Paysan Du Danube*. Paris: Table Ronde, 1966: 168-169.

[...] l'exil m'apparaissait comme une affaire concernant Ovide ou Chateaubriand, mais, au fond, je ne faisais que m'y intégrer, d'une façon quelque peu différente, comparée à la technique passive de mes prédécesseurs, car je le pris d'assaut au lieu de m'en laisser assiéger, *en le transformant en un château-fort dont je suis le seigneur absolu.*

(Vintilă Horia, *Journal d'un paysan du Danube*, 168-169, emphasis mine)

Just like his character, the author oscillates between the nostalgia for the lost homeland and the fascination for the new territories he is discovering. Ovid's spiritual journey takes place between two reference points: the Roman world and the realm of the Dacians. These opposing universes will gradually merge, and as a result they generate yet another cultural space, a new and original territory.

The symbols contained within each of these universes are particularly relevant for any literary inquiry, not only because they fulfill particular functions in the novel's economy, but also because they offer a great deal of insight concerning the author's ideology and the motivations behind his creational process. There is a complex arrangement of dichotomies based on the axis Rome/Tomi, such as artificial vs. natural, sophisticated

vs. simple, old vs. new, decadent vs. innocent, corrupted vs. pure - and so on, their presentation being manipulated in such a way as to shed a favorable light upon the world of the Getae. We need to retain here two of the most important aspects attributed to the Roman society: the first association is with "Western rationality," and the second with the idea of totalitarian state.<sup>134</sup>

The point of origin of Ovid's journey is - naturally - Rome. The city, with its opulent culture, is initially presented as a "paradise lost," object of the exile's desire. But Rome's influence upon Ovid is not limited to that: the city is the central reference of his entire life, governing his thoughts and actions, a cultural archetype to which he compares all of his experiences. Yet despite the abundance of details describing this unique world, in this novel Rome is - as we already noted - an imaginary space, created from the poet's visions, a truly "eternal city" emerging in the immaterial and atemporal sanctuary of his imagination. Ovid practically lives in this chimerical space because of the intensity of his memories, even though he is physically displaced both in time and in space. The

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<sup>134</sup> Obviously Vintilă is alluding to the communist despotic rule, but as we will see, this is one of the contradictions/confusions undermining his ideology.

following fragment illustrates the phenomenon and the subsequent anxiety produced by the fact that the universe of his home (or rather his recollection about his former home) is drifting towards the past, away from the real space to which the poet is relegated. The intensity of the sensations described in the fragment make it easy for the reader to understand Horia's real torments attributed to his character (who obviously is in fact his alter ego). Ovid "closes his eyes to live" and finds that:

[...] j'ai quitté Rome il y a trois jours, mais je suis à Rome, et il me semble qu'il me suffirait de prolonger un peu plus une pensée ou une image pour changer de place et m'intégrer de nouveau dans mon rythme et dans mon espace habituels. C'est en ce moment, en écrivant ces lignes, que je me sens envahi par un doute affreux. Rome est loin, à l'autre bout de la terre et aucune pensée n'est capable de me faire changer de place. Rome est comme le passé, perdue pour toujours, vécue, c'est-à-dire détachée de moi comme une chose étrange qu'on peut reconstituer par la pensée et l'imagination, mais qui n'est plus à la portée de la main.

(Vintilă Horia, *Dieu est né en exil*, 19)

Indeed, the poet's anxiety is well-grounded. The distant mirage of his home is progressively shattered by the austere materiality of his real surroundings. All the

aspects of the Dacic world converge toward creating the illusion of "tangible" and "real." The physical sensations incited by the elements dominating the territory of his exile (the cold, the wind, the snow) are backed up by authentic historical details - the author's insistence upon the aspect of realism went as far as to include a map of "Dacia in the first century A.D. showing Ovid's place of exile at Tomi." This barbarian land's main feature is the telluric, a quality constantly brought forward by the immensity of its geographical constituents: "silent plains," mountains, the sea, etc. - everything is mysterious and awe-inspiring. It is a world "barely surfaced from the primordial chaos"<sup>135</sup> whose main function is to provide an ideal setting for religious epiphanies. Its elaborated ambiance prepares the reader for the changes to come:

Je me dégourdis les jambes, en faisant les cent pas, m'illuminant de cette immensité de montagnes, de collines, de plaines, de forêts et de ciel, qui a une forme, des couleurs et des sons. Cette immensité que j'appellerais *la paix*. Une paix qui parle d'un passé ou d'un avenir très lointain, quand l'âme humaine avait, ou aura, la forme de ce paysage. Je me sens

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<sup>135</sup> Boura, Olivier: *Un siècle de Goncourt*: 218.



vivre sans peur, pour la première fois depuis que j'existe.

(Vintilă Horia, *Dieu est né en exil*, 151)

This instance when the landscape ceases to be hostile and the poet is able to regain his inner peace marks the crucial moment when the exile's mindset undergoes a crucial mutation. The space surrounding him is no longer perceived as a factor keeping him from achieving his goal of returning to his place of origin, but as an ideal setting for a new home. The direct linkage between the character's experiences and the journey of its creator is perhaps the most evident in this fragment. Just like Ovid, Vintilă Horia has discovered that the exile's sole option is adaptation:

Est-ce vrai ? Ces déplacements incessants - Roumanie, Italie, Allemagne, Italie de nouveau, Argentine, Espagne, France, de nouveau l'Espagne - ne seraient-ils qu'une guerre extérieure, une espèce d'expédition des Dix mille, une *Anabase* destinée à conserver, ou à équilibrer ma paix intérieure ? Ce serait trop beau. J'étais convaincu jusqu'à présent que je cherchais partout une Terre Promise ressemblant à celle que j'avais perdue. J'avais partout l'illusion de l'avoir retrouvée, puis, une fois passé l'instant des premiers enthousiasmes, je rongais mon frein jusqu'au moment où je découvrais un nouvel horizon

d'espoir. J'y fonçais, ivre des promesses inscrites dans l'air. Et le jeu reprenait, aussi vain que le précédent. Car *il n'y a qu'une Terre Promise, celle où on a appris à vivre.*

(Vintilă Horia, Journal d'un paysan du Danube, 40, emphasis mine)

For Ovid, the land of the Getae becomes little by little the "promised land" where the exile can start building a new life. For Horia, it is a substitute for a place he never could find in actual fact. As in the case of Rome, this universe owes its existence primarily to its creator's ideas, rather than reflecting the reality - despite the plethora of details borrowed from historical and archeological studies. The ancient nation described in the novel does not reflect an image of the real territory as it was in the past, but rather the outline of a future society. It is an idealistic vision of the post-communist nation conceived by Vintilă Horia, a country erected on its creator's opinions, the only place where he could find his peace.

L'idée d'une patrie heureuse et libre, le rapprochement lent et fécond du « génie du Christianisme, » la valeur significative du passé personnel, la présence active de la mort et des ruines sont des réalités ou des vœux qui s'encadrent

logiquement dans la doctrine d'un nouveau romantisme. À la rentrée, on apportera avec nous le monde qu'on a créé dans la solitude, le monde que Ovide et Dante ont compris dans leur exil, et qui est, dans son aspect romantique, *un vrai monde*, un monde que l'écrivain resté parmi ses pantoufles et les livres de la bibliothèque familiale ne peut même pas entrapercevoir. Ceux qui portent les flambeaux des idées nouvelles sont ceux qui souffrent. Je ne dis ça par orgueil ni pour m'en faire un titre de gloire. La vie m'a appris de renoncer aux décorations. Mais la vérité est ici, loin de notre pays et de la tranquillité, dans cette poursuite fatigante d'un équilibre avec lequel on pourra, j'espère, remplacer le déséquilibre qu'on trouvera à la rentrée.

(Popa, *Corespondență*, 199)

This country is the product of a synthesis in which an initial culture (whose prime example and agent is the main character) is grafted onto a new substrate. The two elements of this process become radically transformed after the combination, the final product being a totally original entity. The model of this process is illustrated by the story of Flavius Capito, one of the new country's founders. He leaves Rome to find "fertile lands belonging to no-one," he marries a young Dacian girl and establishes together with the numerous fugitives "set on finding a new sky" a

community which will transform the barbarian territory in "a part of the civilized world." This entire development described in the novel claims to be the birth of the hero's "Promised Land." It is a sacred territory where "a new God will be born" and whose inhabitants are "the natural and somewhat savage intuitive precursors of a religion waiting to be discovered."<sup>136</sup> We need to take note of two key elements in Boura's previous statement: "precursors" and "religion." As we will see, religion is arguably the most important element in Vintilă Horia's worldview, and the fact that his characters are presented as the precursors of this religion is one of the main issues prompting criticisms addressed to his writings. And this is only one of the many details in which he makes use of his controversial "technique" of altering the truth. In the process of creating this new world Horia does not limit himself to recreating an accurate copy of each of the real nations, but rather, taking advantage of the liberty offered by the artist's status (as opposed to the historian's), he selects only what he deems as "best" from both worlds and combines them in the most convenient way in order to fulfill his desires.

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<sup>136</sup> Idem.

Evidently the author invested a great deal of effort in creating a grandiose image of his ancestors' country. The fundamental notion governing Vintilă Horia's mentality (and consequently his literary undertakings) becomes thus easily discernible: the consecration of a myth about the genesis of the Romanian nation.<sup>137</sup> As Marina Mureșanu notes, he attempts to establish himself as a representative of the people, proclaiming its importance in the universal context:

D'une façon ou d'une autre, il n'est question que des rapports de la roumanité - en tant que race et communauté spirituelle - avec l'autre, avec l'étranger. Il s'agit perpétuellement de lui trouver une place dans l'universalité, d'en définir la mission et le trajet dans l'histoire [...]

(Mureșanu, 120)

The passion he invested in the efforts to construct the abovementioned myth is explained by his desire to see his beliefs acknowledged and accepted by the public, their "homologation" (i.e., a favorable reception of the book by

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<sup>137</sup> In a nutshell, this genesis was the result of the Roman colonization of the territories to the north of the Danube known as "Dacia Traiana." The province was conquered by the emperor Trajan (Marcus Ulpius Nerva Traianus) in 106 A.D. While the historical facts exist, and the theory is founded, Vintilă Horia alters them according to his own purposes.

the Romanian readers) being a prerequisite for the success of his spiritual quest. The author wants to be reassured that he still belongs to his country - the concordance between his own ideas and those of his co-nationals being the best proof thereof.

### **The Reality Check**

But Vintilă Horia's imaginary universes did not meet with universal acceptance. The main cause for this failure was the fact that the literary worlds developed in his texts revolve around a reference system based on his own beliefs, instead of reflecting the country supposedly depicted. The world of Ovid in *God Was Born in Exile* is, as we have seen, nothing but the author's personal antidote against the hardships of exile. Its main *raison d'être* is not to reconstruct the reality (the way a conventional historical novel would do) but to compensate - even if in the realm of fiction - for what the author sees as a "straying" of the nation, the "usurpation" of the features underlying its "true spirit." Consequently, the writings should be considered "literary reparations" and perceived as a product of Horia's personal motivations rather than a reflection of the reality - i.e., of the historical facts and (perhaps most importantly) of his peers' beliefs.

Interestingly, his behavior accurately fits Edward Said's remark about the mindset of a certain category of exiles:

Exiles feel an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people.

(Said, 177)

Not surprisingly, his novels had a limited impact on the country's readers - a fact easily explained by the discrepancies between the exile's doctrines and aspirations and the opinions of the majority of the critics. The discordance between Horia and his public remains very strong even after discarding the element of political persecution, which has been in the past the main factor susceptible of altering a novel's reception. Regardless of the reader's viewpoint, it is difficult to ignore that Horia's displacement has considerably affected his discourse: his myth, conceived "extra muros" overtly disregards the mainstream currents of thought shared by the community; the referents of his imaginary realm were isolated from the world they were representing at the moment when their creator became an exile, and perhaps, as we will see, even before that. Vintilă Horia's theories fall apart as soon as they are confronted with a reality

whose most important agents are historical accuracy and the informed opinions of most scholars.

Several specialists have highlighted the inconsistencies of the historical details scattered all along the text. Some comments, like those of Marie-Anne Monluçon, maintained a circumspect attitude, being limited to pointing out that "Vintilă Horia transformed the Getae, who were polytheists, into monotheists," and that "it is difficult to determine whether this is a piece of misinformation or a distortion serving the apologetic objectives of the author."<sup>138</sup> Other scholars, like Peter Christensen, deal more severely with Horia's attempts to alter history in order to support his accolade of the Romanian nation:

We should not be asked to discount the differences between the world of Zalmoxis and the world of Christ so that the Dacians can be seen as forerunners of the Christians in an overgeneralized way

(Christensen, 183)

The manipulation of the historical facts in order to produce certain messages that fit the novel's architecture (and the ideological agenda of its author) ends up annoying

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<sup>138</sup> Monluçon, 176.



the reader even in a literary context, where granting a certain liberty in the use of poetic licenses is assumed. The text creates the final impression that "Horia uses symbolic concepts [...] which unduly stretch the imagination."<sup>139</sup>

*Dieu est né en exil* is not the only one of his novels where he distorts the facts in order to support the national myth in which his country is presented as an *axis mundi* of sorts, and its population as a superior race, forming together an entity against whose standard all human civilization should be weighed.<sup>140</sup>

The final volume of his *Trilogy of the Exile*<sup>141</sup> comprises another version of the vision inaugurated with the first novel. The setting is switched to Moldova,

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<sup>139</sup> Christensen, 183.

<sup>140</sup> This is another opinion whose origins are traced by Mihaela Czobor-Lupp in the works of C. Noica and Father Staniloaie, two of the most prominent exponents of the nationalist-orthodoxist movement. They tried to support the idea that "by the way they are from a moral viewpoint, Romanians do not belong to modern Europe, being nevertheless superior to it. In the first case, Romanians are too natural to be classified under the heading of any European civilized categories; they are basically in a plain state of nature. In the second case, Romanians are superior to any other culture; therefore they are beyond history, beyond any possible comparison." (Czobor-Lupp: 41).

<sup>141</sup> See the first section of this chapter.

another Romanian province, during the rule of Stephen the Great.

Europe ends on the Dniestr and at the Danube's estuary, where the territory of Moldova also ends [...] I believe that all Westerners, one by one, should come here and spend some time, to observe the outlook of the world from the periphery towards the center, and not the other way around. Moldova is like an initiation process, without which no *aproximatio veritas* is possible. This country should be transformed by humanists in self-comprehension.

(Vintilă Horia, *Mai sus de miazănoapte*, 33)

The legendary ruler<sup>142</sup> is presented as the possessor of an ancestral wisdom, an almost supernatural character extraordinary in all aspects, a veritable saint.<sup>143</sup> While it is true that the prince achieved commendable political, military and administrative successes that secured him a

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<sup>142</sup> Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great or St. Steven the Great or Stephen Mușat III), born in 1434, was a voivod (prince) of Moldova (1457-1504), who won renown in Europe for his long resistance against the Ottoman Empire. Ștefan's long reign brought considerable cultural development to his country: 44 churches and monasteries were erected during his rule. Ștefan Cel Mare was called holy by many Christians, but it is said that he had more than 20 illegitimate children. He has been canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church under the name Saint Stephen the Holy and Great.

<sup>143</sup> Mureșanu: 124.

unique place in the history of his country, the records show that he was anything but a saint - in reality his reign being marked by terror and abuse.<sup>144</sup>

In response to criticisms regarding his alterations of historical facts, Vintilă Horia denies any intent of "scientific accuracy," arguing that the archaic context was nothing more than a pretext around which he took pleasure in developing his novel.

Voici un de mes secrets, un des plus importants. Ceci n'est pas un caprice d'intellectuel - je n'en suis pas un étant un poète - car cette volonté en apparence anarchique fait partie de la personnalité et de la chronologie de mon peuple, saboteur de l'histoire. Je souris chaque fois qu'un critique attribue des intentions historiques à mes romans, me comparant à Marguerite Yourcenar ou à Robert Graves, ou même à Jacques de Bourbon Busset. Tout est permis à l'aveuglement des critiques, et dans *Dieu est né en exil*, ils n'ont pu voir que le déchirement de l'exil politique selon le topique pseudoclassique de l'histoire d'Ovide. [...]

(Vintilă Horia, *Journal d'un paysan du Danube*, 50-51)

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<sup>144</sup> The chronicles of the time attest these facts, but most historians prefer to conveniently forget them.

The historical aspect (and accuracy) should be thus all but ignored, the inclusion of "authentic" details serving the sole purpose of augmenting the reader's "literary gratification" in a text preferring the ambiguities of mysticism over the meticulousness of Cartesian thought. For Vintilă Horia, history, with its details and accuracy, can only undermine the object of the literary act: "the true" cognition, which is to say, religious revelation.

Revêtus d'histoire, mes romans font fi des chronologies officielles, Ovide ou Platon pouvant être en même temps nos contemporains. Ils peuvent être placés en tout temps ressemblant au nôtre, en toute veille d'apocalypse partielle. Leur thème essentiel est celui de la profanation par le collectif et le politique, et du salut par le religieux et l'individuel. Je suis toujours resté fidèle à cette conviction, depuis l'aube de mon âge de raison. On ne peut pas connaître en masse, ni établir à ce niveau des contacts avec Dieu. Les masses ne peuvent croire qu'à ce qui leur ressemble, c'est-à-dire à des fictions et à des bourreaux.

(Vintilă Horia, Journal d'un paysan du Danube, 50-51)

Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to deny any historical implication to a text carrying a passionate

political message. The author's convictions emerge from virtually every page of the novel. The entire text opens with the very assertive statement "Caesar in hoc potuit juris habere nihil" (The emperor has no authority over this). This is a very open allusion to the known discordances between the official ideology of the totalitarian government ruling his country and Vintilă Horia's fundamentally divergent beliefs. The text offers additional hints to other details of similar nature, even if of a much more practical nature: Ovid's permanent suspicions directed towards his fellow citizens, his unease concerning the fate of his personal correspondence - these (and other) issues all remind the reader of the paranoia induced by living under an oppressive régime. Even more relevant for the novel's political objectives is one of its main messages - a message questioning the very essence of such a régime: the world of the Getae, with its pious austerity prevails over a materialist and decadent Rome.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The Legionary movement revived Romanian nationalism and the Orthodox tradition, while warning against democracy and liberalism as the embodiments of modern decay (Davidescu, 4).

The Iron Guard is the name most commonly given in English to an ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic, fascist movement and political party in Romania in the period from 1927 into the early part of World War II. Originally founded by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu on July 24, 1927 as the

It is this very aspect where we find one of the main fallacies in Horia's worldview. As mentioned before, the ideas associated with the Roman society are the refinements of the Western world (considered here in a rather derogative way) and the image of the totalitarian state reminiscent of the communist despotism. What the writer fails to perceive is that two of the main factors that permitted the emergence of such a political system were two of the principles he revered the most: Orthodoxism and the particular flavor of mysticism propagated by the Eastern Christian Church.<sup>146</sup>

The criticisms addressed to the communist system mentioned above are only the most "benign" elements of an

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Legion of the Archangel Michael (Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail), and led by him until his death in 1938, adherents of the movement continued to be widely referred to as "legionnaires" and the organization as the "Legion" or the "Legionnaire Movement" (Mișcarea Legionară), despite various changes of the (intermittently banned) organization's name. In March 1930 Codreanu formed the "Iron Guard" (Garda de Fier) as a paramilitary political branch of the Legion; this name eventually came to refer to the Legion itself. Later, in June 1935, the Legion changed its official name to "All for the Country" or "All for the Fatherland" (Totul pentru Țară).

<sup>146</sup> There are a number of recent studies undertaken by both Romanian and foreign scholars that support this idea. Probably the most notable such studies are those of Olivier Gillet, who finds a direct lineage between the Orthodox Church, Byzantinism (as a form of social order) and the communist social model.

entire political agenda identifiable within the novel's pages. An agenda which is, for all intents and purposes, a reiteration of the reactionary doctrines contributing to Vintilă Horia's intellectual formation. Notwithstanding his official repudiation of the Legionary movement's ideologies, all of his works bear their mark - a feature that becomes evident upon a detailed inspection. After all, given the author's well-known affinity for the Legion, this is to be expected.

Arguably the main factor ruining Horia's works is that he insists on turning them into mediums for promoting ideas that had a hard time being accepted by the majority of the country's population even in the days of their initial conception. These ideas occur too frequently in the text to go unnoticed even by a benevolent reader, and unfortunately the artistic dimension of the text ends up being overwhelmed by the political message.

Virtually all the important concepts devised or promoted by the ideologists of the nationalist right find their place in *Dieu est né en exil*. His commendation of the peasantry and its rustic life style bring to mind the

theories of Constantin Noica.<sup>147</sup> His aversion to rationalism (intimately associated with his mysticism) echo Mircea Eliade's concept of "new dilettantism."<sup>148</sup> Finally, his nationalism and orthodoxism are inspired by the works of Nae Ionescu and Nechifor Crainic.<sup>149</sup> The influence of these last two concepts upon Horia's worldview explains the true nature of the cult made up by him in the novel: what we have here is a religion intimately intertwined with the national character, an Orthodoxy of distinct local flavor, the basis of "the quintessential Romanian spirit." The fact

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<sup>147</sup> Constantin Noica (1909 - 1987) was a Romanian essayist and philosopher; he exhorted the "regeneration" of Romanian culture "with the help of its peasant values." According to him, these values were immune to the influences of historical events. The peasantry managed to preserve "the spirit of the nation" over the centuries. (Cf. Constantin Noica, *Manuscrisele de la Câmpulung: reflecții despre țărănime și burghezie*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997: 49-51).

<sup>148</sup> Lucian Boia points out that for the "autochthonists" (members of a trend often sympathizing with the Iron Guard) the dilettante's intuition was a virtue, and "overcoming the rational" was a fundamental principle for the nationalist Right. Mircea Eliade supported the idea of a "new dilettantism," arguing that "the dilettantes always had a sense of history" and their intuitions allegedly prevailed over scientific studies (Cf. Boia, 98).

<sup>149</sup> Nechifor Crainic (1889-1972), poet, theologian and philosopher, championed the idea that Orthodoxy was the foundation of the Romanian national state; the philosopher Nae Ionescu (1890-1940) affirmed that "being Romanian means being Orthodox" and described a Romanian nationalism founded on the idea of ethnicity.



that Ovid finds the radical attitude of this orthodoxy so appealing because it differs from the Roman mentality is no coincidence. According to the advocates of obscurantism, Catholicism represents a "fundamentally different modality to understand life," a form of "universalism" incompatible with the spirit of the poet's adoptive society<sup>150</sup>, which is much more indebted to the Orient's mystic influences.

As noted before, such doctrines were met with a good deal of restraint even at the time of their conception. Celebrated critics such as Eugen Lovinescu<sup>151</sup> condemned the patriarchal and idyllic elements promulgated by the conservative movements as "retrograde anachronisms." Șerban Cioculescu denounced "the tendentious spirit" of these movements as soon as they emerged. The rationalist member of the Academy promptly confronted those who supported the idea of a "special monotheism" being popular among the Dacians in order to generate the false impression that the Romanian people might have played a decisive role in the evolution of the Christian religion - or, at least, that it preceded the rest of Europe in the domain of spiritual

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. Czobor-Lupp, 114.

<sup>151</sup> Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943) was a preeminent critic and cultural theorist who had great influence on the development of Romanian literature through the first half of the twentieth century.

evolution.<sup>152</sup> He also warned the public that the general acknowledgement of such a doctrine might destroy the nation's most important cultural heritage, i.e., Latinity.

Cioculescu's description of this detrimental process corresponds in detail to Vintilă Horia's methods. We already noted that he considers the Roman order governing the intellectual, juridical, political and administrative domains to be obsolete.<sup>153</sup> One of Horia's principal mistakes is to insist on supporting a number of ideas that were discredited long before he set out to compose the novel. In 1941, Cioculescu was criticizing the creations where "the Thracian spirit, with its uncontrollable structure and vague vital energies, dialectically converted to spiritual values, is paraded like a mystifying banner."<sup>154</sup> Twenty years later, the author of *Dieu est né en exil* continued the same tradition.

More recently, and in particular after the fall of the communist régime in 1989, a new trend gained momentum. Its members devoted considerable efforts to re-evaluating and rehabilitating the authors ostracized during the years of

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<sup>152</sup> Cioculescu, 637.

<sup>153</sup> Cioculescu, 641.

<sup>154</sup> Idem.

the dictatorship. Consequently, some critics attempted to grant a certain value to "the creation of a myth whose origins stem from real facts,"<sup>155</sup> mostly because "it transforms the ancient territory of the country into a privileged space and therefore in an important spiritual center."<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of today's critics identified the ideas proffered by Vintilă Horia as sophisms. Sanda Stolojan notes a circumstance where - ironically - the adept of the "dilettantism" had tried to demonstrate his theories by emulating scientific discourse. She promptly assigns the author to "the cohort of Romanians who are seeking at any price a scientific foundation for their beliefs and traditions."<sup>157</sup> She also remarks that "in reality, Vintilă Horia performs an act of faith" and that "it is while he wants to found this act of faith on the principles of contemporary science that he loses himself in demonstrations that have nothing in common with science."<sup>158</sup> The contemporary studies really founded on scientific methods contest the traditionalist conjectures, encouraging

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<sup>155</sup> Barbu, 320.

<sup>156</sup> Monica Nedelcu, in the Romanian edition's foreword. My translation.

<sup>157</sup> Stolojan, 158, my translation.

<sup>158</sup> Idem.

"their reevaluation with more professional refinement than before and leaving behind nationalist prejudices."<sup>159</sup>

There is certainly a degree of exaltation in Vintilă Horia's writings, who sees himself as an apostle of the "true faith" and of the "true spirit" of the Romanian nation, but he failed in perceiving the real mentality of his country's intelligentsia. Eventually he realized at some point that there was a significant discrepancy between his aspirations and the beliefs of his peers whom he left behind under the communist rule. Usually the justification of this dissonance consisted in various political arguments; but eventually the artist acknowledged the fact that the rationale behind this difference was more serious: he did not belong to the community of his native country anymore. This is what he has to say about his compatriots towards the end of his life:

Popule mee, quid feci tibi ? criaît Dante du fond de sa xénie ravennate. Je ne crie pas, car je n'écris jamais à ma *polis* ingrante, les miens n'étant pas les miens.

(Vintilă Horia, Journal d'un paysan du Danube, 144-45)

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<sup>159</sup> Boia, 14.

Therein lies the major internal conflict haunting the poet's conscience: alone against his *polis*, unable to give up on his beliefs, he sees himself ostracized by his conationals. The inability to convince them that "his reality was the best" amounts to acknowledging the failure of his spiritual quest. His final reaction was to isolate himself completely from the society, in a life governed by a hermetic spirituality:

Je comprends chaque jour d'avantage, que la paix n'existe pas en termes d'humanité et que seul l'individu peut l'attendre sur le plan de l'ascétisme et de la foi. La paix ne peut être donc qu'intérieure, à l'opposé de celle des politiciens et des journalistes.

(Vintilă Horia, Journal d'un paysan du Danube, 56)

### **A Different Instance of Severance**

Clearly, there is a conflict between Vintilă Horia's persona and the nation from which he exiled himself; this is one of the prerequisite conditions for the apparition of severance. However, as we pointed out, his story has a unique feature differentiating him from Tzara and Rezzori. In the case of the other authors discussed here, the phenomenon of severance implies a form of rejection of the

"old" society as a whole initiated by the exiles-to-be (the severance usually takes place *before* the actual departure). The main motivation behind this rejection is, as we have shown, the perception of the culture left behind as primitive, retrograde, and generally hindering the intellectual's potential. This is not entirely so in Horia's case: all through his life, he maintained that he was drawing his inspiration from his motherland, and he was obviously displeased to find himself cast off by his colleagues. However, the author remained attached to the past, unable to adapt to the changes brought about by history, and ended up being left behind. To his credit, he eventually acknowledged this fact towards the end of his life, even though the realization did not determine him to change his beliefs:

Ces ruptures dans le temps sont incurables, parce qu'elles impliquent deux plans d'évolution parallèles et irréconciliables: celui du paysage abandonné, *qui va son train sans tenir compte du nôtre*, et celui de *notre propre avancement dans la vie, dans un espace distinct soumis à d'autres lois d'évolution, à d'autres changements de perspective.*

(Vintilă Horia, *Journal d'un paysan du Danube*, 203, emphasis mine)

This statement highlights the relationship bringing together, in a nutshell, Horia's biography and the idea of severance: the country continued its normal evolution on its historical path, a path which he refused to join. The process of severance is intimately related to the idea of progress, and it is initiated by the member of the relationship wishing to move on, to evolve. In Vintilă Horia's case, the phenomenon follows the same pattern, but the roles are changed - at least in the initial phase:<sup>160</sup> the community ended up rejecting its member, instead of the member severing himself from the community. While Tzara was striving for modernity, looking to secure a place for himself at the forefront of the literary scene, Vintilă Horia preferred to find his inspiration in outmoded sources. For instance, he repeatedly expressed his enthusiasm for (and stated his intellectual affiliation with) Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme*, (published in 1802); he also insisted on advocating the benefits of Orthodox mysticism over the scientific spirit, perceiving the latter as a malefic influence of the Occident. Finally, and in direct relationship with the religious element, the

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<sup>160</sup> As we will see in the final chapter, the rejection was, in the end, reciprocal.

exaggerated nationalism touted by the political group he sympathized with was also a factor contributing to his estrangement.<sup>161</sup>

Horia remained adamant all through his life (in spite of his tribulations, which should have convinced him otherwise) in his belief that it was him, and not the rest of the world, who was in the possession of "the real truth." Sanda Stolojan describes the novelist's way of life as follows:

Il refuse le doute, la rupture, tout ce qui fait le drame de l'homme moderne, en un mot, le risque que comporte la mise en question des valeurs.

(Stolojan, 232)

This is the root of all of Horia's troubles, concerning both his artistic career and his personal fortune: his worldview was behind the times, and he refused to acknowledge this fact. He tried to promote an ideology founded on a mindset inherited from the Romantic era and archaic religious principles at a time when his country was trying to find its way into modernity. His severance from the society and the subsequent exile followed naturally.

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<sup>161</sup> The Iron Guard ended up being outlawed, and many of its members had to leave the country after 1941.



The poet ended up *seeking refuge in his interior world from the community he perceived as hostile*:

Je me retourne chaque jour de plus en plus vers moi même, me détachant de ce qui peut avoir l'air politique ou extérieur, poursuivant un chemin de plus en plus solitaire, s'insinuant dans un paysage toujours plus abrupt, comme une Castille de l'âme.

(Vintilă Horia, *Journal d'un paysan du Danube*, 147, emphasis mine)

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, while Horia eventually found himself in the condition of being an outsider in relation to the Romanian society, his endeavors were in complete concordance with what Mihaela Czobor-Lupp describes as "the Romanian way of being." According to her, this is a lifestyle in which the goal of life becomes to "catch as many forms, ideas, projects, patterns, as possible, and to bring them into the realm where the borderline between reality and ideas is effaced, where what is at stake is the play of alternatives and not the testing of the capacity that ideas have to induce change."<sup>162</sup> An explanation for the apparent paradox of Horia's ostracism in spite of the common spiritual fund he (undoubtedly) shared with the community from which he found himself

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. Czobor-Lupp, 46.

separated is the fact that - as demonstrated above - the gist of the dissonances between the writer and the Romanian society lies in the temporal domain - i.e., in the time gap setting apart two different worldviews. The country followed its natural evolutionary path towards a contemporary system of values, while Horia's equivalent system remained fixed in the past.

Another typical trait of Horia's personality, also in concordance with Czobor-Lupp's portrayal of the Romanian spirit, is the poet's belief in the absolute values of his culture, doubled by the persuasion regarding other people's<sup>163</sup> inability to grasp them. These principles motivated his "retreat from history" and "the construction of an imaginary space for self-definition, the space of the complete and total utopia, where contact with history is lost."<sup>164</sup> The purely artificial character of this space denotes a taste for the absolute reminiscent of Tzara's radical *ars poetica*. The imaginary worlds the exiles build for themselves may be the only worlds where they can justify their existence. Coincidentally, the behavior

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<sup>163</sup> Notably, these "people" are not necessarily foreigners, but also the Romanians disagreeing with Horia.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Czobor-Lupp, 6.

adopted by our authors also fits very well Claudio Guillén's account of "counter-exile writers," who tend to express themselves by means of an "imaginative presentation of relatively fictional themes, ancient myths or proposed ideas and beliefs growing from what are essentially the consequences in the changing writer, or group of writers, of the initial experiences."<sup>165</sup> This is one of the main characteristics making possible the inclusion of a given text (in our case, Vintilă Horia's novel) in what Guillén calls "counter-exile literature," and implicitly, as we will see shortly,<sup>166</sup> its correlation with the phenomenon of severance.

However, such a behavior is likely to involve self-deception, and, as Czobor-Lupp indicates, self-deception "implies the entrance of a space where no control is possible," because "in such a monologic space the profile of the individual cannot be defined except by lifting it above all the others" (which is in essence what our author attempts). And adopting this kind of attitude involves a great risk: "Whoever defines his profile in such a way builds a self-image which is truly valid only for himself,

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<sup>165</sup> Guillén, 272.

<sup>166</sup> Chapter V, p. 212.

fully perceivable only by his inner eye. Such a one-sided self-definition brings with it an extreme vulnerability, due to the fact that if any piece of the composition is destroyed, then the whole edifice falls down.<sup>167</sup>” This was, unfortunaltely, exactly what happened in Horia’s case: unable to persuade the majority of his contemporaries about the justness of his doctrines, he ended up in isolation, seeking justification for his philosophy in an ethereal world constructed for this very purpose. A world which, ultimately, failed to pass the rigors of the scholarly reviews, as well as the trial of time.

Bringing concepts like “Romanian way of being” and “Romanian spirit” into our analysis raises the question whether the phenomenon of severance is dependent upon a national factor in general, and a Romanian factor in particular. In my view, the severance is not dependent on the national factor, although some cultural backdrops may favor it more than others. We can find examples of severance in a number of national literatures - the names of Joyce and Dante quickly come to mind here. Yet at the same time, the Irish and Italian cultures seem to represent the phenomenon better than others. Along the same lines,

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<sup>167</sup> Idem, 37.

severance is not a proprietary feature of Romanian literature, but it certainly is a significant one. Probably one of the main factors contributing to the 'popularity' of the severance among Romanian authors was described by M. Czobor-Lupp above. The Romanians' tendency to favor "the play of alternatives and not the testing of the capacity that ideas have to induce change" usually results in a defeatist attitude: not inducing change quickly leads to the belief that change is impossible. Defeatism, in its turn, leads to a nihilist attitude where everything looks inconsequential for one's existence, as long as it is not directly related to their persona. And under such conditions, rejection (and in particular rejection of cultural values) is much more likely to appear. Horia's strong denial, combined with the fact that he was the "purest" Romanian (both in spirit and in lineage) among our authors convincingly suggest a certain relationship between one's cultural background and their likelihood to experience severance.

## Conclusion

### **The Elements of the Severance**

In the first chapter I suggested the following definition of the phenomenon I called "severance":

[...] a person's attitude of estrangement pertaining to her native culture, a sentiment which will eventually constitute the fundamental factor motivating the person's active choice of becoming an exile.<sup>168</sup>

I also noted that the severance is essentially an intellectual / psychological process, underlying a person's (most notably, an artist's) decision to become (or remain) an exile. And while arguably the severance can be circumscribed as a distinct entity, its very nature as a process implies that it must encompass several elements. And these elements - again in keeping with the features of a process - are interconnected by dynamic relationships, whose substances, the (inter)actions, are deployed in time between two reference points. This succinct review will track the stages of the general progression of the severance in the order of their occurrence.

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<sup>168</sup> See page 39.

The source of the severance is, as we observed in our case-studies, the realization of "non-belonging" to the cultural context of which a given person used to be an integral part. This is the initial spark, the epiphany that will drastically influence the subject's subsequent spiritual evolution. In the case of Tzara, this event can be associated with the emergence of his "*dégoût envers moi-même*" - keeping in mind, of course, that what he hated the most about himself was his "*solitude provinciale*." For Rezzori, the corresponding moment is illustrated by his conflict with his friends, while for Horia it materializes with the phrase "*les miens n'étant pas les miens*."

The subsequent event occurring in the process of the severance follows naturally: after such an awakening the initial culture will be perceived as an element holding back one's spiritual growth. The best example for this is perhaps Tzara behavior with his incessant "evasions," but Rezzori's retrospective contempt for his efforts to integrate himself in the society of Bucharest, or Horia's fervor concerning the imaginary future of his homeland, are also representative.

In the next step of the development this perception will generate, in its turn, a wish to do away with the old context and to find something new, more suitable for the

individual's needs and aspirations. This is, in essence, the driving force behind the entire phenomenon, and it can be applied, to all of the authors under scrutiny here. The fact was previously documented; I will therefore only briefly note Tzara's perpetual striving for innovation, Rezzori's enjoyment of his protean personality whose facets embodied the atmospheres of the countries in which he resided, and Horia's creation of an entire realm with the purpose of fulfilling this very desire.

Finally, the wish for change, as we have seen, often materializes into a self-imposed exile. The composite succession of events described above manifests itself in the form of a unitary phenomenon constituting the subject matter of this research: the severance. In addition, the process usually does not end here. There are also a number of additional consequences which are also intimately linked with (or contingent on) the same phenomenon. However, they are subsequent to, and thus to a certain extent extrinsic to the actual "act" of severance. Among these (otherwise very important) consequences the most notable are: the freedom to write, the freedom of perspective, the added cultural experience, and a better overcoming of possible cultural restraints (i.e., learning to accept "the other"). Instances of these corollaries are noted and discussed in



detail at various points in the current text. For instance, the publication of Horia's novels would have been inconceivable in a society depriving its citizens of their freedom to write. The freedom of perspective gained as a result of their severance was a major factor underlying the works (and implicitly the spirit) of Tzara and Rezzori, as was their added cultural experience. Finally, as we have seen, the acceptance of "the other" is one of the main concepts conferring weight to Rezzori's literary legacy.

The importance of the previous analysis was twofold, one of its main purposes being to scrutinize our subject matter in a systematic manner. Furthermore, just as importantly, the dissection of the severance into its constitutive parts should facilitate the uncovering of these elements in a text - and consequently, the identification of the phenomenon in its entirety. Still, the severance can (and should) be examined not only from a diachronic perspective (i.e., identifying the phases of the process with which it can be identified) but also from a synchronic one, concerned with the configuration of the two members of the dichotomy rendering its existence possible: the "self" and the "other."

## **"Severance" as a Psychological Process**

Also in the first chapter of this study<sup>169</sup> we briefly touched upon the severance as a function of the self. I noted then that in such a framework exile and the way it is perceived by the subject (i.e., as a nuisance or as a benefit) becomes very much dependent upon the way in which he or she envisions the newly acquired identity. Moreover, the nature of this new identity will be determined to a great extent by cultural factors. This is the area where severance and identity (and, in particular, cultural identity) intersect. We witnessed a number of examples illustrating this correlation in each of the cases under scrutiny, and in Rezzori's instance we even had the benefit of the author's own accounts regarding the subject, his testimonials being particularly relevant with regard to the relationships' literary significances. I would like to review in further detail these examples in an attempt to highlight the common building block underlying the behavior of our three authors - namely, the severance.

If severance and identity are intimately connected, we need to clarify the meaning of the latter, at least in the context of this inquiry. "Identity" in its various

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<sup>169</sup> See page 37.

incarnations (e.g., cultural, social, national, sexual, racial, etc). is a concept enjoying extensive coverage, especially in the last decades. It is therefore imperative to attempt a delimitation of its meaning before bringing it into play here. Given that severance is essentially an intellectual<sup>170</sup> process, I would like to approach this portion of its analysis relying on principles and theories "borrowed" from the domain of psychology. Their use, I believe, is not only the most suitable for the subject matter at hand (the artist's spiritual evolution), but also provides a scientific basis for our analysis and its conclusions.

Erik H. Erikson,<sup>171</sup> who laid the groundwork upon which most subsequent studies of the "id-entity" were to be based, offers the following interpretation of the relationship between the individual and his cultural context: "[...] the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means most to others - those others, to be

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<sup>170</sup> I use the term here mainly in the sense of "psychological."

<sup>171</sup> Erik Erikson was an American psychoanalyst of German origin. He trained under Anna Freud (1927-33). In 1933 Erikson emigrated to the U.S. and taught at Harvard, engaging in a variety of clinical work. His contributions to the domain of psychoanalytic theory consisted mainly in studies associating the discipline with social, cultural, and other environmental factors.

sure, who have come to mean most to him. The term 'identity' expresses such a *mutual relation* in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a *persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others.*"<sup>172</sup> Stuart Hall formulates a similar definition of identity, further stressing the importance of the interaction between the subject and its socio-cultural context:

I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken.' Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us."

(Hall, 6-7, emphasis mine)

To synthesize the above definitions in a form that will best suit the purposes of our investigation, identity<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Erikson, 109, emphasis mine.

<sup>173</sup> Obviously, the particular instance of identity I'm referring to here is the "quantum" occurrence observable at a given moment in a

can be perceived as the intersection between what we feel and what we do (or better said, what is expected from us to do), with the additional remark that ideally the two should coincide. And it is here, at this junction between our "inner self" and our cultural environment, where the severance occurs. But in order to fully understand the mechanics of this phenomenon, we should further explore the elements involved in its equation.

In keeping with the definitions of Erikson and Hall - who locate "identity" at the interface between the self and the other - Marisa Zavalloni's "ego-ecology" study expounds both of these facets into several constituent modules.<sup>174</sup> She describes an entity called "the social identity cluster" consisting of eight "elements of self-identity" (sex, nation, political ideology, family situation, profession, age group, social class, and religious origin). These are complemented by a multitude of "alter-identity elements," such as foreign groups, the opposite sex, different religious origin, political tendency, etc. According to her description of "the social id-ntity," a steady personality entails not only a balance between the inner and outer

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specific context, the result of the interaction between the elements of the "inner self" and the social environment.

<sup>174</sup> Zavalloni, 207.

factors, but also a certain equilibrium between the "self-identity elements." Ideally, all of these facets of someone's personality should coexist harmoniously. Obviously, this is not always the case, due to the influence of the "external forces" represented by the "alter-identity elements" - and the ensuing conflict often leads to mental discomfort. In everyday life these conflicts translate into minor nuisances (mundane familial or professional problems) - but in more intense cases, they may lead to situations where the subject will find himself ostracized. This ostracism is usually forced upon the subject by external forces (e.g., a community will cast out one of its members), although occasionally it may be self-imposed. A variant of this latter case can be associated with the severance. For the severance occurs when the equilibrium of the self-identity cluster is disturbed by the elements of alter identity to the point where the situation becomes unbearable, and it is at the junction between these two groups where the separation takes place. The individual will divest himself of the "alter identity factors" - which is to say, of his entire social environment - in order to replace it with another, more suitable one. Or, failing to do so, with the most appropriate surrogate within his reach. This surrogate

usually relies heavily on the fictional: it may be a completely imaginary world, where all external pressures are eliminated (like in Horia's case), or it may be a 'filtered' version of the actual culture where the person lives, seen through a prism adjusting it to fit the subject's needs and expectations.<sup>175</sup> We need to note that I'm not referring here to the actual, physical setting where the subject resides, and where he merely carries out his workaday existence, but to the community in which he could find spiritual nurturing - and the two environments don't have to necessarily coincide.

A well-balanced identity thus presupposes a concurrence between the subject's expectations concerning his social environment (and conversely, the society's expectations need to be fulfilled by the subject). A failure to meet these expectations by either party will generate disappointment, and this disappointment is a key factor instigating the genesis of the severance. Indeed, disillusion is one of the main common points justifying the joint analysis of our three authors. Yet as is to be

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<sup>175</sup> The subject might register mostly the factors perceived as "good." For instance, Rezzori was fully aware of Cassandra's faults, but he was also inclined to overlook them because of his feelings for her.

expected, beyond the sharing of a common fundamental feature, each case is unique, and many of their particularities can be attributed to the fact that the emotional conflict was caused by distinct constituents of the subject's "self-" and "alter-identity." Case(s) in point: we identified the decisive moment leading to the artists' severance for Tzara and Horia. For Tzara the catalyst of the inner crisis was his initial reception by some of the members of the Zürich group. For Horia, the equivalent reaction was triggered by a similar group rejection. But the two groups belong to different categories of "alter-identity" in the structure outlined by Marisa Zavalloni; moreover, the "element of self-identity" at stake is also different in each case. While in Tzara's instance his "national element" was challenged by "foreign groups," in Horia's case the contradiction is to be found between his own "political ideology" and the one adopted by the rest of the society (i.e., its "political tendency").<sup>176</sup> The details setting apart the psychological processes taking place in the spirit of our authors do not end here. Let us review them in order.

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<sup>176</sup> Each of the terms between quotes in this paragraph corresponds to one of the elements of the "social identity cluster" postulated by Zavalloni.



As noted before, Tzara's disillusion was generated by the initial rejection with which he was met in Zürich, and briefly put, the conflict in question had an essentially cultural nature. This conflict is, I believe, very close to the "generic" representation of cultural discord in its most common form:<sup>177</sup> the member of a community needs to overcome the difficulties hindering his integration in a new social order. What sets apart Tzara's behavior, however, is the direction in which the poet channels his frustration. Instead of condemning the condescension of his future comrades, he assimilates their criticism and focuses his energy with the intent of replacing the factors putting together the "Romanian Tristan" with new ones, making up the "dada architect." Unlike Horia or Rezzori, who don't want/need to carry out this replacement, Tzara rejects not only his former culture, but also, in a way, his former self.

Gregor von Rezzori's severance involves a divergence between the "social class element" and a "social in-group" in addition to the national/foreign dichotomy. The crucial rejection of his work colleagues and friends is due not

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<sup>177</sup> In addition, this example also fits the dichotomy of "major vs. minor" cultures.

only to his belonging to "a different race," but also to his snobbish manners and showy attire.<sup>178</sup>

*Take it easy, punk, if you don' wan' us to beatcha outta your jacket! In dis place, you don' hit a woman 'cause she's scared of a bear, unnerstan', you piss-elegant dude! In this place, ya don' force nobody to play wit' wild animals. We'll teach you to act like a boyar!*

(Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, 135, emphasis mine)

It is interesting to note here the author's highlight of the plebeian's language, which not only further enhances the evocation of the social barrier separating them, but also gives the reader a heavy hint about the narrator's standpoint regarding the issue. Indeed, it is in details like this one where we can find most of the arguments demonstrating the presence (and the nature) of the severance in Rezzori's intellectual saga. However, as we have seen, there is a factor in his attitude setting him apart from Tzara. While similarly to the poet he rejects his native culture, as well as his previous persona (who

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<sup>178</sup> His passions included, for instance, equitation (hardly a commoner's hobby) and custom-made outfits. Interestingly, these same interests would later facilitate his (partial) integration in the German society.

was displaying "a pure distillate of provincialism"), he still acknowledges them as "his own," (at least in retrospect) - an accomplishment made possible by the crucial addendum that he relegates the instances of his "former self" to a separate dimension: time. This is one of the main arguments allowing us to associate the novelist with the Romanian culture in spite of his later biography and the various personalities he adopted along its path.

As we have seen, there are several features contributing to the uniqueness of Vintilă Horia's case. Most remarkably, the psychological elements of his "social identity cluster" conflicting here are not the "social class," and even less the "national" ones. His reasons for mental discomfort originate in the oppositions between his "political ideology" and "religious origin" (from the group of self-identity elements), and "political tendency" - perhaps to some extent even "different religious origin"<sup>179</sup> (from the group of alter-identity). It is imperative to note here that this political disagreement can not be reduced to a conflict between the communist regime and its opponents. What we have here is a pronouncedly right-wing

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<sup>179</sup> The religions here are the same, the difference residing in the extent to which they are implemented in the subject's mentality.

mentality being condemned by a moderate society. As documented in the previous chapter, the author's radical political thoughts were met with the disapproval of most of the Romanian society. Horia eventually found himself rejected not only from his native country, but also from France.<sup>180</sup>

He responded to rejection with rejection, finding relief in a state of denial and in his imaginary worlds. While in a way "inverted" (in that the first step in the separation process was made by the others, rather than himself), this reaction is one of the main arguments substantiating an incidence of the severance in Horia's thought (beyond the declarative stances illustrated by affirmations such as "*les miens n'étant pas les miens*").

I mentioned at the beginning of this section that the severance occurs at the junction between the elements of "self-identity" and those of the "alter-identity" (when using the model and terminology proposed by Marisa

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<sup>180</sup> Two remarks are perhaps in order here: first, the "rejection from France" was obviously not a direct, physical one, but rather a form of intellectual ostracism. Second, the fact that he chose to leave France supports our argument concerning the severance - while he might have been forced to leave Romania in order to avoid a prison term, he did not have to leave France. This second relocation amounts to a "coda" to his initial severance, or possibly even to a repetition.

Zavalloni). The subsequent analysis of each author's case demonstrated the existence of a correspondence between the events leading to an artist's severance and certain psychological occurrences generated by a conflict between the elements of "self-" and "alter-identity." The coincidence between the three instances reviewed here and the objective, systematic analysis undertaken by a number of psychologists comes to support, I believe, the idea that "severance" can be classified as a distinct phenomenon. Along the same lines, (and perhaps most importantly), the comparative assessment of the three authors' behavior revealed a plausible common "pattern," (or a common psychological element) in the mindset of the exiled artist, beyond the expected differences between their upbringings and personalities - a pattern accounting for their attitude towards exile, e.g., the sentiment of "non-belonging" to their native communities, and their channeling of the experience towards artistic ends.

### **Prefigurations of "Severance" in Past Literary Works**

The previous chapters support the ideas that there is a certain psychological development identifiable in some literary works - a process inspired by their authors' exile experience - and that this occurrence has a significant importance in the subject's intellectual evolution, often

being one of its underlying factors (perhaps even the most important one). This process, which I called *severance*, has to do with the subject's concomitant awakening to the facts that on the one hand, he feels he does not belong to a given cultural context, and on the other hand, that his relocation (i.e., exile), into a different environment would not amount to a spiritual loss, but rather to a gain. The study has also attempted to prove that the magnitude (both in qualitative and quantitative terms) of this matter is considerable - to the point where it should grant the concept a place of its own in the realm of literary studies.

A legitimate question ensuing from these conclusions is: if the phenomenon of the severance is really that significant, why has it failed to attract the researchers' attention until now? The answer to this question is twofold: first, that traditionally the great majority of the writers perceived exile as a distressing event, a form of banishment - a tradition whose strength may lie in its venerable origins. Even today, the conventional reference to the paradigmatic image of the exiled artist brings up the image of Ovid. True, there were notable exceptions to this norm (one can find passages prefiguring the idea of severance in the works of Dante or Rabelais) but the

numbers of authors and critics adopting the premise that exile can be a change for the better has become "statistically significant" only in recent times.

The second answer to the above question is: it has failed only partially. While there are a number of works dealing and/or illustrating concepts similar to the notion of "severance," and while they are founded on similar assumptions, (or express equivalent sentiments), they omit to elevate the process to the status of a distinct concept. I will refer to two of the most notable such examples: Claudio Guillén's *On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile*<sup>181</sup> and George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*.<sup>182</sup>

Arguably the greatest appeal of Guillén's article resides in the fact that he frames his vision regarding the "beneficial form of exile" in a sound theoretical framework. This framework consecrates what he calls "the literature of counter-exile" as a substantial domain worthy of any scholar's consideration. Fittingly complementing the present study's propositions, Guillén confirms that we are dealing with a phenomenon of sizeable proportions, as well

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<sup>181</sup> Guillén, Claudio. "On the Literature of Exile and Counter Exile." *Books Abroad* 50 (1976): 271-80.

<sup>182</sup> Lamming, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*. London: Michael Joseph, 1960; Allison and Busby, 1984.

as the need for its study - a study which is to be undertaken from a novel perspective.

Clearly, we are confronted with the sort of political, social or linguistic pattern of events which one may call a historical structure. Insofar as it is historical, it cannot be dissociated from political discontinuities and social or economic changes. As a structure, it reveals enduring conflicts and responses. *It may be that what students of the subject need today is not so much another review of the pertinent events as an effort to approach the pattern as a whole.*

(Guillén, 271, emphasis mine)

Another hypothesis postulated in these pages and corroborated by Guillén is the one advocating the idea that the artist not only can benefit from exile, but in actual fact needs to experience it, if he is to build for himself a truly comprehensive intellectual horizon:

No great writer can remain a merely local mind, unwilling to question the relevance of the particular places from which he writes, or to extend the radius of their presence, or to estrange and exile himself, so to speak, at some point in his search for metaphor, from immediate circumstance.

(Guillén, 280)



This idea is not new: we can find similar arguments in works as early as Petrarch's, who deemed a man "desidiosus ac mollis [lazy and soft]" not to leave home sometime in life.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, this study also used concurring references, like Andrew Gurr's assertion that "exile creates the kind of isolation which is the nearest thing to freedom that a twentieth-century artist is likely to attain"<sup>184</sup> (to mention only one of the many such arguments presented here). However, Guillén's great contribution is to decisively associate this line of thought with the category of "counter-exile literature" (and implicitly to support the idea of severance). Let us close (and confirm) the demonstration about "the benefits of exile" with Guillén's own example - the biography of Adam Mickiewicz:

Mickiewicz was banished to St. Petersburg in 1820, and no one would deny that he left his native province a patriot and a Pole. But he was not moving from a center to a cultural periphery. He was leaving further behind, in fact, his origins in the eighteenth century. Mickiewicz was lionized by the large Polish colonies in Russia, met Pushkin and found himself in

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<sup>183</sup> Petrarca, Francesco. *Rerum familiaribus libri I-VIII*. Translated by Aldo S. Bernardo. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975: 71.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Gurr, 17-18.

Moscow "for the first time," writes Wiktor Weintraub, "in a large, lively and up-to-date literary center . . . . But he was only mildly interested in Russian literature itself. We know that while in Russia he ransacked German and French anthologies of Oriental poetry, studied Italian writers (Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli) and other Western poets." Some years later he heard Hegel in Berlin, talked with Goethe, met Fenimore Cooper in Rome, and wandered, a relatively prosperous "poet - tourist," through various European countries. *Could one possibly imagine the growth and the richness in Mickiewicz's poetry without the adventures of exile? [...] One need not search for a more instructive example of the dynamics of recent exile, or of the passage from the centralized spaces in which Ovid was tormented to the time-bound, strung-out shapes of modern expatriation.*

(Guillén, 276, emphasis mine)

The next point advocated by our study and corroborated by Guillén's commentary is one of the remarks concerning Vintilă Horia's quest for salvation through artistic means. Horia's life story - as well as his objectives - fits the critic's affirmation that "the wanderings of the banished poet are no mere literal foundation for the spiritual odyssey of the soul; for at the same time the ascent of the soul is viewed as a figure and example to be matched by the

actual exile that follows and by its fruit in poetry."<sup>185</sup>  
Horia's case of ("inverted," if you will), severance and his consequent actions were, as we saw, an attempt to reach salvation after having passed through the purgatory of the exile.<sup>186</sup> This quest is in fact a process intimately associated with "the dialectics of counter-exile" - as Guillén calls them - and it was described in a classic religious text:<sup>187</sup> *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*.<sup>188</sup>

The list of correspondences between Guillén's "counter-exile" and the phenomenon I called "severance" does not end here. We already know what "severance" means;

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<sup>185</sup> Guillén, 277.

<sup>186</sup> See page 164.

<sup>187</sup> Not only is this religious reference consistent with Horia's religious character, but also - given his well-known erudition - it is very likely to have been a major source of inspiration for the novelist.

<sup>188</sup> This is a reference to Saint Bonaventura and his writing *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum* (1259).

Giovanni Fidanza, [San Bonaventura] (1217-1274). Philosopher and theologian, born in Bagnoreggio, near Viterbo. He studied theology in Paris; in 1243 he entered the Franciscan order. In 1253 he obtained the licentia docendi, and from 1257 he dedicated himself to teaching.

The thought of Saint Bonaventura is marked by the constant search of God, whose print in the world is decipherable by means of a "mystical journey" leading the mind towards God (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*), a development rendered possible by the original presence of the divine in the human spirit. The final stage of this journey is achieved when the spirit is quieted down, becoming one with God.

I will attempt a description of the "counter-exile literature." The critic defines it by means of differentiation from the "exile literature," which he associates with "direct or near-autobiographical conveyance of the actual experiences of exile itself by means of emotions reflecting the experiences or of attitudes developed toward them." The "exile literature" speaks directly about displacement, and it is usually expressed in a lyric discourse. By contrast, the literature of counter-exile "is the imaginative presentation of relatively fictional themes, ancient myths or proposed ideas and beliefs growing from what are essentially the consequences in the changing writer, or group of writers, of the initial experiences," which is to say, an expression of the displacement's intellectual effect. A condensed description of writings like these - and also the main point where the "counter-exile literature" meets the idea of severance is that they are "responses which incorporate the separation from class, language or native community, insofar as they triumph over the separation and thus can offer wide dimensions of meaning that transcend the earlier attachment to place or native origin."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Guillén, 272.

All of the three authors analyzed in this dissertation fit the above characterization. Arguably, (again) Tzara is the ideal representant of the artists who "triumph over the separation" and creates a poetic language with "wide dimensions of meaning." As shown in chapter two, the very essence of his creativity was related to his capacity to "transcend the earlier attachment." Gregor von Rezzori may belong - at a first glance - to the category of authors whose texts are "direct or near-autobiographical conveyances of the actual experiences of exile," and he even expresses his "emotions and attitudes" generated by those experiences. However, once we remember his confession: "My writing is my life. Constructing a fictional reality comes naturally to me [...] So I construct my own abstract world,"<sup>190</sup> in conjunction with his warnings about the "mythical nature" of his self-representations, we should associate him with the group of counter-exile writers. Finally, Vintilă Horia's imaginary worlds are precisely projections of ancient myths seen through the unique worldview that he developed as a consequence of his displacement.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Anecdote, 12.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Guillén, 272.

In conclusion to the comparison between Guillén's work related to the idea of severance and the current inquiry, I would like to remark that while many of the elements I identified as "literary effects of the severance" coincide with the features of the "counter-exile," the phenomenon of severance precedes the manifestation of the latter. Moreover, I believe that counter-exile itself can be attributed to the primordial reaction of rejection prompting the severance. Embracing the ideology of "counter-exile" presupposes an awakening to the fact that shifting from the old culture to the new one leads to progress. In other words, while Guillén was mostly concerned with the *effects* of the severance, this study also attempted to circumscribe it as a distinct phenomenon and identify its causes.

The second case of "prior art" having to do with the idea of severance is George Lamming's work, and most notably *The Pleasures of Exile*; his greatest merit is perhaps that he expresses a certain antipathy against his own people, while concomitantly trying to overthrow the archetypal image of "the evil colonist."

*The Pleasures of Exile* is a collection of essays dealing with topics such as the Caribbean colonial past, decolonization, and the author's own identity. Making use

of the traditional icon of the colonial subject, Caliban, Lamming adds a novel twist to the classical perception of the relationship between the "master culture"/oppressor and the "primitive nation"/oppressed. He declaratively acknowledges that while colonization may have put an end to the world as his ancestors knew it, it has also provided him with opportunities inconceivable without its intervention.

For I am a direct descendant of slaves, too near to the actual enterprise to believe that its echoes are over with the reign of emancipation. Moreover, *I am a direct descendant of Prospero worshipping in the same temple of endeavour, using his legacy of language - not to curse our meeting - but to push it further,* reminding the descendants of both sides that *what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future which is colonised by our acts in this moment, but which must always remain open.*

(Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 15, my emphasis)

The passages describing the members of his own culture are articulated in a language suggesting condescension and the author's inner detachment from the "subjects" of his narration. Clearly, in his case, the severance has already

occurred, Lamming contemplating his heritage from the position of an outsider, with an attitude similar to Rezzori's - a similarity emerging not only from the tone of his discourse, but also from the writer's attempt to remain objective.

[...] the enemy was My People. My people are low-down nigger people. My people don't like to see their people get on. The language of the overseer. The language of the civil servant .... Suspicion, distrust, hostility. These operated in every decision. You never can tell with my people. It was the language of the overseer, the language of the government servant, and later the language of the lawyers and doctors who had returned stamped like an envelope with what they called the culture of the Mother Country.

(Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 27).

What Lamming's texts add to Rezzori's illustration of the severance is an even more open (read: uninhibited) acknowledgement of the benefits involved with the transfer from an archaic social order to an "urbane" world. Arguably, this "added impact" may be due to Rezzori's constant shifting between two cultural extremes, as opposed to Lamming's "one-way" spiritual trajectory.



## Final Words

Summing up the differences between these previous writings pertaining to the concept of severance and the current research, we need to note the following facts: Guillén's analysis focuses on the actual works of several authors gaining from their exile, and highlights the benefits made possible by their displacement. Lamming's text also presents his contact with the culture of the "other" as a rewarding experience, while enumerating the reasons underlying his appreciation for it. However, while both of these accounts include to a certain extent the idea of severance, they do not isolate the process as a distinct entity (referring to a phenomenon does not amount to defining it as a subject matter *per se*); neither do they attempt to analyze its constituents in a systematic and extensive manner. To put it another way: while there are a number of literary occurrences where we can identify references pertaining to the process of severance (or an idea closely related to it), there is no work where the phenomenon is declaratively converted from an element of the discourse into its very object. This, I hope, is the main merit of the present work.

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## Vita

Alexandru Boldor was born in 1969 in the district of Satu-Mare, Romania. He completed his primary education in his hometown, and his secondary education in the city of Satu-Mare.

In 1990, he continued his education in Cluj-Napoca as a student specializing in linguistics and literature at the Philology College within the University "Babeş-Bolyai."

He was awarded a degree in philology in 1996, with a major in Romanian linguistics and literature and a minor in French linguistics and literature.

Between 1996 and 1998 he taught Romanian and universal literature at high school level.

In 1998, he began his studies with the Program in Comparative Literature at Louisiana State University. He was awarded a Master of Arts degree in comparative literature in 2003.