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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
THE FIELD OF PHILOLOGY**

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

THE PHANARIOT CENTURY AND ITS LITERARY ECHOES

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CONSTANȚA, 2020

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Keywords: *Orientalism, Phanariotism, Balkanism, literary Balkanism, style, lifestyle.*

The thesis *The Phanariot Century and its literary Echoes* investigates the Romanian 18th century and the literary discourse that recovers it as such or in the form of its echoes past the epochs that succeeded it.

The analysis of the current state of research has highlighted the existence of a significant number of studies dedicated to Phanariotism or its persistence in the periods that followed, as well as a diversification of approaches, which attests to the status of the Phanariot phenomenon as a fruitful field of interest at the level of the Romanian scientific research. The studies already established have helped us in establishing a starting point in our own analysis. We tried to associate the existing perspectives, in order to circumscribe the adjacent issues of *Orientalism* and *Balkanism*, but the major objective we pursued is to question *Balkanism* in its literary version. We were interested not only in observing the way in which the term circulates in our specialized literature, but also the extent to which the aesthetic transfer of the notion is pertinent, even though politically forged and understood as a unit of civilization; if it is adequate to state a specific nature of the literature circumscribed to Balkanism and if the approach of scientific substantiation of the notion is supported, as a professional task assimilated by Mircea Muthu.

The answers we obtained led us to the necessity of overcoming the theory of *literary Balkanism*, which, although it failed to obtain a critical agreement, leaves the feeling of a quasi-full establishment. Deconstructing the reasoning on which the theorist Mircea Muthu bases his argument, we automatically undertook to provide our own proposal for reading Romanian literature containing the reflexes of Phanariotism, which is the major challenge of our approach and its novelty. The hypothesis we support is the following: the writings integrated into our Balkan-Eastern-inspired literature reflect a series of life forms, which unify in a lifestyle primarily practiced by the local social elite and to a certain extent by the townspeople with some financial status. We are talking about a lifestyle without a native foundation, but a borrowed one, functioning through a transfer of pattern: an insertion of Oriental culture. From this perspective, which favors the idea of lifestyle, we suggest to re-read our literature that recovers Orientalism in the local version, the Phanariot one, or that reflects only the echoes of Eastern culture, when prose writers built their fictions outside the period 1711-1821.

The thesis is structured on five chapters, complying with the usual meaning of the scientific discourse, which aims at the transition from theory to application. *From and about the Phanariot century: dissertations* represents the chapter on context localization. In this chapter,

we pursued two major objectives, corresponding to the subdivisions that make up the opening section. We were interested, in a first phase, to observe the metamorphoses that the term “Phanariot”/“Phanariotism” registers within the Romanian historiographical research. The analysis, one related to the history of mentalities, performed on a written corpus containing texts published between the two centuries that took place since the abolition of the Phanariot system, starting with the political and social writings signed by Ionică Tăutul, dating from 1821 and from the following years, until the recent researches of Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, highlighted a series of stages indicating a perceptual evolution. The moment the incriminating discourse against the Phanariots is inserted even in the epoch and then in the first years of the return to the principality reigns, and the institutionalization of such a discourse, is the work of the 1848’s generation. The transition to an objective perspective is made by A. D. Xenopol, together with the first modern synthesis of national history. Nicolae Iorga assumes the task of rehabilitating the Phanariots, inaugurating a direction of their monumentalization, by highlighting the value of exponential figures. Research in recent decades have given up on raising the issue in terms of judicial criticism, as the focus of the authors moved, after the discovery of new directions of historical investigation, to exploring the daily existence of members of various social categories. Thus, the temporal distance from the Phanariot phenomenon favors the impartial perspective.

The second objective aimed at in the opening chapter is to render a more accurate, complex and nuanced image of the Phanariot century, by probing the historical, political, social, economic, administrative, cultural and elements of civilization from the Romanian Principalities. This approach, in the field of cultural anthropology, resulted in the following conclusion: the Phanariot century is the period in which Moldavia and Wallachia reach the highest levels of decadence. The suppress of idealized figures, the culture of obedience, the degradation of morals, the corruption in political life, in administration and justice, all testify to the moral decline of this society. But, equally, it is the age when the first steps towards modernization are taken, meaning the adoption of French cultural influence, steps that are initiated or supported by Phanariot lords themselves. The assessment of the Phanariots’ contribution must be carried out by considering both aspects.

The second chapter, called *Two Related Notions: “Orientalism” and “Balkanism”*, is also one of contextualization. The components of *Orientalism*, indicated by Edward Said in his reference work, were correlated with the observations of Western travelers in Moldavia and

Wallachia, in an imagological analysis. We found, thus, that the Romanian realities seen through the lenses of these occasional Western European authors illustrate the two registers - the positive one, consisting in praising the beauty of landscapes and women and appreciating exotic habits, respectively the negative, predominant, aimed at primitivism and despotism - from which the Orientalist discourse is constituted. Therefore, the analysis we performed in the subdivision *Orientalist Echoes in the Romanian Principalities* confirmed the hypothesis related to the integration of the Romanian Principalities in the issue of Orientalism. Directly or indirectly, Southeast Europe has long been subsumed to the Orient. If *Orientalism* is the major narrative of the West on areas and inhabitants of the East, including Southeast Europe, *Balkanism* is a more recent construct that crystallized during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), during World War I and consolidated with the establishment of the communist regime and the violences in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The reasons that determined the appearance of the Balkan stigma, the causes of its persistence, the construction mechanism of the Western perceptions regarding the otherness, are approached in the subchapter *The constitution and perpetuation of the Balkan stigma*. In *Emil Cioran and his revolt against our Balkan background*, we presented an eloquent case of Balkan discourse appropriation by the Southeast European intellectuals. In the final subdivision of the second chapter, we questioned the supposed indivisibility of the *Balkan* concept, which led to the following conclusions: the term does not designate a territorial structure, with clearly marked off borders, just as it should not be understood as a multiethnic conglomerate; its equivalence with a typology is also debatable, with a specificity resulting from a series of mentality reflexes. The Balkan cultural homogeneity appears to us as an exaggerated fact. We consider that the term designates a unity of civilization, understood as “art of living” or “lifestyle” seen from the distorting perspective of Westerners, therefore, a lifestyle fueled by imagination.

With the third chapter, entitled “*Literary Balkanism*”: *a concept under debate*, we enter the field of the history of literary ideas. The major objective we have pursued at this level is to re-discuss *Balkanism* in the literary version. We started from the considerations of the one who has the paternity of the notion, G. Călinescu, we later followed the echoes of his thesis, reviewing opinions of the critics Pompiliu Constantinescu, Marin Mincu, Constantin Ciopraga, Eugen Negrici, to finally discuss the only systematical approach of theoretical substantiation, belonging to Mircea Măruță. We retested all the hypotheses of the distinguished researcher, we returned to the multiple attempts to reshape the term in order to unify its conceptual fluidity, we

followed its development in stages of consolidation and clarification, in an approach that aimed at the integrating meaning of the synthesis, we explored the fallibility of the term and theories put into circulation starting from him. Numerous hesitations and inconsistencies led us to the conclusion of the impossibility of setting the term from an aesthetic point of view. We believe that *literary Balkanism* is an unstable, unstructured and unsupported concept.

The chapter *Romanian Literature and the Orient* contains an integrated approach to the field of artistic imagology. We were concerned with the way in which the image of the Orient and the Levantine - of the Ottoman, especially, as its main animated exponent - is restored by the Romanian literary-artistic creation. Although it is not an exhaustive view, taking into account representative achievements in the field of Romanian poetry, interwar novel and pictorial production, the analysis is consistent enough to highlight a series of perspectives on the Orient and a set of hypostases in which the figure of the Ottoman, suggestive for a mental evolution, which corresponds to the transformations related to the socio-political context. As long as the Romanian-Turkish relations are tense, belligerent, the role attributed to the Ottoman is invariably that of the adversary, of the enemy for whom only a feeling of hostility can be nurtured. The Ottoman serves as an element of contrast, its presence offers the opportunity to assert its national identity, at the level of a militant literature, such as that of the 1848's generation. Once the relations between the two nations become loose, the Ottoman is discovered as culturally interesting and his humanity is revealed. Paintings of Balchik highlight the Oriental lifestyle, perceived both natural and exotic. We find the same perspective in the interwar novel. A diminished Orient, surviving as an enclave, a decorative and museum-like Orient restores this segment of the native Romanian creation.

No longer understanding our Balkan-Oriental-inspired literature in terms of what is commonly called *literary Balkanism*, in the final chapter, *The Aesthetic Recovery of the Orient*. A *stylistic perspective*, we proceeded our own proposal for reading the writings that illustrate this thematic segment of our Romanian artistic creation. The hypothesis we support aims at situating the specifics of Balkan-Oriental literary creations at the level of a lifestyle that literature recovers with the means that are characteristic of various epochs or of each writer. A new look at G. Călinescu's statements revealed a fundamental intuition of the critic, even if in its details partially questionable. The hypothesis we are referring to can be formulated as follows: the literary writings that deal with the Oriental subject are particularized by a high attention paid to

style. We integrated this assumption of G. Călinescu into our reading proposal, verifying its validity, testing its limits.

The exegesis operation carried out in the final chapter is based on recent contributions from members of the French scientific community, on the basis of which we have outlined a much needed theoretical framework. From the reflection of contemporary French researchers, we particularly noted considerations on the subject of literary stylistics, the difficulties encountered in describing the style phenomenon, the relationship in which it is situated with the notion of *ethos*. An important objective for us was to explain the meanings with which the concept circulates in literary studies and thus we presented the main logics that build the theory of style as “gap”, as “choice”, as “honesty”, as “signature” or as “singularity”. The term “stylization of existence”, seen from various perspectives, also caught our attention. This conceptual background provided us with the theoretical tools necessary to approach the literary material, an approach that materialized in the application sections entitled *Phanariot lifestyle, Balkan writers and stylistic productivity*, respectively. However, the way we operate with the style phenomenon transcends the limits of the discourse level, without excluding it. We were also interested in style as an effect of a process of linguistic craftsmanship, as *écriture artiste*, style as a privilege of language, to the detriment of the diegesis. We operate with this meaning in the final subchapter. But the direction we have turned to is a particular form of the phenomenon proposed for discussion, namely lifestyle, a concept that refers to an area of social and cultural anthropology, to the sphere of mentalities. Our analysis is a literary one, in other words, we followed life forms that unify in a lifestyle, in a *manière de vivre* from the Phanariot century, representing a variety of an Oriental *modus vivendi*, and which the literary text recovers with its characteristic means.

The body of research in the two application subchapters consist of fictional creations containing the reflections of Phanariotism, as the very title of our thesis indicates. The exegesis operation aims at the artistic production in prose, mainly the Romanian one. Although less successful and, in some places, incomplete, the writings of the 1848's generation, that illustrate the incipient stage of the Romanian novel, were considered relevant for the topic of our research, including them in the corpus, given that they belong to the generation (biographical and creative) that succeeded the Phanariot regime, a generation that had formed in the spirit of revolutionary and modern ideas that turmoiled Europe, *id est*, the West, but which still lived very well anchored in the customs of the repudiated past. We found it interesting to follow what is

remembered from *the old regime*, the shy attempts at the novel by Mihail Kogălniceanu, Dimitrie Bolintineanu, Ioan M. Bujoreanu, Alecu Cantacuzino, Alexandru Pelimon. We did not include Nicolae Filimon in the previous category, given the recognition he received from his most important writing, which became a milestone that ends the exploratory stage, finalizing the process of crystallization of the novel species in Romanian literature. *The Old and New Parvenu*, especially due to the task the author assumes of memorialist of the Phanariot era, is one of the main texts that make up our corpus. Equally significant are Mateiu Caragiale's novel, *Gallants of the Old Court*, Eugen Barbu's *The Prince*, Silviu Angelescu's *The Rascallians*, *The Handbook of Events* signed by Ștefan Agopian and Doina Ruști's *Phanariot Manuscript*. The analysis is completed with references to Varujan Vosganian's novel *The Book of Whispers* or to *Chira Chiralina and Zoe*, short prose with Panait Istrati and Costache Negruzzzi as authors.

Starting from the idea that the literary text preserves what the epoch has specific and that this specific resides in the practiced lifestyle, we reinterpreted, from this perspective, the works included in the research corpus. We could thus see that the literary text preserves a series of practices and convergent mental reflexes, whose common note is hedonism. In *excess*, we have identified the value that the Phanariot lifestyle favors. The lack of measure, regardless of level - in the possession and display of material possessions, including human resources (gypsy slaves), in the frequency and intensity of practices - is the expression of a need to assert social prestige, an advantageous position in social topography and also a proof of vanity. Ostentation, irrational consumption and non-ascetic practices are part of the logic of social prestige, characteristic of that category of individuals who cultivate feudal attitudes, such as the Romanian aristocracy of the late medieval era and the transition to modernity.

The analysis of the Phanariot lifestyle recovered as a literary fact allowed us to identify some particularities configuring a specific: corruption, to which careerism is subsumed, and a special kind of hedonism.

The level of corruption is associated to a type that operates at the level of organized relations based on very strict hierarchical relationships. Opportunism, manifested in court life, in the form of careerism, involves ritualized forms of acquiring functions through the use of "courtly" means that have fallen very low, with evidence of obedience used as tools of achievement. Within this society built according to the Oriental model, by a Greekized Romanian aristocracy, there are no meritocratic relations, but clientelistic relations, in which the

above-mentioned forms of humility, but also the tip or gift are quasi-ritualized and correspond to a solid Oriental tradition. The fact that this tradition is assumed by the Phanariot elite is also reflected in the way of obtaining the thrones of the Romanian Principalities, which also illustrates a situation of careerism and which must be discussed in connection with the kleptocracy regime adopted by most Greek lords.

The perception of temporality is reduced, roughly, to the idea of the pleasure of lost time. Laziness, calmness, slowness, lack of haste, procrastination, stillness, nonaction, contemplation, siesta, all form a perception of tasted life. Thus, the discussion about the hedonistic culture that this social elite embraces is foreshadowed. The taboos or ritualized forms of sociability, the inclination towards lust, softness, all form a special type of hedonism.

Of course, this priority pursuit of pleasure defines any privileged society that lives beyond any material concern. Similarly, parvenitism characterizes societies in which class differences have faded, which is happening at the European level after the French Revolution. We do not ignore the shareable nature of these distinctive marks or the terms that define certain generally human propensities. But we believe that there are, undoubtedly, specificities and nuances and that they allow us to detect distinct lifestyles. The Phanariot hedonistic culture, for example, differs from the 18th French culture in its Oriental influences, such as sitting positions, in the type of furniture suitable for living by cultivating nonaction, in loose and silky clothes, in slowness and in aromas, in tobacco pipe and in coffee steam. And the differences in terms of careerism, by reference to the same Western culture, aim at pushing towards exaggerating the forms of obedience that operate within the hierarchical relations and the cultivation of ceremonial interferences.

Reading literary texts containing the reflexes of Phanariotism led us to identify two types of attitudes: on the one hand, a critical attitude, aiming at the specifics of a political system and a society, on the other, an idealizing attitude, pursuing an aesthetic sublimation, the nostalgic recovery of a lifestyle whose power of fascination is (re) discovered.

In the last subdivision of our paper, we re-discussed G. Călinescu's statement regarding the propensity for style of the so-called "Balkan" writers, observing some limits, despite the deep intuition he conveys. We verified this hypothesis by highlighting the process of recovering the language of the Phanariot era, as well as various uses of the archaic register. The intention of reconstituting the epoch, of the local color demands the restoration of its language. Abandoned at

some point, when it begins to be perceived as obsolete, this language is recycled by the literary text. The language of the Phanariot era conveys a certain exotic character, but its role is not limited to that. Considered scrap, it has a certain color, the words have a special flavor, so that language becomes an aesthetic tool. The prose writers discover the artistic virtues of the 18th century vocabulary and cultivate them in various keys.

The conclusion of the final subchapter is that the interest in Oriental themes, often recovered on the Phanariot chain, favors the writers' concern for style. The privilege of this component of discourse coincides with the acquisition of an exotic character by the Oriental lifestyle that this literature reflects. And the exotic character occurs when the lifestyle ceases to be a social norm, becoming an epiphenomenon, a marginal, isolated and enclaved fact.

Looking at our approach as a whole, we have the feeling that nothing is immutable, nor the perception of a historical phenomenon such as Phanariotism and even less, the literary ideas. We found the thesis of *literary Balkanism* artificial. We reread it and thought we found, even in the arguments it contains, evidence of expiration. We signaled them without fear of stepping on a minefield, but with the awareness of an awkward task.

Denying the legitimacy of *literary Balkanism*, we automatically undertook to provide a substitute. In reading the literary text, we identified the answer. We noticed that literature records what is proper, in the highest degree, to a society, its imprint on successive generations, its legacy. And our Balkan-Eastern background, significantly consolidated during the 18th century, manifests itself socially in the form of a lifestyle, recovered, with the tools that are characteristic to it, by artistic creation. The reconstruction of the epoch implies a restoration of its language, and with this last process, the exoticism of the Phanariot century is emphasized. The linguistic material that has become the vehicle of exoticism reveals its stylistic potential, thus becoming an aesthetic tool.

From this perspective, we propose to read the literature that retains the Balkan-Eastern component of national identity. In the reflection of a certain lifestyle and in the propensity to the *style* phenomenon, resides the specificity of this segment of our literary creation.