

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE ROMANIAN LITERARY EXILE: PSYCHOLOGICAL,  
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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*Abstract: It is well-known that literary exile is, essentially, the result of a socio-cultural process. The return of the artist to the public requires literary reinvention, but not the estrangement of the carefully crafted letters in another history, neither the limitation of the profound sensations that marked, at some point, the Romanian literary stage. On the other hand, the literature of exile of today and yesterday is submitted to the judgement of an audience that is not ready, at all times, to approach it objectively. Virgil Tănase lives through his work and amazes through his force of (re)presenting life in its psychological and social complexity, he fascinates with the poetic dimension of his writing and, more than everything, preserves the Romanian spirit in his country of exile. Today, in the same state of exile, his career as a director and a theatre professor at the International Institute of Image and Sound of Paris is fortunately and harmoniously bound with his activity as a novelist and playwright.*

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The writer is “a narrator, an actor, experiencing and being experimented, a memoirist of his own deeds and gestures, a hero of his own story on a distant stage, yet updated into the narrative; he is the only witness in rapport with the sedentary public”. (Pageaux, 2000) It follows that any literary work reveals different situation in relation to its author: the individual’s personality coincides with that of the author; the author’s identity correspond with that of the narrator; the author’s identity may be related to that of a character-narrator (provided that we exclude the previous relation, author-narrator); and, a last stance, personal identity may be forwarded indirectly, via transfer towards a character or more, as a trumpet of the author and, why not, as an identity adopted by characters. The de-multiplication process concretely reveals the construction of the worlds the author has lived, but also an interpretation of the self through the self. The writer actually becomes the psychologist of his own ego, or the therapist of an individual almost known to himself, who attempts to integrate with a society in search of culture.

We present below a few narrative projections that include biographical elements of the life of an ascending writer: the imaginative, naughty child with a mature, ironical thinking, in the adventure novels *Le bal autour du diamant magique* and *Le bal sur la goélette du pirate aveugle* (*The Ball around the Magic Diamond* and *The Ball on the Blind Pirate’s Schooner*, two children’s novels): “I will not make a full inventory, **for I’m not Balzac**, a novelist who filled entire pages with lists of objects in order to pay his debts.”

In the novel *Zoia*, Haralamb, the author’s double, **chooses exile**. Haralamb was one of those writers considered young, because they were just starting to get awareness, in a favourable context. Artists whose political file was not pristine, and whose works could not be considered ideologically suitable had started coyly to come to light. Haralamb was duplicitous, not because of his squalid nature, but as a result of his way of understanding the world; he believed that our feelings and thoughts belonged to a separate universe, governed

by other laws, not connected with the chaotic and vulgar reality of the day by day existence, where our fate depended on the goodwill of some social animals whose only quality was fierceness.(Zoja, 2003)

When he was an adolescent, Haralamb spent all the nights waking up at the slightest noise, certain that they had come to arrest him, waiting every day to learn that his father had been taken from his office and sent to the Danube-Black Sea Canal, where the representatives of the old regime were re-educated through work. Later, admitted to the Faculty of French Language, Haralamb was certain that, one day or another, someone would read his political file more carefully and that he would be expelled and sent to a construction site. He struggled to identify elements of social criticism in all the authors he studied, who were preoccupied with unmasking exploitation and stigmatizing those oppressing the working peasants and the proletariat. He carefully avoided looking for deeper meanings in these texts, or to be seduced by various Formalist analysis methods, occulting the militant call of the arts under sterile considerations on style, poetic effects or literary construction.

Miron, the university professor in the play *De Crăciun, după Revoluție* [Christmas' Day after Revolution], and Luca, in the play *Veneția mereu* [Always Venice] experience the same drama of the intellectual abandoned by the system, who can only accept his condition or perish. Miron is not only a victim of love, but also the **culpable emigrant**. The playwright's investigations tend to reach towards of the root of the evil to have been born, and the character he knows best is himself. This is the reason why one may feel that Virgil Tănase's plays unwind following the same formula, of pathetic subjectivity, of autoscopia transferred to characters.

The author's multiple identities do not only cumulate "a construction of experienced worlds", but they also have an intrinsic motivation: "an interpretation of the self through the self". His biographical stories are placed at the crossroads of history and fiction.

Virgil Tănase is the prototype of the polyvalent artist, able to move craftily from a language to another, from a culture to another, from a country to another, from a history to another, and from a literary genre to another. This is why, while in exile, Virgil Tănase is capable to combine prose and dramaturgy, often resorting to his directing skills. The French world of arts is thus surprised by the artistry of Romanian drama.

Virgil Tănase is actually an inventor of such a theatre: a modern, psychological, genuine, actual drama based, in the end, on controversy. The epic and lyrical elements are transparent from the characters' lines and the plot construction, to which acting is added. When speaking of modern drama, one unavoidably should look for pertinent arguments. Modern drama is configured on the principle of free acting, manifest in the melange of categories such as lucidity, cynicism, lyricism, macabre, grotesque, dramatic, in the mingling of the present and past tenses, in the game or alternation of the real with the unreal, illusion, imaginary and reality. The senses are exacerbated. There is a dynamism and montage of opposites: hatred-love, desperation-affection, and cynicism-insanity. "Drama is a field from where, more than anywhere, habits, clichés, ready-made patterns, mechanical procedures are hard to pull. Their inertia is murderous. It is positive, once in a while, if a man able to look on old things with fresh eyes enters this closed world" (Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal II*)

**Drama becomes integrated part of his being** (my emphasis) for playwright Virgil Tănase. His second debut as a director (a double debut, as he was only known as novelist in France) takes place in 1983, on the stage of Lucernaire<sup>1</sup> Theatre in Paris, with his own play, *Le Paradis à l'amiable* [A Bargained Paradise], a story about a lover who kills his woman and then, trying to cover the murder, starts terrorizing his neighbours and ends up as a dictator. Still clung to the heart of Bucharest (*le petit Paris*), Virgil Tănase surprises his Parisian audience with innovative and enticing shows, in terms of both directing and scenography.

In full bloom of the revolution of theatrical techniques, when many playwrights aim at reforming writing, Virgil Tănase is **authentic** precisely because he is not completely ready to give up the model of his predecessors. The novelty of his drama is the interference between **modern, psychological and internal**, on the one hand, **and classical, social and traditional**, on the other hand, a connexion artfully made, without any perturbations in the structure of the dramatic text.

His plays appear to be psychological dramas, or, in other words, belong to the genre of psychological drama. As in the case of Chekov, for example, we find out that the characters of Virgil Tănase's drama have the desire to live in happiness, to overcome their condition (this is a realism in its contemporary acception, where the relation to metaphysics and transcendence has weakened), but, at the same time, they experience **the disorientation, the rout of the conscience** facing a world understood as a chaos with mysterious laws. Such literature, with a new way of artistic reflection, draws away from Chekhovian patterns (although one may identify sources of inspiration for the theatre of the absurd in the Russian playwright's plays). It is, however, easy to trace some patterns in the dramatic works of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett. Virgil Tănase's drama dwells between psychological and absurd, while his characters seem to have been inspired by olden drama, such as Cervantes's, where the characters live a profound psychological crisis.

After having thoroughly analysed the dramatic texts, we are inclined to affirm that, in Virgil Tănase's plays, the characters endowed with a biography are stressed, unbalanced, anguished, that they simply live or survive great failures.

The authentic character of the playwright and novelist Virgil Tănase's discourse is related to his individuality: the artist creates his work sincerely, spontaneously and calculatedly, at the same time. In other words, his authenticity may be defined as a constant preservation of a cerebral hazard in the literary space.

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<sup>1</sup> French *lucernaire* translates as religious service held at night, in the light of the candles.

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