

"OVIDIUS" UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANTA
PhD SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
DOCTORAL FIELD: PHILOLOGY

**EROTICISM IN THE CONTEXT OF INTER-WAR
LITERATURE; CAMIL PETRESCU, MAX BLECHER AND
MIRCEA ELIADE**

Scientific Coordinator:
Prof. Univ Dr. habil. Angelo Nicolae Mitchievici

PhD Candidate:
Alin-Daniel Piroșcă

Constanta , 2021

Table of contents

Introduction

Part I. Philosophy

Chapter 1. Eroticism and theory issues

- 1.1. Philosophical perspective of the concept of eroticism
- 1.2. The propedeutics of eroticism in Greek philosophy
- 1.3. Eroticism and the effect of the transition at Georges Bataille
- 1.4. Eroticism and peripheral temptation at Roger Dadoun
- 1.5. Octavio Paz' s eroticism or the temptation of double
- 1.6. The eroticism and temptation of the daily life at Herbert Marcuse
- 1.7. Eroticism and metaphysical pattern at Julius Evola
- 1.8. Eroticism and reflection of phenomenological totality/wholeness at Emmanuel Lévinas
- 1.9. Eroticism and erotic intersubjectivity at Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida
- 1.10. Eroticism and cultural conjugation at Giorgio Agamben and Byung-Chul Han

Chapter 2. Eroticism and colliding regimes

- 2.1. Eroticism and sexuality
- 2.2. Eroticism and love
- 2.3. Eroticism and privacy
- 2.4. Eroticism and nudity
- 2.5. Eroticism and pornography

Chapter 3. Eroticism and the substance of decay

- 3.1 Bolges of eroticism
- 3.2. Sexual ambiguity and hybrid forms of eroticism
- 3.3. Representations of abisal eroticism and sexual psyche

Part II Literature

Chapter 4. Eroticism - the subject of a permanent dispute between philosophy and literature.... 90

4.1. The reason for the dispute

Chapter 5. Camil Petrescu: Eroticism in philosophical and literature binomial. (*The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War*)

5.1. From the ambiguity of the erotic to the model of adaptive quidness *The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War*

5.2. Education: The kierkegaardian pattern and Camil Petrescu's intellectual approach

5.3. Erotic cutouts in *Procust's Bed*

Chapter 6. Max Blecher : cutting the erotic into literary perspective

6.1. Max Blecher: A view of the work

6.2. With eroticism at the sanatorium: *Healed Hearts*

6.3. Erotic initiations in *Stories in the Immediate Unreality*

6.4. Erotic topographies: Blecherian paneroticism

Chapter 7 Mircea Eliade: The spectra of eroticism and erotiv hermeneutics

7.1. Mircea Eliade in the interwar context

7.2. The spectra of the erotism between romanticism, decay and popular culture (*Miss Christina*)

7.3 Hierogamy: eros and magic in *The Snake*

7.4. *Maitreyi* and the exotic eroticism

General bibliography

Key words: Eroticism, heroes, love, seduction, ambiguity, wish, sexuality, pornography, nudity, privacy, dispute, sexual deviation, psychopathology, philosophy, literature, quarel.

Summary

The main theme of this work consist in the research of the concept of eroticism and the identification of erotic levels in the structure of the interwar literary text in Camil Petrescu's literature ("Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război" and "Patul lui Procust"), Max Blecher ("Inimi cicatrize" and "Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată") And Mircea Eliade ("Domnișoara Christina", "Şarpele" and "Maitreyi"). Eroticism is analyzed from a two-ways perspective: philosophical and literary. The subject of eroticism, as bidder is proposing the interdisciplinary approach, as difficult and delicate involves the cause of reflection and the recovery of a defining situation. What is noticeable and identifiable in the case of eroticism is the absence of a definition, which is the effect of the ambiguity that eroticism proposes. In other words, eroticism is eliminated by speech, abandoning the meaning of the concept, but amplifying its meaning by what literature, which does not intend to work with episteme, reflects through various ruling lines.

Our approach is placed within the range, which can only engage in its own reflection only in the moment of an overshooting and of a recording of an inventory of theories that set in a theoretical framework the subject of eroticism. That is why I chose to divide the work into two parts: Philosophy and Literature. This structure is intended not only to reflect, each of them, on the subject, but to capture eroticism in the allure of the subject, ambiguous, a true "apple of discord" of the relationship between philosophy and literature. Eroticism therefore proposes the paradigm of a *quarrel*, of a dispute.

The gist of our concerns was to identify some defining characteristics for the subject of eroticism and to exercise the report of what is veiled, which is out of focus in the literary text as regards eroticism, since the leading thread of eroticism comes to an understanding of certain codes, of the states at the end of which we find certain conditions in which eroticism manifests itself. Literature also proposes a certain pattern of eroticism, starting from erotic typologies.

What we proposed was mainly the observation of eroticism in the two territories we considered, philosophy and literature, and the delimitation of places, erotic typologies and erotic spectrum in the novels written in between the World Wars 1 and 2 by the Romanian writers Camil Petrescu, Max Blecher and Mircea Eliade.

Eroticism becomes the subject of reflection only to the extent that love vanishes, leaving room for introspection and doubt, that is to say, those territories that are unreturnable and unorderly in the natural expansion of the feeling of love. In our research, we suggest that eroticism is eliminated by discourse, leaving us to face an ambiguity, but a consistent ambiguity that proposes our own scenario.

Our *sentence/thesis* is as follows: If love does not need justification or if the love relationship does not leave room for further explanations, eroticism is that ineffable one that damages, without ruining, the feeling of love. It is precisely because of the need for scenario, through the ordering or idealistic projection of a subjective proposal to assemble what is to happen, that eroticism makes love abandon itself to this thought. After all, eroticism takes on the essentiality of a state and extends it into the structure of an event that has not yet taken place.

We could also say that love ties in close (or immediate) touch of the eros to its functional particularities, or else to the dynamic functions of the eros, which cause the eroticism. That is why the literary character lives his love honestly at the beginning, and only then at the introspective level. The introspective approach can also be considered as an exercise in devoating your own sense of love, identifying the way love is shown, without being conjugated by the intrinsic affections of life.

We believe that when we talk about eroticism, we remove from our speech and perceptions what traditionally this concept decelerates, the idea of love, as well as other connotations. In other words, it is not the question of calibrating the idea of eroticism on a pure structure, stripped of feelings and impressions, but of excluding what could detour a substance. The courtly love of the medieval knights is such a love, as it abandons the esthetic and the imaginary, leaving room for a set of gestures designed to restore love to its purity.

The first part of the paper, philosophy, contains three chapters which are meant to conceptually place eroticism and to set up a wide field of observation, philosophy, phenomenology, psychopathology, psycho-analysis and psychology.

In the first chapter, *Eroticism and the Level of Theorizing*, we aim to map out the main theories and approaches to eroticism. The historical level we chose for is broad, our intention is to map the main theories and some paradigms of work regarding the concept of eroticism. Starting from a case-by-case exercise in which we affirm that eroticism is a philosophical issue, despite an intent to eliminate the concept from philosophy, we come to the reflection of Jean Luc Marion who sensed that it was philosophy, understood at a generic level as *a love of wisdom*, he did not pay attention to the word love. The inventory present in this chapter begins with Plato, practically the moment of entry of the concept of eros into the West. A look at *The Symposium* dialogue, and the time of the dispute between Socrates and Aristofan, leads to a paradigm shift in regards to the erotic: the transition from the ethics of pleasure to the philosophical erotic is being made.

The search for the concept is brought into modernity with Georges Battatile. We will take on the fundamental idea of Battatile, the transgression as a dynamic mechanism of eroticism, but we will apply it as a way of making the eros projections outward in the consciousness, which will inevitably lead to introspection.

The temptation of the peripheral at Roger Dadoun reveals the simplistic and somewhat reductionist way in which the eroticism directly related to the idea of sexuality can be thought, but also the way to reduce eroticism to the body functions.

Surely we cannot say anything simple about love, the more we cannot elucidate the meaning of eroticism, but what makes love has a double effect, just like a flame, as the Mexican poet Octavio Paz says. And this brings us closer to our idea which will go through this research, namely that the refuge of love or eroticism is the introspection, as *a trace*, in the Derrida's meaning like sense of that ineffable state that crossed our being for a while.

We chose to include in this inventory the theory of Herbert Marcuse, who talks about taking over the idea of eroticism in the natural order of the roles that the individual plays in the modern society. This part is useful for research from the perspective of accepting eroticism in the cultural-civilization report and for trying to shape a mechanism to place eroticism in the civilized paradigm.

For Julius Evola, eroticism, even if it directly links with the sexual instinct, finds a determining reason in its natural state, in other words not in pleasure but in impulse. This idea

has a volume in the theory that we will expose in our research, namely that eroticism needs scenarios, and the impulse can be considered a stage in the leading threads of eroticism.

The eroticism and total reflection at Emmanuel Lévinas talk about the subtle shift from erotic to erotic phenomenon, thus bringing the problem of the erotic into the area of phenomenology. Lévinas says that beyond his many faces and traces (sexuality, desire, passion, love, friendship, etc.) the erotic phenomenon appears and becomes central in any attempt able to understand the condition of the unwillingness, self and alteration of the other.

Toward the end of this chapter, I am adding some highlights upon the recent research on the subject of eroticism. The hermeneutics and phenomenological exercise is found mainly in Jean Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida, and in Agamben and Han we discuss the present phases of the eros, conceived in the open and interdisciplinary perspective of the cultural approach.

The second chapter, entitled *Eroticism and Interfering Regimes*, addresses the conceptual determinations of eroticism reflected by reference to sexuality, love, privacy, nudity and pornography. By making these distinctions, we are able to place determined interrogations for the nature of eroticism, its defining characteristics. We will notice that every time it is placed in a report, eroticism is summed up to the discourse that will eliminate it, thus it cannot be fixed to a definition, or it is outside, becoming a witness to the phenomenon it precedes or follows.

The third chapter, *Eroticism and the Substance of Alteration*, continues the confusion in deter-pathology, psycho-analysis and psychology. Based on the reflections of Krafft-Ebbing, A. Moll, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, we note that the nature of eroticism can be transferrable to the area of sexual deviation, sexual ambiguity and some hybrid forms of erotic manifestation on the horizon of an abusal eroticism.

In **the second part** of the paper, literature, **the fourth chapter** of the paper places the subject of eroticism within the framework of a dispute, a *quarrel*. I referred to William Marx's book *The Hatred of Literature* because what we are interested in is the dispute over eroticism on the territory of the two disciplines and the acquisition of a level of play and interpretation in theoretical articulation and literary expression. This identification of a source of conflict is all the more exciting. In other words, can we wonder when eroticism is being created as the subject of this dispute between philosophy and literature? Literature lacks an object of study, in other words, literature does not organize a systematic search for something, of a particular object as in the case of wisdom for philosophy, knowledge of truth for science, of God for religion. But we

must not forget that literature organizes a form of knowledge which is its own, the recognition of the human being not in its absolute, but in the reality of everyday life, that is to say, in the posterity of a palpable, observable reality. Eroticism in this case becomes one of the exciting topics for both philosophy and literature.

Thus, William Marx offers the prospect of a formidable conflict between philosophy and literature, in view of axiological supremacy. This conflict is assumed, sometimes open, even in modern times, where the philosophy is called upon to provide a legislative, legitimate, intellectual environment to eroticism, in other words, to "tame an evasive term, to take over a problematic, even dangerous territory". As we can see, one of the hypostasis of this confrontation can be watched in Camil Petrescu's novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război*. What we are interested in is this state of conflict which has been carried over from antiquity and which is now reflected in the complexity of the situation in which the philosophy is placed. So we are dealing with a dilemma.

In chapter 5 we analyze the eroticism reflected in Camil Petrescu's novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război*, ways of seduction in the comparative register Stefan Gheorghidiu - Soren Kierkegaard's seducer Johan and the erotic levels in *Patul lui Procust*. The analysis is twofold, as we focused not only on literature, but also on Camil Petrescu's philosophy, which was exposed by the writer in the *Doctrina substanței* treaty. We believe that a large part of the ideas he presented in his literature represent philosophical premises and extensions of thought based on the author's obvious intention to develop a philosophical system. Therefore, in order to elaborate this perspective that displaces the eroticism from the argument of philosophy with literature, by poking the philosopher-writer into the backings of a (un)-understanding of both his destiny and the erotic mechanisms that takes him over in a vague paradigm, we believe that Camil Petrescu's novel is an excellent model of study. In *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război*, eroticism wraps up the novel under the simple gesture of an exercise of Ela's admiration for Gheorghidiu's social position. But this admiration exercise is a corrupt one, because admiration is a decorative element that sets up the idea of a man's personal style, so then Ela can attach herself admiratively to other virility styles. The philosopher is found himself in the difficult position of identifying an object of knowledge without having access to it, and this object of knowledge is his own love, which he cannot "understand". That is why the problem of Camil Petrescu's novel is more profound than the

circumstance of a relationship between two characters (Ela and Gheorghidiu), it questions the philosophy's ability to bring this object of knowledge, which is eroticism, closer to itself. In the novel, the level of eroticism increases to the extent that this absolute possession emerges from it. On the other hand, we should not forget that the voluptuousness comes from the maculation of the loved one. Baudelaire says that voluptuousness comes from the desire to do harm. Gheorghidiu is in the posture of a philosopher touched by feeling/emotion, feeling that alters the form of knowledge which the author uses: Philosophy. A transgressive mechanism of the erotic leads to the intention to recover the rest of a love relationship. Ela offers herself like an object without any rest.

The appearance of a surplus, of a remnant occurs with the ambiguity of the character, as a finding for Gheorghidiu that a part of Ela's personality remains unknown, inaccessible, mysterious. We can observe that Gheorghidiu does not solve this rest, this ambiguity by framing it in a typology, in a convention, such as that of "the eternal feminine or the stereotype of feminine versatility as in Rigoletto: " [...] la donna è mobile, what a feather in the wind. "

In many situations, eroticism benefits from a certain scenography, direct or indirect, from an arrangement, from a small show that can occur spontaneously. This occurs especially when eroticism is associated with seduction, in a lasting partnership. Availability does not ensure the erotic staging, just as the establishment of a continuity, a banality or a routine does not stimulate eroticism. On the contrary, what becomes the optimal framework for the erotic drive is the discontinuity, the transitive episode, initially conceived in the (im) possibility of being continued and fixed in the routine.

The sixth chapter examines two of Max Blecher's novels, *Inimi cicatrize* and *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*. Our analysis brings new perspectives on the interpretation of Blecherian novels, emphasizing the emphasis on erotic layers. In *Inimi cicatrize*, for example, it is not the body that is the central theme of the novel, as some studies have argued, but this sensory and negotiated eroticism mediated by disease. What matters in Blecher's novel is this regime of dilated perception. Not even disease is a mechanism that Blecher proposes as a mechanism for action and sweeping of perceptions. Blecher does not build through Emanuel, in *Inimi cicatrize*, an exceptional patient, he does not make suffering, like Dostoevsky, a soteriological instrument, a form of choice, but he ridicules this state of affairs.

Eroticism is a cultural fact, sexual arousal is a physiological act. Eroticism presupposes a crime, it is subject to the violation of a ban, it is accompanied by an impurity, with the presence of something that is cruel. The praise/eulogy of artificiality is a factor that amplifies eroticism, it is able to highlight it. In eroticism there is always something additional to sexuality, there is an addition - artificiality, mizanscene, the contrast that opposes what is cultural to what is wild, not just transgression, but impurity, as Georges Bataille said. The disease can intervene as a favorable environment for eroticism, insofar as it draws attention to the nuances, insofar as it widens the field of perception. Eroticism orchestrates the five senses, all of which may be likely to punctuate erotic nuances. Eroticism is caused by bias, by the perspective of incompleteness. The subject creates his erotic scenario, and the theme itself takes in eroticizing key the event that is about to happen, even if the event is thought in the full complicity of the eroticizing subject and in the perspective of a disappointment.

The idea of the erotic scenario is also visible in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*. A common denominator of the erotic scenario is the appearance of an obstacle, an obstacle to the fulfillment of sexual intercourse, which on the one hand increases the frustration and impatience of the adolescent (central character), and on the other hand has the appearance of improvisation, forcing with the suggestion that the two protagonists of the novel could be surprised at the time of sexual intercourse. All these elements contribute to the intensification of eroticism, they are part of the erotic scenario that Clara stages.

In Max Blecher's novels, we are dealing with an enlargement of the sphere of eros, with a pansexualization of the world. An easily interpretable symbol - the smell of rotten shells, reminds us of Patrick Suskind's dizzying scent. The perfume produces a narcosis, a faint, a dizziness, a suspension of the will. The whole body is taken possession of, it is intoxicated by this smell. There is in this description of the crisis also an erotic dimension, an installation of pleasure in the whole body caused by an external stimulus, the suspension of will and consciousness, the surrender. Pleasant and dizzying fainting can also function as a connotation of an eroticization. In fact, the narrator's contact with the world is mediated by eros, and the probing of reality, "events", also takes place through the prism of eros. Eroticism is a component that belongs to the cultural space and that configures a particular space of the relationship between the sexes, a special dialogue developed in a sensory dimension that encourages explanatory fictions and the construction of pleasure scenarios.

The seventh chapter, Mircea Eliade- the specters of eroticism and erotic hermeneutics, proposes an analysis of eroticism in the novels *Domnișoara Christina*, *Şarpele* and *Maitreyi*.

The erotic intensity in the novel *Domnișoara Christina*, the construction of erotic scenarios in the field of erotic misery, are visibly reflected in the novel and led us to the idea that voluptuousness stems from the consciousness of transgressing the interdict, from a consciousness of doing evil, of breaking the taboo, of the profane. Referring to Eliade's literature, we cannot neglect the philosophy and religious aspects on which Mircea Eliade reflected for a long time, true comprehensive springs for the guiding lines of the ideas reflected in the literary text. I noticed that the eroticism in the novel *Şarpele* is no longer dependent on a sensuality that sexual knowledge already establishes, but on its transfiguring capacity. It is the eros that resonates with the sacred, untied of any residue of impurity, of any triviality and of any bourgeois convention, that eroticism which serves as a binder to the primordial couple of man and woman.

We are dealing in the Romanian snake with a series of initial thresholds, of blockades and deblockades, of bans and of breaking of bans, and of returns, rewards, all of which set up this complicated erotic scenario, but made out of the social dimension, integrated into the sacred size. The heroism is connected to a number of cultural codes, the analysis of the *Maitreyi* novel brought us to the idea of a cultural difference disputed in terms of eroticism, sensuality, communication between man and woman. As for the intensity of eroticism, in *Maitreyi* novel it is assimilated to an experience of ecstasy. There is obviously a fusion between love and eroticism that is mutually reinforcing. But there is also an temptation to overcome any limitation, even the unlimitative of love, if we associate this sensual-erotic experience so intense, to a mystical experience.

Eroticism is fixed today in an ambiguous program, of a meaning beyond its own meaning, situated in the condition of a permanent interpretation. We do not know whether Ruwen Ogiens sentence, "today's pornography is tomorrow's eroticism" retains the terms of a possible horizon, but we can reflect on the eroticism of this double hypostasis that we have proposed in this paper: philosophy and literature.

Often, eroticism is connected to love, but we can also see that love is no longer a dynamic medium today, as in Dante where "... rotates suns and stars", but rather a witness, always located outside our life contained in love, if we think of Ortega Y Gasset's theory.

Lévinas stated that "[...] to love means to fear for the other", and although we are aware of the absence and at the same time the lack of love of the other towards us, this is exactly what gives us the right to own the whole. But integrity is not the characteristic of eroticism, but only partiality, therefore, we are faced with a dilemma, a hidden object of our desires.