

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication

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Section: Literature

CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE OF IDENTITY

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Abstract: The paper aims at presenting the way in which Liliana Corobca's novel Kinderland builds up a special universe of childhood which loses its innocence when crossing a period of transition, mirroring the greater one of the society on the background of which destinies interweave. The child's conscience forces the reflection upon identity and this is what we try to emphasise: assuming individual and/ or collective identity. In the macro-text there are identities being assumed at geographical level, at the symbolical level of the Country.

Keywords: childhood, communism, identity, axis mundi.

The main character in Liliana Corobca's novel, Cristina – a girl who is “slender and petite, only skin and bone, so much so that one would think the next gust of wind will carry her up and away”¹ (p. 10) – is a 12 year old child, at the start of her adolescence, at least according to the psychological way of defining ages. Left home by her parents, who went abroad in search of “big money”, she has to tend to the household and her two younger brothers. Cristina is now the older sister who protects her brothers “now he doesn't tell her (Cristina) who is beating him up for fear he would be left without a playmate” (p. 10).

Everything is seen through the conscience and mind of a 12 year old child, at the beginning of adolescence, a period which “forces one to reflect on one's own identity and to identify one's values, interests and abilities, to evaluate one's capacity of making decisions and of dealing with various situations”². The fact that Cristina is always referring back to the past “when I was little and I wanted to play... they would send me along” (p. 58), “before, I had long-long hair and my mum used to rinse it with vinegar” (p. 60), not so much as with sadness but with loneliness, represents her permanent connection to herself, a child dependent of her mother, a child who used to feel safe in her mother's authority. The shift between reminiscing and gaining independence – “I can't (braid hair). I've never even thought I could” – (p. 61), is the symbolic imagine of crossing from childhood to adolescence, when the child is trying to cut back on the family dependence, thus searching for personal autonomy.

¹ All translations by the author of the article (M.N.).

²Nircas Vendal, *Constituirea identităţii de sine*, <https://www.academia.edu/5861246>, accessed on 7 June 2016.

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Earning independence gradually is becoming something Cristina does without thinking; it is an important element of her identity. She knows she is a child, but she is waiting impatiently to enter adulthood "... when mum came home last time, she brought a packet of special toiletries, for women, she said. [...] I can hardly wait to stick one to my underwear" (p. 76). The image of the pubescent teenager is created not only at the senses level "but what I liked the most was when she grabbed my chin with her fingers and looked me straight in the eyes, just like in the movies and kissed my cheek" (p. 71) but also at the attitude level "I'm an accomplished person (because she was kissed) and a big girl" (p. 74). Sexuality is subtly overlapping innocence. Liliana Corobca manages to create an opposition between Cristina's innocent sexuality and the early sexual maturity of some of the girls in the village. Veronica, a librarian's daughter, only three years older than Cristina, becomes her uncle's lover, thus being frowned upon by the women in the village. Therefore, by referring to herself and to other girls in the village, whose sexual experience is more advanced (having their period, kissing, etc.) Cristina is identifying herself as an element of the rural society she is a part of, but, in the same time, she acknowledges her individuality as a distinct person. Cristina does not try – at least not consciously – to search for her identity in the past, she is aware of her age, she is discovering her sexuality and she wants to be seen as an adult. Viewed as a continuation of shaping the image of the Country, (which can symbolically translate the Republic of Moldova or Romania), the person, and taking into account the time frame (the action in Liliana Corobca's novel takes place after December '89), Cristina could be the continuation of the very shape of this image, an image of post-Communist Romania when, on the one hand, Romanian people start feeling more free (in the communist era everything related to sexuality was considered taboo, with the woman being the prototype of a "colourless, perspiratory and sexless"³ character); on the other hand, the Country, when discussing the stage of identity development it was in at that time, seems to be just like a child whose parents abandoned him and who is yearning to be seen as an adult, but who, in the same time, feels nostalgic about the uncertainty he used to feel in the past (especially the false economical safety, so common in the Communist era).

Belonging to a group, as a part of social identity, is oscillating (a normal process in adolescence) between the conformist I (prevalent at her age) and the *Self*, according to Mead's definition⁴. The conformist I is noticeable when Cristina, together with other girls, performs

³ "The proletkultist texts, artificial and written mostly on command, imposed a type of feminine character that was colorless, perspiratory and sexless, willing to give away the little eroticism she had left to her work, from dawn till sunset, three hundred and sixty five days a year in order to give the Party, the Soviet Union and Comrade Stalin winter coats, piglets and as much corn as possible" 50 Ion Manolescu, *Sexualitatea în poezia comunistă autohtonă*, în *România literară*, no. 10, 2001, http://www.romlit.ro/sexualitatea_n-poezia_comunist_autohton, accessed on 8 June 2016.

⁴ "We say about an individual that he a conformist when he has the same opinions as his neighbors. In this situation he isn't more than a «Me»; his adaptations insufficient and are produced unconsciously. In opposition with this «Me» there is the individual with a well-defined personality, who reacts to the attitude organized significantly different. In this case, the «I» dominates the experience. These two phases, which appear constantly, are the most important of the self". Mead *apud Identitate socială și identitate personală*, <http://www.scribub.com/sociologie/psihologie/Identitate-sociala-si-identita23647.php>, accessed on 7 June 2016.

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some sort of ritual which consisted of a boy and a girl lying on top of each other, inside a circle made out of twelve girls (on the inside of which a „woman-girl” had danced), with the purpose of summoning the rain and rich crops, as well as sending away the draught and diseases, or bringing their parents’ home; a sort of rainmaker with a twist. The Self, as personality builder, makes its presence notable, sometimes, through remorse “I am still sorry we couldn’t save it (the dog killed by a child from the neighbourhood). We should have gone in the night, with Dan, to untie it and bring it with us” (p. 101).

The need of belonging to a group can be seen as a metaphor of longing; Romania wanted to adhere to the continental nations because, on the one hand, the need of economical safety still remained – the attempts of attaching itself to the European Union are well-known – or, on the other hand, if we were to think about the fictional space, about The Republic of Moldova to be more precise, this need can also be perceived as the struggle to show that both Moldovans and Romanians have the same origins (performing the rebuilt myth). The efforts of the Bessarabian to prove they have common roots with Romanians are well-known and what is also well-known is the disappointment caused by the indifference and the anti-Bessarabian and anti-Romanian attitude that both nations display. The writer Maria Şleahţiţchi makes a pessimistic synthesis, in an interview for the “Contrafort” magazine⁵ “of the sad reality in which a very small number of Bessarabian writers speak Romanian, thus, the first step toward a cultural identity, which is one of the main elements of social identity, is made with great difficulty and more often than not is followed by one step back.

The heartache of the child missing their mother “sometimes, after talking to you, my soul weighs so much!” (p. 65) is not uncommon “every family has someone working abroad” (p. 17) “we are nothing but children (the children from the village) abandoned and grounded by our parents and the world around us” (p. 104). It is a world of abandoned children, it is *Kinderland*. Therefore, Cristina identifies herself with the group of children. Cristina’s suffering is the same as for other children in Romania, children abandoned by at least one of their parents, children left in the care of relatives by parents gone to work abroad. *Kinderland* is the Country of abandoned children. It is the country where children and old people prevail; the country which the adults left from economic reasons, but they are not coming back to.

The moments that make the connection with adulthood alternate with the innocence and gullibility of the child who believes she can move mountains “maybe she can feel we are all thinking of her (of their mother) and she calls us” (p. 92), “the mind must be educated, disciplined... The wish in my mind is for mother to come home [...] you go with it, with this wish, at a crossroads, at night [...] For the wish to come true, you must break the egg and leave the yolk in the middle of the road, but this isn’t enough, you are the one that sends the

⁵ “...more desolate another reality appears to me. The poor way in which the Bessarabian writer speak Romanian, with the exception of a small minority. Thus, it seems that the cultural integration [...] doesn’t occur with the participation of all writers, but with the effort of those who want to be integrated and who cannot find their purpose except in native cultural environment”. *Anchetă printre scriitorii: Basarabia și România-un deceniu de integrare literară*, în „Contrafort”, no 12, 2002, December, <http://www.contrafort.md/old/2002/98/265>.

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wish, the egg doesn't turn into a bird which can carry your wish away" (pp. 154-155). What is also typical for the child she continues to be is the reverie, the withdrawal to an ideal realm, a village for the "good children", not all children, only the good ones; a village unreachable by other people who can spoil it with their meanness, a children's village, without any longing, malice or waiting.

Although she is overwhelmed with chores that are too difficult for her, Cristina doesn't lose the kindness typical to all children, when she finds out that a child is sent by his mother to steal from them, she doesn't punish him, but lets him, under her supervision, to take a few things. This is also the moment when the helpless child she sometimes is needs to depend on a strong parental figure to protect them, a feeling that is augmented when a man from the village steals from the sand they were playing in and as a consequence they have to seek for their uncle's help.

Beyond the innocence, the gullibility, the generosity and the wish to be called an adult, there is the need of behaving like the child that she is. And it is not about the desire to go back to the past with everything it meant, but about the need of being a child now, the need of hearing her mother calling her "baby", of her mother waking her up with caresses, the need to feel nurtured and spoiled "we have become old from all this responsible and mature waiting and we become children again when mother is home" (p. 186), it is the need of being a child under the protection and security provided by a strong figure. It is, metaphorically speaking, a country which has still remained a child who cannot help its own children, an undeveloped country which cannot even help itself. It is the Romania left home waiting for those who went away.

At text level, the fictional image is that of the path that an individual has to cross in order to find and assume their status. Cristina is a teenager who has barely begun to build her identity, aware of the fact that she is a child. It is a path of identity which reveals a person waiting for self-discovery as a forever child wishing to become an adult. On the other side of the fictional image, there is the reality which is metaphorically reflected, an existential road to finding one's identity. It is the path of a former Communist Country suffering from amnesia and therefore vulnerable to the regime, accepting not only forum idols, but also theatre idols, waiting for something to be given by the "humanitarian Communism", maybe a new identity.

The rural society in *Kinderland* and Cristina's parents seem to be able to see but in the same time be blind. Seen through the eyes of a child, the Moldovan village where the little girl lives is one almost deserted by adults, a village where a child whose parents are home is considered to be high on the ladder of power, a child whose mother was home was a powerful child who was safe. At some point, Stefanel, a little boy who only lived with his grandmother (his mother went west to work) and was torturing his own animal, beat up another child. But that child "had a mother", which meant he was a strong and safe child and Stefanel was punished. Social divergence is represented in the novel both by presence and by absence. Went away to make a living in a world that is different from the one left behind, only a few parents manage to take their children with them; most children are left in the care of their grandparents and sometimes even left to fend for themselves.

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Cristina's rural world is, thus, divided into three: her parents, the small society (the children) and the big society (the adults in the village), the latter being some sort of defender, similar to Gulliver, only smaller. The closest divergence in the adult world is represented by Cristina's parents. The stream of consciousness makes their memory appear only as flashbacks in the child's mind, although she is constantly thinking about them. Her father, gone to work in Russia, symbolizes power, the authoritative figure that keeps her safe – "when dad was home he used to chase away the sparrows from the swallows' nest" (p. 84) – and in the same time the teacher of nature science "mom said to ask dad about the chicks. Dad said that the chicks were surely dead and that the swallow would lay another set of eggs" (p. 93). He is the one who is telling her why the sown hills have different colours, the one who is describing the colour of the forest, of the grass or the corn, according to the season, the one who shows her the ways of the world, as stated by Mircea Vulcanescu⁶. Her father is the person who presents her with the wonders of the world (the small stream that was dried up by people during the famine, the large river which runs under the bridge that the Soviet Russians had built "when stone was real stone", a river that is now used as a dump site and a meeting point for thieves, etc.) Her father describes to her, in simple words, the path from real to simulation⁷. The stone or brick, which is the main element in building houses, becomes a symbol of the illusion of stability and strength when it is used to draw on fences or houses. Liliana Corobca succeeds in including two philosophical ideas in a story told in the middle of nature, on a caravan which carries a father and his daughter down a country road. It is what Mircea Vulcanescu called *understanding the world*. With her father, Cristina considers herself the best and most beautiful child "after I would put on my hat (which he bought) he used to say: let's go, my daughter, for a walk around the village so the people can see what a beautiful girl I have" (p. 52). It is another image of Olguta beside an old man Gheorghe, where the latter is embodied by the young and strong father. Even though he is far from home, she sees her father with love and compassion in her eyes, and she doesn't hate him for not being there for her, but understands him and knows that it is them, his children, that he is sacrificing everything for.

Her mother teaches her how to take care of the household, how to tend to her brothers, but she is also the one who is hiding the pain of coming home in small chores around the house and the one who Cristina always sets her standards according to "whatever mom does, it is the best". In the centre of Cristina's longing for her parents, there is her mother, for she is a symbol of the household, of feeling loved, protected and carefree. When she comes home, she cooks and cleans, comforts her sons and tends to their education and Cristina becomes a child again. She is a sort of *Alma mater*.

The two images of Cristina's parents, the adults who went away to find work, are, on the one hand, a cruel reality that Romania has had to deal with for a while. The reality of young people who have to leave, but also of adults, parents, who let their growing children be looked

⁶ "time is nothing more but the world changing", Mircea Vulcănescu, *Dimensiunea românească a existenței*, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 46.

⁷ The words *simulation* and *simulacrum* are defined by Jean Baudrillard, as a replacement of the real with the signs of the real, in *Simulare și simulacre. Precedența simulacrelor*, Idea, Design & Print, Cluj, 2008, pp. 5-8.

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after by relatives or, in some cases, by no one at all. More often than not, this creates not only a mentality (“in order for me to make something of myself, I have to leave”), but also a huge discrepancy in cultural and economic development. The former is relevant as the children who are left to their own devices by the parents who work abroad have a tendency to disregard school as an important factor in their development⁸, therefore, culture, deprived of the young people’s interest, cannot develop. Moreover, many of the children whose parents didn’t go to work abroad have started to consider working outside the country the only way to make a decent living (where to live means to barely make ends meet). The latter, economy, experiences a decrease due to the departure of the working force⁹ and the intellectual capacities (a lot of intellectually endowed young people leave the country because of this).

On the other hand, continuing the metaphorical image of the Country, the two parents represent the country outside the borders, people who had to grow up abroad, and whom the children left behind long for, in the hope that they will come back to help them develop and grow. This Country represents a symbol of coming of age, but it isn’t enough to follow its evolution.

Social divergence creeps into Cristina’s life first through the children who, pushed by poverty, become selfish and unkind. Cristina remembers when, chosen prom queen at school on account of her beautiful dress, she comes home with the dress ruined, without being able to understand who did that and why. Another child, who had received a mobile phone, brings it to school only to watch helplessly how the other children, out of sheer spite, destroy his present. All of these make Cristina wish for a village only for the good children. These behaviours, which according to the specialists could be caused by a cerebral region called *amygdala*, are closely related to the parents’ attitude which can determine a child’s aggressive or vindictive conduct¹⁰. The world of the village children is a world of abandoned children, either by one parent or by both. The children are unhappy, abused by their parents who very often find refuge in Cristina’s house, who sometimes tries to persuade her younger brother to stop crying by telling him that for children who have a violent father life is even more difficult.

⁸ A study carried out by the *Save the Children* organization, shows that abandoning and skipping school, but also a decrease in the interest towards school, issues appeared also from a poor understanding of the lessons, represent one of the reasons for worrying regarding the children whose parents went abroad to find work in *Situația copiilor ai căror părinți sunt plecați în străinătate*.

http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/upload/p0001000100030001_Situa%C5%A3ia%20copiilor%20ai%20c%C4%83ror%20p%C4%83rin%C5%A3i%20sunt%20pleca%C5%A3i%20la%20munc%C4%83%20%C3%AEn%20str%C4%83in%C4%83tate.pdf, accessed on 17 June 2016.

⁹A piece of news for the Digi 24 channel warns about villages remaining without people, choosing as an example a village in Sibiu. *România depopulată. Satul îmbătrânit, în care părinții își așteaptă copiii plecați la muncă, în străinătate*.

<http://www.digi24.ro/Stiri/Digi24/Actualitate/Social/Romania+depopulata+Satul+imbatranit+in+care+parintii+isi+asteapt>, accessed on 17 June 2016.

¹⁰ Mirela Zivari, *Psihologia copilului: Metode de disciplinare*

<http://www.mirelazivari.ro/psihologia-copilului-metode-de-disciplinare>, accessed on 17 June 2016.

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But, in this world of children, Cristina manages to make a friend, Alisa, a girl who came to visit her grandmother and who symbolizes the mythical and archaic voice of the conscience of being. She provides Cristina not only with an insight on the mystical world of the village, she knows all the crossroads where you can send wishes from and all the places with live or dead water as well as their healing powers, but also an insight on the mystery of understanding people, seen from a magical perspective of the witches, of the kind people who can save the village, of the people who can sense each other, the same as animals, without them being aware of it, of the people as energies. The crossroad, Alisa tells her, is the place where positive energies gather, because it is the place of kind thoughts, and because people meet there, and people who haven't seen each other in a long time are happy to be reunited; people start towards the future from there, with good thoughts; the thought is like an energy that can help you if it is a good one or can sicken you if it is a bad one. Alisa appears to be the symbol of a mystical and Christian philosophy of life and thus she plays the role of the grandmother, a grandmother who initiates her granddaughter in the ways of the world, in the typical Romanian style of blending the sacred with the profane, as Lucian Blaga mentions in *Trilogia cunoașterii*. The sacred, the divinity as energy and the man as part of this energy, the way it is presented in the Orthodox religion, fuses with the profane, the breaking of the egg, "boiled at the armpit", at the crossroad in order to send the wish of the parents' return.

In Romanian mythology, goblins are demons that are spawned into the world from an abandoned egg which was kept warm by a person at their armpit for a certain period of time. These goblins grant the person, who sells their soul, any wish in exchange for food, water and tobacco¹¹. Warming up the egg which then has to be broken at the crossroad in order for the wish to be granted is, therefore, a ritual derived from mythology.

In the social divergence, the grown-ups seem to be an adult version of their children, except that carelessness and envy are in this case the basis of human behaviour in this society. Similarly to children, grown-ups can be good or bad. When Dan, the middle child, is stung by a tick, Cristina cannot convince any of the neighbours to come and remove the tick. Moreover, it looked as if the whole village had fallen silent and the girl's cry for help could not resonate in any of the houses. When a stranger stops to rest at the fountain it is him that, persuaded by the girl's constant stare, comes to take the tick out. The rather amusing way in which this event is presented (the man who, judging by his appearance, could just as well have been Death itself coming frightfully closer to the tick, rattling its teeth. When the man asks for brandy to disinfect the wound "he wants to get drunk and throw my brothers over the fence" (pp. 7-9), her imagination, made darker by fear, cannot diminish the tragedy of the scared child who is struck by the neighbours' disregard. It is the first image depicted in the novel which captures not only the essence of the novel but also the prevailing attitude of the adults, carelessness (sweetened here and there by a grandmother who gives them pears or an aunt who sends them pie).

Lack of caring is like a disease that spreads to all the neighbours; even to the social worker whose only attempt at doing his job is to ask the children whether or not they are feeling

¹¹ Ion Ghinoiu, *Mitologie română: dicționar*, (Ed. a II-a rev.), Univers Enciclopedic Gold, București, 2013, p. 262.

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depressed, as if they knew what depression was, or to throw some pamphlets about parental love, over the fence. The same thing happens when humanitarian aid is also thrown over, but it only consists of a *Kinder egg*. This is, in fact, another side to carelessness, but one that bears the resemblance of protection. It is the way in which society shows the world that it is able to take care of its children. Sadly, this image conveys, rather faithfully, a bitter truth of communist society. Dating back from the previous political regime when “we would pretend to be working, they would pretend to be paying us”¹², or even from an ancestral past, from the Romans, this superficiality not only has survived, but it has also been transformed, taking under its black wing the love and care for the helpless children. It is the image of a country incapable of defending its future, the image of a country diseased on the inside, a country which cannot change a system still faithful to communism, as if time stopped in 1990.

The adults’ violence passes through the child’s filter as a neutral observer. Rodica, a young woman from the village, commits suicide to escape a violent, jealous husband, with a primitive mentality; Veronica, a teenager fallen prey to her drunkard of an uncle’s sexual desires; two men who are fighting, until one of them dies, for an adulterer whose husband had gone abroad to work; fathers who beat their children mercilessly, etc. What’s more, conjugal violence becomes a spectacle for the children (who are a sort of Caragiale without any humour) “Yesterday there was a carnival in the slums near the school. We went there too. Uncle Andrei hit aunt Agripina again. He wouldn’t stop until the ambulance came” (p. 129).

A sad display which changes its quality form and even though it is educational, it is transformed into a negative example for the future people who, in their innocence, imitate the adults’ behaviour by creating a parody in the *Kinderland* game. Thus, there are characters such as teachers who feel girls up or who, typical for Caragiale’s plays, try to scare “the shoed up cattle” that are not afraid of their yelling; the corrupt policeman who is on the thieves’ side or who pays thugs to convince the well-off villagers to pay a protection fee. It is a corrupt and unjust world which continues its cancer-like evolution, the same as a disease that keeps spreading. At text level, the divergence is seen either as a badly built past or present, or as false friends and new acquaintances, or even as a society which is enfolding before the viewer, who can be an adult or a child, with its two ages (adulthood or childhood). It is a divergence which the human being, young or old, watches with mistrust and innocence. A divergence which is not exactly a pleasant one, with small exceptions, and which, irrespective of the physical distance between it and the viewer, still appears to be far away.

Projected metaphorically as reality, the divergence distinguishes more aspects: the aspect of post-communist society as seen through the eyes of the Western society; and what they see is a country of savages and beggars, a country where cheating is the main occupation

¹² Ion Simuţ, *Comentarii Critice: Ce s-a întâmplat cu literatura română în postcomunism - Simptomatologie generală*, „România literară”, number 6, 2008.
http://www.romlit.ro/ce_s-a_intamplat_cu_literatura_romn_n_postcomunism_-_simptomatologie_general, accessed last on 02 June 2016.

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and it cannot be annihilated by the scarce examples of moral and intellectual value. Divergent are also the ones forced to go abroad in order to make a living and who are awaited by the people left behind to come back and help them grow-up. The few valuable people who stayed have been trying, in a time of commercialism and persecution of the intellectual elite, to form new thinking habits; they are thought to be blind people whose perspective goes beyond the boundaries of a materialistic society (ideology). Divergent are also the Communists who marched right through the garden of history in their iron boots and tore apart the national roots; the Communists who completely transformed this tortured country into a past covered in a demagogical speech that transmits nothing and put it behind bars while inducing amnesia through Murti-Bing pills. Divergent is the Country itself, when it looks back on itself as if at a show where violence and corruption are the main themes in a *Kinderland* game. This country seems to have been born old (when Communism changed its identity) and only later did it become a child; a helpless child who doesn't understand its past, is unable to accept its present and cannot make a future for itself all the while watching, like a person suffering from amnesia, an immigrant or a child, the entirety of these aspects.

Cristina is the one who has to play the part of her parents and she does it to the best of her ability, if we were to consider her age: "at 12 years old the children are *big grown-ups* and they are responsible because they have to take care of the younger children. At 12 years old they don't cry after their parents, but they clean the whole house on Fridays or Saturdays" (p. 61). *Big grown-ups* seem to be words of encouragement told by an adult, sometimes even by a child to himself, words which are contradictory to the image of the children who don't have to take care of younger brothers, or cook, children who are being bathed, put to bed and given an education. Those words come from the responsibilities Cristina's parents placed on her shoulders (when she talks to her mother, Cristina is asked about food, if they were beaten, if they had clean clothes, if the house was in order).

Her mother's words and gestures are always present in Cristina's mind: she saves money and food, but keeps in mind that they need their vitamins, that is why she gives her brothers dairy products; she comforts her brother Dan, when he cannot bear their parents' absence, by telling him that he was all grown-up now; furthermore, in order to stop her brothers from suffering she compares the situations, just like an adult would do, of having an absent father, which is not so bad, to having a violent but present father, which would be terrible. She is the mother that soothes them with her words, who makes their life magical, who feeds them (she even tries to make them pie), but she is also the mother who gets upset over their lack of help and respect, when she cleans by herself and her brother walks in all dirty; she is the one bathing them and cooking for them and all the "reward" she receives is nothing but insults. There are moments when she would like to give up, but she cannot do that because she is the adult now so she has to set the rules: she doesn't hit Marcel because she's all he has, instead she explains to him, using all her patience, that what he's doing is wrong.

The child inside wants so much to escape "That's it, I can't take it anymore! I just want to leave it all behind and run away from home." (p. 67). Her innocent soul wants to be free, just like when her parents were home and she sat under the nut tree letting her spirit get in touch

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with nature in a happy place, in a moment in time; but her conscience knows that her brothers need her, that she's all they have left (the way she tells the wild boar she stumbles across in the forest for fear he might attack her). She feels the pride any mother would feel seeing her children grow-up; she wants to protect them from the heartbreak of their first love story, to celebrate their birthday; she wants to be a good mother for she noticed that there were no bad mothers. She sometimes appears to be watching everything that is happening with the coldness of an adult "These young generations are growing up so fast, first they start kissing each other, and then they learn how to walk." (p. 115) This child that Cristina is can see something that parents cannot, that the loneliness someone feels away from home because they want to earn money is useless; life is only beautiful when lived together with your family and children.

Cristina accepts the divergence as part of her identity only temporary because she knows it is a role she will stop playing at some point; a role in which imitating her parents is vital. She is trying to take care of the household even though she is well aware of the fact that she doesn't have all the necessary energy resources (she arrives at school without having eaten and she's very happy when the Chemistry teacher shares her food); she minds after her brothers, but the lack of help on their part displeases her; she tries to comfort them, but she needs comforting herself. Even though she successfully carries out these parental duties, she knows that they are only temporary, as if she does all these things for a little while, until her parents return home.

Depended on a Communist past, where people were even told what to think, Moldova or Romania, the post-revolutionary child, was forced to obey the other Moldova or Romania, the one that grew-up and left West, "in the West the society is made out of rules"¹³. The grown-up country was sending money back home, thus it was contributing to the economic development. In its melancholy, this child, retains in its being the forms of the old authority, this is why, after the revolution, the same former members of the Communist Party rule the country. The people preferred to listen to the speeches that transmit nothing; they sat back watching how the same old Communists have absolute power over the state institutions, except maybe one or two scape goats that were made an example of; they accepted that the state financed the bankrupt economic firms; they blamed the real democratic parties and the people of value, especially if they were coming back from abroad "Where were you (the ones that fled the country) then (during the Communist era)? You were there eating caviar and drinking champagne"¹⁴, these were common lines used both in everyday life and in the newspapers. This shows how the Romanians preferred the fairy-tale world presented by the new Communists converted to Capitalism, the way Lucian Boia refers to them in *Strania istorie a comunismului romanesc (si nefericitele ei consecinte)* to reality.

During the Communist era the individuals were separated from their world, a world which meant their very essence, where all things and all living creatures have their own part in this life¹⁵. And so, they sought comfort in Communism, where their fairy-tale was transferred

¹³ Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului. Omul nou*, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 209.

¹⁴ Tatiana Covor, *Fuga dincolo de mine, apud Mirela Florian, Iona Popescu (coord.), Între patrii. Mărturii despre identitate și exil*, Polirom, Iași, 2006, p. 133.

¹⁵ Mircea Vulcănescu, *Dimensiunea românească a existenței*, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 40.

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to¹⁶, in the stories about the rotten bourgeoisie and the savage and degrading Capitalism, with boyars who bled the people of whatever little they had left; stories about the all-mighty ruler, etc. The grown-up Country is asking the left-behind one to take charge of the parental responsibilities and to start taking care of its children. Therefore, the young Country is forced to prove it is indeed applying rules (or laws), it is indeed trying to protect its children, or to develop, but it is only doing so temporarily. The country is attempting to eliminate corruption, but with its childlike resources; it is trying to develop its economy, but it is complaining nobody is helping and that it is too difficult; it wants to protect the children but with insufficient means; it strives to change the education and to eradicate plagiarism, but the reforms are only the ones found in Caragiale's plays: "Either this or that, allow me: if it changes I agree! Only as long as nothing is different. If it doesn't change I also agree, but in this case some things should be different here and there"¹⁷. Therefore, in everything it does, this country doesn't follow a plan set on the future, but the past, in the old Communist manner.

Waiting for her parents to come rescue her, Cristina becomes the symbol of the long painful waiting for something better than may or may not come. Metaphorically speaking, accepting divergence as part of one's identity, means also accepting the destructive past that erased all traces of hope. At first, it is only an acceptance at shallow level, but it manages to change identity, amplifying its flaws and mutilating its spirit. Similarly to a child who reaches out for new toys, it only picks out the ones that are bigger and more beautiful, in the same time letting go of its own old toys, but not because they are no longer suitable, but because it wants to be like everyone else. It is nothing but a childish attempt to attain Occidental level, but not its essence, its form and simulacrum. Thus a hybrid Country emerges, who assumed an Occidental identity, but cannot live up to the challenge. Finally, there is no room left for plans regarding the future or significant changes, because everything is done in the spirit of the temporary. This country was born old, became a child and now it is afraid to grow up. And so, it accepts a divergence as a cover up for its identity and it is waiting.

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¹⁶ The fairy-tale world is left without the essence of which Vulcanescu talks about (about the world changing, about its becoming, about the world in time and space, in with the Netherworld overlaps with the world up here) and it is becoming a symbol of manipulation and Romanian naivety. (*n.n.*)

¹⁷ I.L. Caragiale, *Teatru. O scrisoare pierdută* (colecția Lyceum), Albatros, București, 1985, p. 117.

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