Dissident Eloquence: Take Ionescu, Take-ism and Fin-De-Siècle Aesthetics

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the relationship between political rhetoric and literature in the wider context of the cultural modernization which occurred in Romania during the second part of the 19th century. I intend to follow two parallel movements—the* extension *of literature into politics and the* projection *of politics into aesthetics/morals—in Take Ionescu's speeches between 1884 and 1900. In spite of theories claiming that literature derives its strength from the growing institutionalization of its practices and, perhaps, from the movement of peripheral aesthetic phenomena to the social limelight, my research shows the contrary: in the period commonly called fin de siècle, one realizes that literary effects are employed in the practical messages of the political world as a survival mechanism.*

Keywords: *extension, projection, dandy, dissidence, fin de siècle*

Résumé : *Cet article s'occupe de la relation entre la rhétorique politique et la littérature, dans le contexte plus large de la modernisation culturelle qui a eu lieu en Roumanie pendant la deuxième partie du XIXe siècle. Nous avons l'intention de suivre deux mouvements parallèles –* l'extension *de la littérature vers la politique et* la projection *de la politique dans l'esthétique/la morale – dans les discours prononcés par Take Ionescu entre 1884 et 1900. En dépit des théories qui prétendent que la littérature puise sa force dans l'institutionnalisation croissante de ses pratiques et, peut-être, dans le mouvement des phénomènes esthétiques périphériques vers les feux de la rampe sociale, nôtre recherche montre le contraire: pendant la période généralement connue sous le nom de fin de siècle, on se rend compte du fait que les effets littéraires sont utilisés dans les messages pratiques du monde politique en tant que mécanisme de survie.*

Mots-clés : *extension, projection, dandy, dissidence, fin de siècle*

Instead of Introduction

The relationship between political rhetoric and literature should be analyzed by taking into consideration the wider context of the cultural modernization which took place in Romania during the second half of the 19th century. In this period, it is generally admitted that literature, the literati and literary objects derived their strength from the growing institutionalization of their practices and, perhaps, from the movement of peripheral

aesthetic phenomena to the social limelight. However, the cultural hints surreptitiously embedded into *fin-de-siècle* political speeches may evince exactly the opposite. Is it possible that the extension of literary techniques towards the political message might actually function as a survival strategy for literature? Is it a sort of disguise that literature perversely assumes in order to divide—into small units, or ideologemes—the ideological bulk conveyed throughout the political talk?

On the one hand, *the extension* of the literary domain into the field of everyday communication only points to the malfunction of the linguistic channel. Once the conative and phatic functions have molten into reflexivity, the political talk itself evinces a counter-triumphant disposition. If we take into account the historical context, one cannot help but notice the infection of political speech with Decadent aesthetics. On the other hand, what was included in the political speech without having an overtly political relevance—various aesthetic elements, ranging from figures of speech to quotations and anecdotes—remains a textual latency. To paraphrase Fredric Jameson, the "aesthetic unconscious," applied to political texts, manifests itself as a disrupting, perchance anarchic, force. Nevertheless, the same phenomenon can be defined as an instance of conscious *projection*; indeed, the political speech never ceases to project itself into the higher realms of aesthetic autonomy. In spite of its application to current realities and even to strict ideological allegiances, political communication appears to preserve a form of "aesthetic imagination," eventually convertible into what conservative thinkers like Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk and Leonidas Donskis call "moral imagination."

The *extension* (of literature onto politics) and the *projection* (of politics onto aesthetics) suggest a literature-politics-aesthetics triangle. While the matters are quite complicated from a theoretical point of view, I tried to find, in 19th-century Romania, a few examples where the phenomenon of *crossbreeding* or *contamination* seems to define the coexistence of practices specific to oral and written discourses. Even though literature usually observes the protocols of written discourse, while political rhetoric commits to the rules of oral communication, even though literature has always aspired to aesthetic autonomy, while political oratory has always insisted on the transmission and negotiation of referential reality, both of them share a set of common interests and techniques. First, the main concern of both literature and rhetoric is to arrest the public's attention; secondly, they both aim to create a sense of tradition; thirdly, they aspire to give a coherent, though not always lifelike, image of the world. C. Xeni, one of our local experts in the art of eloquence, noticed that the genius of great speakers resides in "a sense of imponderables" or "the art of what is possible" (Xeni 77-78, my trans.)[1]. The rules of eloquence are ineffable. As for tropes and figures of speech, literature and rhetoric share—it goes without saying—the whole list.

If not Articulate, a Genius Is Not a Genius

In the light of the common pursuits of literature and rhetoric, the most important trait they share is, perhaps, their concern with the concept of "genius." From Carlyle's theory

on "heroes"[2] to Max Nordau's reflections on "morals"[3] (*Morals and the Evolution of Man*) and "degeneration" (P.M. Baldwin), 19th-century thought tries to discover what exactly brought people like Napoleon to the front of public life. Was it their brilliant eloquence? Was it their practical genius? The answer requires us to discriminate between (abstract, philosophical) politics and Rochau's famous concept of *Realpolitik*—a distinction which actually corresponds to Carlyle's distinction between silent and articulate heroes and to his own definition of success within the field of political action[4].

Once the mastery of rhetoric skills is acknowledged as one of the main propellers of one's political career, Eugène Paignon's book *Éloquence et improvisation: Art de la parole oratoire au barreau, à la tribune* [*Eloquence and Improvisation: The Art of Rhetoric at the Bar, at the Stand*] insists on the qualitative difference between craft and the art of eloquence. Paignon's stress falls on originality, that is, on improvisation and on the deliberative genre of rhetoric. It is not the greatness of men, but the greatness of language which brings political success. From now on, skilful improvisers take the front line. Instead of Burke, Fox, Pitt, and Sheridan, Paignon enthrones a new dynasty of French tribune heroes: Mirabeau, Barnave, Maury, Cazalès, Danton, Vergnaud, Dupin, Foy, De Serre, De Villele, Martignac, Stanislas Girardin, Saint-Marc Girardin, Camille Jordan, Casimir Perier, Royer-Collard, Benjamin Constant, Thiers, Guizot, Berryer, Odilon Barrot, Lamartine, Villemain, Duchatel, Ledru-Rollin, Jaubert and so on (54-67). The change of stress does not remain without consequences. From now on, the message of every gifted speaker will be suspected to be a combination of truth and lies; truth has always been associated with concision and straightforwardness, whereas lies deal with exaggeration and fictionalization. In other terms, the speaker's self is torn, as Max Nordau puts it, between "individual morality" and "collective immorality," between silent inner dispositions and articulate outer negotiations. Translated into Gilbert Durand's anthropological view on imaginary structures, one might say that the identity of each speaker is a fabric of at least two faces, corresponding to the diurnal and the nocturnal regimes.

Therefore, not only the political speeches as textual artefacts, but also the prominent personalities of 19th-century Romania go through the most spectacular transitions and transformations from silent inner dispositions (the literary) to articulate outer negotiations (the political). Almost all the figures that marked the Romanian political life of the 19th century evolved from the state of ambitious literary men to the industriousness of actual statesmen: Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, C.A. Rosetti, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Ion Ghica, Vasile Alecsandri, Cezar Bolliac, Grigore Alexandrescu, Titu Maiorescu, P.P. Carp, B.P. Hasdeu, V.A. Urechia, Alexandru Lahovary, Take Ionescu, Nicolae Filipescu, Constantin Dissescu, Th. Rosetti, I.G. Duca, to name just a few. Thus, first comes the writer, and only then the politician.

None of the cases listed above indicates the writer's irresolute severance from the versatile political leader. Therefore, the inherent cohabitation of intimate and public facets must also be the reason for the massive presence of literary traces into whatever political assertions these personalities make. Even though the Romanian Parliament was, around 1865, a fairly young institution, one cannot overlook the fact that some of the speeches

delivered there lost sight of the issues under debate; Hugo, Vigny, Lamartine, and the classics are introduced into arguments as if the debates were to be solved by some higher cultural jury. Even though the parliamentary institution was going through a process of accelerated development and modernization, literary interests were very much present in the discussion of mundane issues, while the political world inflates and witnessed dissension, dissidence, volatility, and frequent transfers to other parties. At the end of the 19th century, public speakers continued to cherish literary expressivity. Yet it is not the exquisite rhetoric of political talk which gives the real measure of its incessant aesthetic creativity. The literature-politics-aesthetics triangle pertains, to a certain extent, to the mystery of the personalities who shaped the history of Romanian rhetoric.

Eloquence, Philanthropy and the Love of Public Exposure: A Romanian Andrea Sperelli

Advised by Ion Petrovici, himself an expert in eloquence, as attested by his radio conferences (*Discursuri parlamentare* [*Parliamentary Speeches*]; *Talentul oratoric: Conferințe la radio 1932-1943* [*Being a Good Speaker: Radio Conferences 1932-1943*]), Eugen Lovinescu puts together an anthology of "occasional writers." Incomplete and written in haste, it should be taken as a collection of literary pieces drafted by political leaders who, occasionally, committed themselves to the noble art of ineffectiveness. Lovinescu shows a good intuition, but he definitely misses Petrovici's point. The orator, says the philosopher, is a person who relies on "spontaneity in phrasing" and "improvises with ease" (Petrovici, *Talentul oratoric*) Therefore, in the spirit of Carlyle, Paignon & comp., even in the 20th century, the definitions of eloquence cannot do without the concept of genius. However, what the public applauds most in the brilliant speaker is neither his visionary powers, nor his personal talent. Again, Take Ionescu's biographer puts a stress on enthrallment, magic, "sorcery" or "apocalyptic diction" (Xeni 145). Xeni's remark is worth investigating because it depicts the political orator as an ambiguous Medusa, that is, half-masculine and half-feminine, with an ability to trigger what the Decadents used to call "sacred horror." Thus, the insertion of the beautiful into the political message represents a stimulus which directs attention towards the speaker's personality. The speaker himself experiences a process of reification and becomes an *objet d'art*. We are not far from Walter Benjamin's idea on the "aestheticization of politics."

Indeed, Lovinescu's own view on Take Ionescu rests on a rather dandyish portrait—long frocks, slim frame, white skin, with hues of French red, graceful and almost invertebrate movements, similar to those of the 13th Lord Derby (E. Lovinescu 111). Furthermore, the politician's most fierce adversaries only emphasize the feminine lines of his character. Nicolae Filipescu says that everything in Take Ionescu follows the logic of the curve: the forehead, the temples, the cheeks, the chin, the arch of his moustache. Certainly, the figure of this articulate and polymorphic genius attracted, like the mystery of the Medusa, all of his contemporaries. Browsing one of the most informed treatises on graphology—Henri Stahl's publication from the late twenties—, one comes upon a fine analysis of Take Ionescu's writing, a final illustration for the theories laid beforehand.

The reputed expert, who also breveted a method of parliamentary stenography, gives a facsimiled autograph and insists on the writer's feminine writing, as well as on a tendency towards dissidence, that is, a penchant to "do everything by himself." The feminine portrait is rounded by features such as high-mindedness, fastidiousness, and native intelligence (Stahl 99-101).

Aware of the fact that the icon's evanescent beauty eludes a sharp diagnosis, C. Xeni resorts to a craftier solution. He describes Take Ionescu's personality indirectly, by describing his house. This is a two-story space, accommodating a Janus Bifrons, a man of as many talents as Hydra's heads or, in Joseph Campbell's terms, a "hero with a thousand faces." On the first level, the politician lives a bourgeois life, occasionally relishing the pleasures of philanthropy, surrounded by his burgundy leather armchairs, by his books bound in burgundy leather, and by his wife's assorted portrait, which shows her wearing a burgundy velvet dress. However, the second level is marked by another kind of atmosphere (suggestive of high aristocrats and famous European diplomats), as if Take Ionescu's house contained two different worlds (Xeni 233). Xeni's biographical account ends with the image of the Polar Star—which does not undergo the decline most earthly things experience—and adds a reference to D'Annunzio's hero. The biographer alludes to Andrea Sperelli, the main character of *Il piacere*, and provides the following quote: "Man has nothing in this world except what he gives" (Xeni 500). There is a certain ambiguity between philanthropy and dandyish exposure. Later on, Ion Petrovici will emphasize the speaker's sensuality, comparing Take Ionescu's phrases to Rubens's rosy and rubicund faces (qtd. in Haneș and Solomonovici 147).

The Extension of Literature into Ideological Gallimaufry: From Dissidence and Centrism to pure Take-ism

The biographer does not want to portray Take Ionescu in the image of a radical democrat, nor in that of a harsh conservative boyar. On the contrary, from 1884 onwards, the statesman used to claim that the universal suffrage represents, in a country dominated by illiteracy and political inexperience, the surest way to dictatorship (Ionescu, qtd. in Xeni 73). The commentators—C. Xeni, E. Lovinescu, Nicolae Filipescu, Constantin Dissescu, Henri Stahl, Sterie Diamandi, Ion Petrovici, Maude Rea Parkinson and so forth—all highlight one and the same personality trait. Moralists would call it "moderation," whereas political philosophers would name it "centrism." I would call it "eloquent dissidence."

By the end of the 19th century, Take Ionescu stands as the undisputable icon of centripetal political drives. He begins by being a liberal under I.C. Brătianu's flag (1884), then he passes into the dissident liberal fraction (together with Nicolae Filipescu, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, Manolache Costache Epureanu, C.P. Olănescu and Al. Vlahuță), and speaks on behalf of the joint opposition for seven years. Afterwards, he enters the Conservative Party in 1891, but he leaves it in 1908, and eventually forms his own party, named, after the fashion of English politics, the Conservative-Democratic

Party. *Political volatility* as well as *the personality cult* define Take Ionescu's tendency towards "centrism."

I do not aim to offer a strict definition of political "centrism"; instead, I would like to draw attention to the causes and effects of such behavior. First and foremost, centrism is the refusal of radical solutions. Next, centrism cannot exist without dissidence and the practice of moving from one party to another. Thirdly, centrism legitimizes itself by appealing to a mild ideological gallimaufry such as "liberal-conservatism," "democrat-conservatism," "conservative socialism," "socialist-liberalism" or "aristocratic-democrat-ism." Fourthly, centrism cloaks the personality cult, which, in its turn, unveils the sweet temptations of tyranny. Once clarified the nature of centrist allegiances, I have to point out the fact that the same ideological blend is specific to the Decadent movement and to Decadent figures (dandies). Scholars have already drawn the attention to a whole cluster of political biases, hidden or apparent within the aesthetes' creed[5], so there is no need to reconsider that in detail.

Nevertheless, my opinion is that centrism and aestheticism—broadly understood as a way of contemplating life—get along quite well, given their love of dissidence and a certain thirst for autonomy. They share, as Walter Bejamin would put it, a "negative theology," that is, the absence of a higher, transcendental referent. While the politician and the dandy seem to share the same "negative theology" and revert everything to themselves, Barbey d'Aurevilly points out that Beau Brummel's figure contains the tension between "the Machiavellis of elegance" and "the Machiavellis of politics" (38-39). Thus, the dandy is nothing but a political product and cannot breathe outside the sphere of political life.

No wonder that Take Ionescu, who publicly celebrated dissidence a score of times and preached both ambition and tyrants, fits the description of the "dandy" so well. The way his contemporaries remember him has something to do with the history of Romanian mores. His dandy *persona* (reducing everything to eloquence) represents the aestheticized icon of Take Ionescu's political action. Turned into a cultural artefact, infused with Machiavelli's ideas and including a quasi-Mephistophelian posture, "Take-ism" (which eventually evolved into a party ideology) became what the Romanian public would associate with "aesthetic imagination."

In 1886, when Take Ionescu was only twenty-eight, the gifted lawyer and promising politician broke with the Liberal Party and with I.C. Brătianu, and became a member of the faction intimidatingly called The Dissidence. Although N. Fleva, C.C. Arion, Al. Djuvara and the Lecca brothers had founded the group, it is very significant that Take Ionescu assumed the spokesperson's office; thence, he would repeat on and on "we, the Dissidents", "we, the assassins." Consequently, he is also the one who would later inherit and carry on the part of the typical dissident. The orator built his dissident speeches on the banquet imagery ("feast," "cutlery," "dishes," "the legitimate lust"), which he would reiterate throughout his career (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice I* [*Political Speeches I*] 95, 176). Besides, he sees the relationship between a party and its members not as one of inclusion, but as one of dissent and personal sacrifice (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice I* [*Political Speeches I*] 96). Even Cervantes's hero, Don Quixote, is fit to impersonate a

genuine dissident, while liberalism sideslips toward individual, perhaps anarchic, liberty. He occasionally has moments when he muses on the theme of identity mystification, so typical for those who dream to append aristocratic titles to their names (Take Ionescu, *Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 115).

In 1887, when Take Ionescu tackles issues such as the freedom of assembly, the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, the young dissident pleas, with genuine gusto, for a score of "plotting places" (and for plotting in general): the Circus, Mazar Paşa's house and garden, "Orpheus" Hall. The informal spaces for plotting and talking politics, where earnest teenagers could listen to the masters of eloquence, also trigger the memory of Take Ionescu's own literary aspirations. One of his speeches on the "Amnesty of Botoşani" calls forth the times when he used to be an industrious contributor to *Revista Junimei*. Embittered by his change of profession and by the futility of literature, Ionescu remarks that, in his youth, "young people were sufficiently insane so as to publish their texts in literary journals" (*Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 154).

The Liberal Dissidence of the 1880s certainly counted on the allegiance of "cultivated and refined classes", while—and the versed dissident understood why—the masses looked down on it as a form of defecting to the enemy (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 176). However, Take Ionescu would not give up on this *persona*, and would use the same word ("dissidence") and related phrases when he spoke in 1891 as a freshly anointed conservative: "If needed, dissidence can be accepted; a second act of dissidence makes one ridiculous, while a third is downright suicide" (qtd. in Xeni 118).

The speaker reflects on being a dissident and asserts that not treason, but the waste of energy is the most blamable thing (qtd. in Xeni 118). On other occasions, the role of dissident blends with a hint of ambition and vanity:

> Ambition, gentlemen, is a strange passion. When one has it to a medium extent, ambition is a real danger, because it makes one suffer a lot of unpleasant situations just in order to get high honors; but when ambition is really great, then it turns into a shield which makes one pursue power itself and not the high honors. (qtd. in Xeni 125)

Take Ionescu believes that the recipe for political success is made of three ingredients, all of them marked by great ambition: intelligence, instruction, and authority (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice I* [*Political Speeches I*] 148). We can easily notice that ambition and the overt plea for tyranny are closely connected. Take Ionescu resorts to the example of tyrants quite frequently, quoting a wide gallery of names, ranging from Caligula, Augustus, and Tiberius to Borgia and the dictators of South America. The word "tyranny" is embellished by epithets such as "hypocritical" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 9), "violent" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice I* [*Political Speeches I*] 95), "clownish" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice II* [*Political Speeches II*] 115), "anonymous," "earnest," "honest" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice I* [*Political Speeches I*] 355) "legitimate" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice IV* [*Political Speeches IV]* 6).

One can think that such a patchwork of ideas simply belongs to the sphere of political sciences. Nevertheless, Take Ionescu's speeches should win the literary critic's appreciation for their discrete literary qualities: textualizing quotations from newspapers, introducing strong political metaphors ("the church of conservatism," "the flag of liberalism," "the inferno of political solitude"), re-contextualizing *obiter dicta* and proverbs, circulating cultural names (Borgia, Cervantes, Cicero, Lamartine, Hugo). For instance, the Romanian proverb "Blood does not turn into water" stands alongside the English "Blood is thicker than water" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice IV* [*Political Speeches IV*] 41). Or Barbu Katargiu's saying "everything for our country, nothing for us" turns into the more abstract dictum "everything for justice, nothing for power" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 27). When it comes to political wisdom, sayings by Cicero and Miron Costin are just perfect (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 50; *Discursuri politice IV* [*Political Speeches IV*] 12). But the most spectacular example of re-semantization is to be found in a speech delivered in 1892, which ends with a paraphrase after the famous line from I.L. Caragiale's *O scrisoare pierdută* [*A Lost Letter*]: "Have a little bit of patience, will you?": "only then, when you have proven that this government is not a good one, only then will you be right. But till then, have a little bit of patience" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice II* [*Political Speeches II*] 15).

However, perhaps the most telling example of Take Ionescu's attachment to literature rests in his way of contemplating the world, like an Epicurean seated in a theater hall, where the harsh realities are hidden backstage. At the same time, the experienced speaker never loses sight of the fact that he is being watched and read by an audience. Which leads—not only in Ionescu's case, but also in that of others—to a great awareness of the act of writing and even to a sort of uneasiness and sterility (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice II* [*Political Speeches II*] 3-15). Once in a while, he would recall the evanescent beauty of artistic performances (be it drama, music or rhetoric) and would compare it with the beauty of an hour's glory: "let us bear in mind this one thing: no one can be sure of what tomorrow brings. There is only one moment in time man is master of, and that is the present hour… Let us show ourselves great and strong in this present hour, and we will be able to live a whole immortal life in the span of just one hour" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice II* [*Political Speeches II*] 3). Sometimes exhausted by political fights, like a mythological creature in-between Sisyphus (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice III* [*Political Speeches III*] 33) and Prometheus (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice IV* [*Political Speeches IV*] 3-12), the statesman reflects on the imperfections of his political activity: "We do not have the vanity to believe that we will be perfect in our work" (Ionescu, *Discursuri politice IV* 12).

The recurrence of "evanescence" tropes emphasizes the secret and morbid connection between Decadent art and eloquence. For instance, Alexandru Lahovary could shine "like no other at practicing the most ungrateful of arts." "Eloquence," says Take Ionescu, "does not count on the stability of words, but on their movement, on the voice of the speaker and especially on the mysterious bond between the one who speaks and those who listen, which gives the orator the most precious form of command—the command over other

people's souls, even if only for an instant." (qtd. in Lahovary xxxviii). Nevertheless, fierce "passion" represents the secret key for attaining excellent eloquence skills. Oratory is not only an evanescent art, but also a way to free the political man from the chains of present pressures, be they ideological or factual. When committing his thoughts to words, the speaker stages his passion and, consequently, comes to embody an autonomous world, severed from history, like Leibniz's monad. At the end of the 19th century, the autonomy given by one's own talent and ability to freeze present issues into aesthetical frames becomes important in speeches on the very topic of political rhetoric. It appears with greater poignancy in Take Ionescu's solemn speech occasioned by the inauguration of Lahovary's statue. Risking a cultural comparison—with Demosthenes, Cicero, and Mirabeau—, the speaker insinuates that the environment and the political events do not bear a lot of significance for the absent public of future readers. Only here and now, the "divine word" can turn mere facts into gold.

It is noteworthy that Take Ionescu himself enjoyed, like John Chrysostom, the reputation of a "golden mouth." Take Ionescu attributes his nickname (Tăchiță Gură-de-Aur—Little Take Golden-Mouth) not to the polemical power of his speeches, but to his ability to abstract himself from polemics. Consequently, once abstracted from reality and history, the voice that utters the golden words can claim its own political autonomy, if not its sovereign right to switch sides and create dissident factions. The 19th-century history of Romanian political parties proves it without the shadow of a doubt: eloquence is a sharp two-edged sword; it can draw blood from both political enemies and friends. Beyond facts and immediate determinations, the gifted speaker turns aesthetic liberty into political autonomy and self-containment.

Projections of Political Talk: Utopian Thinking, Mountain Climbing, and a Couple of Souvenirs

Not only Take Ionescu himself, but also literary historians counted his figure among the personalities who made a career in the field of letters before 1900 ("Ionescu, Take" 451). Under the pseudonyms Juanera and Tya, the young Demetru G. Ionnescu publishes poetry ("Contemplare" ["Contemplation"], "Refren de toamnă" ["Autumn Refrain"], "La lună" ["To the Moon"]), short prose ("Roze albe şi roşie" ["White and Red Roses"], "Ună pagină din viața unui visitor" ["A Page from a Dreamer's Life"], "Ună lacrimă" ["A Teardrop"], "Spiritele anului 3000" ["The Spirits of the Year 3000"]) and literary criticism. One of his prose pieces quotes a line from Mihai Eminescu's *Mortua est*. Perpessicius, the editor of Eminescu's complete works, is pleased to discover not only references to Gérard de Nerval and Edgar Allan Poe (in Baudelaire's translation), but also a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of Romanian literature (222-223). The mature Take Ionescu continued to indulge himself in this futile occupation by trying his hand at the popular genre of memoirs (*Souvenirs*), landscape descriptions, travel accounts ("In the Carpathians") and panegyrics (funeral orations).

One of the most startling writings Take Ionescu ever published is a utopian or sci-fi story entitled "Spiritele anului 3000", inspired by Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440,*

rêve s'il en fut jamais [*The Spirits of the Year 2440*]. Ion Hobana, the editor of an anthology entitled *Vârsta de aur a anticipației românești* [*The Golden Age of Romanian Sci-Fi Prose*], holds that what the daring Romanian teenager wrote in 1875 rises to the level of H.G. Wells' prose. If both Perpessicius and C. Xeni were struck by the author's culture and by what might be reasonably called a Borgesian setting (the theme of the world-as-library, the list of favorite books and authors, the labyrinthine vision), Ion Hobana notices that Take Ionescu narrates how the frame of our descendants will change in the future, how the climate will get milder, how the deserts will turn into seas, how the endless prairie will be used for agriculture, how the old forests will be explored, how people will manage to create an artificial island where the city named Liberty, that is, the Capital of the whole Planet Earth, will be seated. The introduction is worth quoting for its morbid and decadent traits:

> I was dead. A cold and heavy stone had been pressing my feeble frame for over a thousand years, and, in the narrow confines of the coffin (now broken to pieces), I could hardly breathe, for the air was terribly damp and thick. A thousand years or so had passed since I had left the world and I still had not fancied getting out from my bleak, yet peaceful, dwelling, so as to find out what humankind had made in the past eleven centuries. On the day of August 13, however, I was stricken *by such an unbearable spleen*, *that all my nerves were tensed with an extraordinary force* [emphasis added]. So I decided to get out. (Ionescu, qtd. in Hobana 20-21)

Therefore, getting out and going into politics is a sure way to heal spleen and remove tension.

The first observation on humankind is that Aru (the guide to the world of the year 3000), even though dwarfed and somehow dimorphic, wears a Greek costume, which shows that fashion, in spite of its tides, finally returns to its original cuts. The time-traveler finds out that all nations are united into the Kingdom of Frankness, and that they are truly dedicated to the Religion of Reason. There is no other God but Consciousness. When passing thorough the gallery of historical personalities, the pilgrim remarks that there are no decorations, as they are considered the "seals of treason" (Ionescu, qtd. in Hobana 38). The cityscape of Bucharest resembles now that of Venice. The houses are surrounded by Oriental gardens, the tableware is made of nothing but silver, and the interiors are decorated with red velvet. More importantly, the traveler discovers that he is the primogenitor of a noble lineage, that he is a "Don" and owns a coat of arms! Being an aristocrat ensures highlife standards and entails visits to respectable families and rendezvous with fine ladies (Ionescu, qtd. in Hobana 43). Even if Take Ionescu's utopia seems radically democratic (by insisting on liberal principles such as honesty, frankness, reason and consciousness), its deeper strata already announce both the aristocratic mystifications of *Souvenirs* and the "twists" from Take Ionescu's later political speeches. A text attributed to Gh. Gr. Cantacuzino, but included in Take Ionescu's 1904 edition of political speeches (which, therefore, shows that Ionescu is its real author)

states that "ideals are sheltered by utopias" (*Discursuri politice IV* [*Political Speeches IV*] 6). Utopias are the ones which shelter ideals and personal ambitions. In this case, what is most cautiously sheltered is young Demetru G. Ionnescu's dream of dining with kings, noblemen and classy people, and perhaps his early, most dandyish, mystification of identity.

In his anthology of "occasional writers," E. Lovinescu believes to have chosen the most representative text from the Romanian statesman's literary works. However, the text is not only a written piece, but a conference as well, delivered at "Ateneu" Society in 1902. Nonetheless, the text does bear the resemblance of literature, because it is a speech on a non-political topic, evoking the beautiful landscape of the Carpathians. In the presence of a quasi-academic public, Take Ionescu repents for having been a "prodigal son" and embraces his former literary posture (qtd. in Lovinescu 115). Moreover, the experienced dissident makes use of an old literary artifice—that of the "lost manuscript," which, in the space of rhetoric, turns into the figure of the "lost topic." This time, the speaker's lost topic is Ibsen's drama *Emperor and Galilean*— "a genius' attempt to permeate the mind of another genius," as he himself explains. The few impressions on Ibsen's theater introduce a subject quite unknown to classical rhetoric, be it Roman or Greek.

In his depiction of the mountains, Take Ionescu endeavors to coin a new word, commuting "alpinism" ("mountain climbing") into "carpathianism" (coming from the Carpathians). Those already familiarized with Blaga's theories on "the Mioritic space" (a hillside landscape, gently curved, reminiscent of transhumance rhythms) will certainly recognize the impetus of regional patriotism and the haste to define Romanian identity. For Take Ionescu, nature is a provider of aesthetic emotions with the power to tame the greedy beast hidden in each and every one of us (qtd. in Lovinescu 119). Moreover, nature awakens the free man in the conventional *zoon politikon* and brings out "the unutterable beauty of freedom" (Ionescu, qtd. in Lovinescu 121).

What strikes the eye is Take Ionescu's melancholy mood. Right from the very beginning, the man who climbed at the "Ateneu" tribune points to the emptiness and uselessness of our worldly life. The speech does not dwell on the well-known image from the Ecclesiastes; instead, it expands on the idea that life on this planet will extinguish some day; and not only will life on Earth cease, but the planet itself will vanish into the great, dark universe (Lovinescu 119). Even though one might imagine the apocalyptic view comes from 19th-century science, what the speaker calls "a world of thoughts" alludes perhaps to Mihai Eminescu's view on civilization in *Memento mori*. As previously mentioned, young Demetru G. Ionnescu's characters frequently quote Eminescu's lines; therefore, it wouldn't be far-fetched to assume Take Ionescu drew his inspiration from Eminescu in this case as well.

More important here is Ionescu's personal way of developing the *ubi sunt* trope. He styles himself as a Roman emperor (Trajan) and imagines, while contemplating the ruins of Dacia's old capital (*Sarmisegethusa*), the clamorous fights between gladiators and lions, as well as the elegant matrons and dignified patricians seated on the stone benches (Lovinescu 137). Moving beyond geographical information and travel impressions, the speech called "In the Carpathians" leaves us with a paradoxical, if not uncanny,

feeling; speaking about courage, mountaineering, risk-taking and, consequently, about the necessity to move upward on the social ladder—better said, the necessity of being opportunistic and practicing social "alpinism"/"carpathianism," Take Ionescu's text creates a dim, crepuscular atmosphere. In the spirit of the Romantic penchant for oneiric landscapes and ruins, this description of the Carpathians depicts "the mountains covered in snow beneath the twilight sky" (Ionescu, qtd. in Lovinescu 130). Once the light fades away, the aesthetic miracle, like that transient glory derived from the practice of eloquence, passes into darkness: "As the light was fading away, climbing up the mountains and overturning reality into imagination, we started to live a future history for which nobody should blame us, because it was nothing but a dream" (Ionescu, qtd. in Lovinescu 142).

Guilt, blame and the sense of futility—all of them derived from the writer's posture—did not prevent Take Ionescu from publishing, two decades later, a collection of memoires and anecdotes about the world of European diplomacy in the period of the First World War. Few are those who have noticed the highly projective character of Ionescu's so-called souvenirs. Whereas historians have mostly investigated the authenticity of the facts provided by the Romanian diplomat, what impresses the literary eye is the aristocratic atmosphere of the text. The names and ranks belong chiefly to the Austrian, Hungarian or Prussian nations, but they also come from France, England or Romania: Prince of Lichnowsky, Baroness Deichmann, Count Berchtold, Marquis Pallavicini, Count Gołuchowski, Count Aehrenthal, Count Czernin, Count Mensdorff, Prince of Fürstenberg, Count Szecken, Baron Bánffy, Sir Edward Grey, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, King Charles I of Romania, Queen Elisabeth of Romania, Princess Maria of Romania, and so on.

At first sight, the statesman's memoires look like a sort of fashionable publication, taking after Claymoor's *La vie à Bucharest* [*Life in Bucharest*]. It is not the geostrategic issues which catch the interest here. On the contrary, we learn that Prince of Lichnowsky failed to make a successful career for himself because he was indolent, like the people in Constantinople, where he used to be an ambassador (Ionescu, *Amintiri* 9). Count Berchtold seems to be very polished, but he actually lacks coherence and logic, so Take Ionescu suspects him of stupidity (*Amintiri* 17-21). Even if intelligent and fascinating, Marquis Pallavicinni is nothing but an ugly brute with a Mephistophelean grin (Ionescu, *Amintiri* 23). Arrogance makes King Charles I of Romania take on an authoritative stance, especially on matters he does not quite understand (Ionescu, *Amintiri* 32). Count Gołuchowski has the tasteless idea to display his decorations in an ordinary Viennese café (Ionescu, *Amintiri* 40-43). Count Czernin offers a sample of strong language and vulgarity, mixed with native shrewdness (Ionescu, *Amintiri* 74-81). All in all, Take Ionescu's idea of describing the political fauna in the eve of the First World War points to something which brings to mind the thesis underlying "Spiritele anului 3000": that the old aristocracy should be dismissed and replaced by meritocracy.

Take Ionescu also had an indisputable talent for panegyric oration. C. Xeni remarks that the orator would read his speeches only at funerals (153). I will not insist on this, since I have already dealt with this topic in other papers. All his texts come down to a

particular reverence for death: the predilection for burials or funeral settings and the description of a dead man's sensations in the beginning of "Spiritele anului 3000"; the crepuscular image of beauty and the sense of evanescence in his travel accounts; and a fascination with the philosophy of fashion and all things superficial. All these build the image of an eloquent dandy, who liked to contemplate life from a distance. A master of eloquence, Take Ionescu used to astound his contemporaries in the same way as the figure of Medusa.

As I have shown, the reputed Romanian speechwriter never lost his mastery of literary effects, and finally turned aesthetic autonomy into the hailed principle of political dissidence. His acts of dissidence were never the exclusive product of political strategy; they always emerged from his heart's dissent. Nevertheless, to Take Ionescu they were also a way of giving vent to his frustrated literary talent. Applied to the realm of political speech and projected onto the public's aesthetic imagination, the idea of literature eventually managed to survive even in the hard times of *Realpolitik*.

NOTES

1 All subsequent translations are mine.
2 See esp. *Lecture VI. The Hero as King. Cromwell, Napoleon: Modern Revolutionism*.
3 See esp. *Chapter V. Individual Morality and Collective Immorality*.
4 See Carlyle's opinions on Cromwell and Napoleon in the chapter quoted above: the "inarticulate prophet" vs. "the piece of silent strength in the middle of morbid querulousness."
5 See Swart; Dellamora; Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky.

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