

**A.E.BACONSKY – THE FALSE TRAVELING JOURNAL AND THE SELF
IDENTIFICATION INSIDE THE CATEGORIES OF MASTERPIECES**

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Abstract: According to his own confessions in Remember. Fals jurnal de călătorie (1977), A.E.Baconsky developed a strong experience of self-identification by migrating between cultures, nations, collective memories and masterpieces. By traveling from place to place, the writer succeeded in improving the understanding of the whole system of valuating the true European masterpieces, making differences between real products of the main artists and the so-called `kitsch art`. First at all, the traveler was determined to find his own identity in the middle of the European framework, by accessing the cultural memory and the trades of well-known masterpieces. The dialogue Identity vs the Otherness transform his traveling journal in an anthropological, sociological and historical study on the process of reinforcing the imperative target of the Romanians: to be proud of the national values. Inside the country or being somewhere in the world, A.E.Baconsky had a strong point of view in this respect, determined by his incredible knowledge in many fields: history of arts, anthropology, aesthetics, philosophy, cultural sociology, religion, theory of arts.

Keywords: Identity, Otherness, traveling journal, masterpiece, self-identification

MOTTO:

“The most important creation that a human being has to accomplish is to fulfill oneself. Self-fulfillment is a masterpiece, just as significant as any bronze, marble or color creation.”¹

In a sequence of *Amintirile unui fost corector*, the poet Petre Stoica – close friend and traveler-companion of A.E.Baconsky through Europe, noted a specific reaction of Baconsky in front of a European architectural masterpiece (The Dome of Köln): “We will go in tomorrow, the wonder has to be closely examined...”² This “the wonder has to be closely examined” seems to have been the fundamental principle that has stood at the basis of all the experiences occasioned by the intellectual voyage of the systematic traveler that A.E.Baconsky was, a writer infused completely by the fascination of searching compensatory spaces, renowned through value, which could provide the self-identification with a highly, authoritative code of masterpieces. The direct contact with the matricial spaces of universal culture, the communion with them through the diffusion of one’s own traveling identity between alternative spectacular places, the vocation of clarifying the meaning embedded in external structures, the advocacy for the nobility of the spiritual adventure beyond accessing, full circle, places only apparently doomed to linearity, all of these represent the foundation of the almost one thousand pages of Baconsky’s traveling journal. However, “the false journal” *Remember* sets, by far, the writer’s preference for the inner journey canon, which uses the outline of the traditional journey just as an ontological basis, as a means of exercising the privilege to strategically combine the outer experience with the profound insights, in a ritual that strongly resembles to the antique rites. The purification is, nevertheless, in Baconsky’s

¹ Petru Comarnescu, *Kalokagathon. Cercetare a corelațiilor etico-estetice în artă și în realizarea de sine*, București, Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1946, p. 141 („Creația cea mai esențială pe care o are de îndeplinit omul este de a se realiza pe sine. A se construi pe sine însuși este o operă de artă cel puțin tot atât de însemnată, ca orice creație în bronz, marmoră sau culoare.”)

² Petre Stoica, *Amintirile unui fost corector*, Cartea Românească, 1982, p. 73.

case, only a step to accessing the inner cultural background, within a permanently confessional gesture, whose objective targets not so much the creation of an alternative artistic scenario, but the self-accomplishment and the decoding of inner perceptions – “places of undisturbed meditation within a golden framework, his and only his”³. “He had discovered the pleasure of traveling, as a matter of fact, long before setting foot on the steps of a coach: the first travels are always the ones around your own head...”⁴ – the writer confesses and imposes, consequently, a perceptual canon which directs the cyclical welcome of the journey’s experience: the departure and the return are inner privileges, they do not get blocked in the simple traveling through space and time, nor in a superficial causality.

As a result, the intellectual traveler’s choice to spiritually take hold of the *place*, to uncompromisingly interact with the surroundings, without identity losses, after a subtle strategy of reconfiguring the signals of the encountered culture from the perspective of one’s own expectations, seems fundamental. The departure, in itself, is accepted as an alternative in relation to the outdated and the petty, and the retreat into compensative spaces is achieved by taking into consideration an inner protocol of relearning the semantics of admiration; Baconsky’s confession is eloquent: “I am tired of admiring. I am tired of enthusiasm and borrowed props. I want to develop my original faculties alienated by circumstances, to reexamine the alphabet of morning surprises and of candid admiration, to have the joy of experiencing discoveries and uncontrolled shouts. And this is one of the reasons of my journey”⁵. Quintessentially, Baconsky is the seeker of important meanings, acknowledging often, sometimes ironically, the unequivocal separation of surrogates and illusions, the aristocratic reluctance in reference to the “mechanical human being” who has lost the meaning of suffering⁶, the appeal for authenticity and for the rearrangement of the contemporary axiological system. To this end, the traveler seeks, with a complex stubbornness, anywhere he travels, the spaces, the historical time and the highly cultured people.

In Vienna, where he arrives on several occasions, he has a constant insight: “Merely for the fact of having deserved a Haydn, a Mozart, so present here in Vienna, and it would still be enough to greet with deep respect these stones with coat of arms aligned as though in a pantomime of esoteric symbols.” (R I, p. 17). He chooses to visit, as he will proceed all over Europe, not the exceedingly technological spaces – which induce a cultural shiver – but the supreme patrimonial foundation: the Peterskirche, the second hand bookshops, the Stephanplatz, the Votivkirche, the Museum of the History of Arts, the Prater (“I missed the trees and the wind. I crossed the channel and lost myself in the Prater, the old Viennese park, where Eminescu and Blaga went for a walk, at an interval of half a century. Before Eminescu, Horia had passed through Vienna”⁷), he meets the literary elite (he meets Wolfgang Graus, F. Csokor, Heimito von Doderer, Ernst Jandl, Max Demeter Peyfuss, with some of them maintaining fundamental friendships throughout his life). At the Art Museum, the writer A.E.Baconsky, fascinated by the great painters known worldwide, being an expert in the history and theory of art and possessing a fine critical eye, lives a “Religious moment in the vast space granted to Bruegel”, rediscovers at Pisanello “an intense melancholy”, in front of the Andalusian Velásquez “a world of chromatic exuberance”, “pure painting”, he notices “how the teaching of Velásquez travels to Manet, who had become so enthusiastic by his

³ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁴ A.E.Baconsky, *Remember. I. Fals jurnal de călătorie*, Cartea Românească, 1977 vol. I, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

⁶ See Petru Poantă, *Omul mecanomorf*, în “Tribuna”, XXII, nr. 52, 28 dec. 1978, p. 4.

⁷ A.E.Baconsky, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 48.

work at Prado, to Degas and particularly to Renoir”⁸, he conveys that he is charmed by his modernity (“These paintings are intensely felt by his contact with the Venetians, perhaps especially by the contact with a Tintoretto, a Veronese. But Velàzquez completes the evolution of a concept. He is the first European for whom reality and language are no longer two categories, with two hypotheses, two moments of the artistic act: paraphrasing Heidegger, I would say that for him painting is the *formation of the human being through color*.”⁹

Paris remains, for Baconsky, the capital of modern painting and absolutely all places are interpreted according to this threshold: “This city has been and will be the capital of modern painting; even if it vanished, if its stones were subject to the Sodom curse, artists would continue claiming the title of l’*école de Paris* (...). Its magnetic power lies in the atmosphere, in the legend and in the mystery of the strange conglomerate of interlope masterminds: Van Gogh, Dutch, Cézanne, Matisse, Rouault, French, Brâncuși, Romanian, Picasso, Jean Gris, Miro, Spanish, Modigliani, Italian, Chirico as well, Soutine, Chagall, Nic. de Staël, Russian, Vlaminck and Van Dongen, Flemish etc., etc. This is the place where geniuses have risen and tens of thousands of mediocre persons have died...”¹⁰. Nonetheless, he also has here a reaction regarding the fundamental dignity of the cultured human being, who is aware of belonging to the autochthonous great culture, Baconsky directly expresses his bitter-ironic disapproval concerning the absence of the famous Romanian painting from the Parisian Art Museum: “Those who imagine that the Modern Art Museum is a sort of irreproachable collection of masterpieces are mistaken: next to the well-known and main pieces of our century’s painting, you can find samples of a sheer platitude, for the nominal principle outweighs the criterion of real value. There are a lot of distinguished painters that are missing, like the Romanians Luchian, Pallady, Petrașcu, Tonitza etc. and this does not flatter, by any means, the collection. On the contrary. Țuculescu is also missing and I believe he will still be missing even after his work will be exhibited at Paris.”¹¹ We grasp, as a result of Baconsky’s confession, the rejection of egos that artificially share the worldwide cultures according to other criteria than those related to value, condemning them to the rupture and the incongruence between major and minor.

The long walks in the company of Paul Celan remain important for the writer (“We would search for old fashioned coffee shops wandering across Montparnasse while nearly reaching the cemetery. The Dome, the Rotonde, where Modigliani’s shadow can still be found on the walls, where Cocteau’s spirit danced on the wire, painted as a harlequin by his friend, Picasso. People, places, the movement of figures, of destinies”¹²), and he also experiences the entrance in a Louvre that he can decipher in his own rhythm, according to his own code of interpretation, free from history.

From the Italian cultural geography, the experiences gathered in Florence, Venice and Rome are essential to Baconsky.

In Florence, the traveler searches masterpieces and does some soul-searching by visiting, according to a thorough preselection carried out inside his own cultural preferences, the Dome Square, the Baptistery, the Santa Maria del Fiore Florentine Dome with its famous Brunelleschi cupola, the Santa Croce Basilica, Giotto’s Bell Tower, the Palazzo Vecchio that protects the Galeria degli Uffizi, the Pitti Palace (designed by Brunelleschi and finished by

⁸*Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁹*Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹⁰*Ibidem*, p. 142.

¹¹*Ibidem*, p. 147.

¹²*Ibidem*, p. 118.

Ammannati, preserving two of Raphael's Madonnas: *Madonna del Granduca* and *Madonna delle Seggiola*, but also *Cinquecento* masterpieces: Tizian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Rosso). The remarks are precise, without discontinuity: "I will never be able to express enough my admiration for Michelangelo and Leonardo, for the great Venetians (...), for Raphael and Correggio. But my soul is shaping its most authentic and obscure zones out of the shadow of the graves of Giotto and Piero della Francesca, of the elder Sienese, of some creations of Brunelleschi, Pisanello, Paolo Uccello and Botticelli, the one who was thrilled listening to the passionate sermons of Savonarola and illustrated Dante's *Inferno* with drawings where the rhythm became suffering and spasm, and the line became a soft and anxious melody"¹³. The effect of such an encounter governed by basic values is more than symbolic: "When you are in Florence, irrespective of where you come from, from any part of the world, you feel a barbarian, to some extent. Today's habitants, even the old Florentine must sometimes run into this inexplicable feeling, because it is absurd to live in Florence. It is like saying that you live on the Acropolis. Only here can you apprehend the superlative and prolific degree of loneliness and of active melancholy, can you ideally isolate amidst your own thoughts, until you achieve the state of supreme interior tension when all converges into an abstract rhythm and pure music."¹⁴

In the Venetian space, too, the traveler's self strives to run away from the modern substitutes, rendering itself to complete shapes, in an allegorical undertaking to discover hidden meanings. The wanderings in the Square and through the San Marco Basilica, through Santa Maria della Salute, through Doge's Palace or on the San Giorgio Maggiore island are doubled by rich hermeneutical allegories and by an immeasurable delight of the expert to explain or clarify the symbols through a scholarly interpretation of value. Venice – says Baconsky – disrupts all your principles and it humbles your solitude. Here, a Beato Angelico, a Dante, a Botticelli, a Savonarola would not fit in: the true patrons of the city are Tizian and Aretino"¹⁵, and the San Marco Basilica brings about long and intelligent digressions in regard to the history of art: "The great anonymous masters of the Byzantine mosaics start their activity here around the 11th century. Afterwards, we will encounter the Florentine artists Paolo Uccello, Andrea del Castagno and the Venetians, from Paolo Veneziano and Iacopo Bellini up to the protagonists of the 16th century, Tizian, Tintoretto, Veronese, L. Lotto, drawing the blueprints for the future mosaics."¹⁶ The sensation of a subtle assessment transpires, here and there, at the sight, almost reaching a palpable plane, of one's own scholarship, as if this demanded confirmation and embededness in an eternally valid foundation which cannot be further examined.

Rome is portrayed by Baconsky as a bipolar cultural geography, a place of identification and division, equally: "Rome, nowadays, as I have felt it in the Spanish Square, is the city of all the people who display with pride their own anonymity, like an inalienable right for all joys and sorrows, for disregard, for concern and for seclusion. Nowhere, in Rome, have the pedestrians seemed more alive, more equal to one another, more free and, yet, more linked to their city which has confused everyone, for the last two thousand years, with its illusory decadence"¹⁷. On the other hand, Baconsky observes that "Rome, in the Renaissance period (*sic!*), reveals its precisest replica in the Capitol Square where the urban and

¹³*Ibidem*, p. 178.

¹⁴*Ibidem*, p. 171.

¹⁵*Ibidem*, p. 289.

¹⁶*Ibidem*, p. 300.

¹⁷*Ibidem*, p. 240.

architectural harmony reaches its fullness: not once has Michelangelo's genius, who drew it, seemed more Olympian, more alienated from all his confusing states, more faithful to the Renaissance concept itself"¹⁸.

Visit, when in Rome, Saint Peter's Square, the Capitol Square, Trajan's Forum, the Pantheon Square, the San Pietro Basilica. The insights are always associated with the detailed level of the masterpieces and the permissiveness in regard to intelligent interpretations, with multiple cultural references, sophisticated, enthusiastic and enticing for the uninitiated in the history of art. Ultimately, Baconsky's elaborate analyses materialize, beyond the elegant confessions, into a refined panorama of European art, the pleasure of discourse is strengthened, not at all ostentatiously, by identifying one's self with the essence of the masterpieces. The used code implies, obviously, a dramatic perception of a disease of the modern world: the fragile and superficial value judgments, the lack of education concerning art and esthetics, as a whole. Aware of such an ethical shock, Baconsky proposes, behind the reassuring analytical options of the self which contemplates the imperishable value, the necessity of the axiological realigning of the cultural product, in general. The admiration principle is always activated from an authentically Romanian level: "In San Pietro, the proportions and the grandeur, the monumental materialization of the idea of divine greatness overwhelm you.

There, inside the colonnade, you experience a feeling of ambiguous shyness that does not reconcile with our stylized Orthodoxism, purged of ostentation, reduced to a ritual of abyssal introspection and you feel, in Catholicism, the perpetuation of old forms of pagan Rome and of old classical patterns founded on perfect symmetries..."¹⁹. He is, although, stunned by the perfect juxtaposition of the masterpiece, which is above his own options regarding balance and esthetic strength: "*The Final Judgment*, with the face of Christ portrayed athletically, as if really saying *Remove yourselves from my protection, you damned souls!*, is a composition of grandeur specific to Ancient Greece, that seems to engender form-wise, in an impressive way, the synthesis of Christianity and Plato's artistic ideal. (...) The creation is characterized by balance in spite of the dynamic anatomical excess: the values of real life triumph over the conceptual values and the stylistic meaning of the whole rules the components only as far as the laws of unity demand it, without consequently depriving them of their own direction, virtually imprinted by the artist."²⁰

Paradoxically, he will not have the same comforting feeling related to the archetypal encounter in front of Trajan's Column, the intrusion of history in the existential mirage leaving marks of doubt and an odd sensation of convention and artifice. Baconsky's reaction is powerful: a feeling that is divided between accepting a situation, which cannot be changed *de facto* and perceiving the fragile identification with the external image of the ethnogenetic limit: "I have arrived to Trajan's Forum, too. I have avoided it for a long time and, anyway, I would have liked to approach it by myself, without witnesses, and this is due to a truism complex. (...) It was in the afternoon and the sun was shining in the middle of ruins, shattered columns and memories. I sat down on an old slab at the basis of the Column, with my back facing the mediocre grave of Victor Emanuel, and I sat lighting cigarettes, one after the other, and filtering thoughts, of which some would be difficult to jot down. I have only briefly and absent-mindedly looked into the visual encyclopedia of the Dacians' life: I carry their true life inside me and I will also leave it untold to the next generations, as I have received it. The

¹⁸*Ibidem*, p. 237.

¹⁹*Ibidem*, p. 236.

²⁰*Ibidem*, p. 250-251.

severed head of Decebalus is always modifying its features in its quest to find those worthy of its symbol and grain is growing on the altars of Zamolxis. That war is for me a Trojan tale, with a Ulysses who continues to get lost at sea. A story that each generation is reedding, always in a different manner, following other and other illusions. I have fabled, myself, and others will, too, tomorrow and forever and they will exhaust themselves under the same impassive godly residence, under the grand and enigmatic indifference of the stars that do not answer questions and do not unravel miracles”²¹.

There also are, however, cultural spaces which, being scrutinized, do not have the same chance of entering the writer’s preferences who is always tempted to find himself in the structure of masterpieces. Not because it lacked value, but because of a destructive modernity that has led to a hyper-technologization and to the implicit obsolescence of the worship of naturalness and simplicity. The writer confesses explicitly: *I am fed up with the concrete poetry and the kinetic art... petty technocratic freemasonry, object words, verbal plexiglas, Taschenrevolution, cybernetic robotic art, sufficiency and dust, huge veils of dust are already deposited on the object words, on the amorphous machine of kinetic sculptures which quickly become outdated together with the factory molds, and in literature and in art, the gigantic cemeteries of automobiles get crowded... with a grin from scrap aggravated by rain... I see the image of Leonardo unraveling as he bursts into laughter on a water surface... ”*²². We are not surprised, then, by the antithetical and dissonant reactions in a city, quintessentially connected to the great culture as is Heidelberg: “...this city seduces you spontaneously and inexplicably through beauty that is beyond architecture or town planning: Heidelberg has an ineffable beauty of spirituality and intellect, that interior light which exalts and transforms the features of the plainest face... more than anywhere else I realize that tradition is not only an abstract blazon... here, its feeling materializes, tradition converts into actual value, just as air being subject to liquefaction becomes palpable matter... (...) Nevertheless, nobody has stayed permanently in Heidelberg, because this city seems to be meant for you to only make a halt in it, and then gifting it with a few days, a few days or a few years which you will never forget ... not more - because if you are a writer it is impossible to live in Heidelberg... the city’s charm has a poppy sweet taste, it has the strength of a secret perfidious drug that envelops and perverts you until you end up becoming *à la longue* your own ghost... ”²³, but „I have also experienced a disappointment in Heidelberg: (...) where my ingenuity had been seeking a place for solitude and meditation, an ideal acoustics for the mute monologues of the spirit, I have only found one residential neighborhood belonging to the bourgeoisie, with elegant and inaccessible villas behind walls covered with glycine and ivy, spectacularly and abruptly built on a terrain auspicious to architectural fantasy... the memory of philosophers increasingly relegated to apocryphal areas, is humiliated by middle-aged women who walk their enormous well fed dogs, or the loud Playboy groups, and rich ignorant tourists get into their extravagant cars defying the past poverty of the Poet of Diotima”²⁴.

Thus, *Falsul jurnal de călătorie – Remember* of A.E.Baconsky remains the interior panorama of masterpieces, the masked, subtle way of the author to find himself in an undeniable humanistic journey. Nothing from the obscure undergrounds tempts him, nothing from the daily carnival, nothing from the appearances of modern art grabs his attention. Constant and obsessive, Baconsky’s admiring gesture is focused on confirming values throw

²¹*Ibidem*, p. 251-252.

²² A.E.Baconsky, *Remember. I. Fals jurnal de călătorie*, Cartea Românească, 1977 vol. II, p. 16.

²³*Ibidem*, p. 177-178.

²⁴*Ibidem*, p. 186.

analyses, juxtapositions and syntheses, never leaving the masterpiece exposed to accidentally adverse interpretative alliances, always protecting it with hermeneutic instruments from the history and theory of arts, anthropology, sociology of culture, ethics, esthetics, history, religion and philosophy.

The epistolary confessions remain memorable which confirm the effects of self-identification in the space of masterpieces, with natural identifications and separations. Revisiting Baconsky's letters from when the writer was in occidental Berlin, Octavian Paler found the following confession that perfectly concludes the current study: „« Distance only acts as an inner self magnifying glass, greatly increasing the value of those, few, things, that give our existence a gain of substance and joy », « I saw myself home for a moment, talking together or casting a shadow on the old walls of forgotten settlements, in small abandoned cities, searching for treasury dwelt in ruins that keep watch between death and palingenesis. Therefore, I thank you because in this way I have defeated one more distance and nostalgia»”²⁵; „« I am convinced that in Cheia, where this letter will find you, you are feeling excellent and are having a fruitful dialogue with all of those that, being, presumptively, speechless, are in the habit of teaching us the inexhaustible alphabet of silence, many times more profound and resonant than words. It is an ideal therapy formula that I miss (...) Often, I get glimpses of landscapes, of the crow nests in the Bărăgan's acacias, seen in winter on the road to the seaside, of the Olt's watercourse in a narrow path somewhere beyond Cozia, of the shadow of some ruined wall or of some enormous sunrise between the hills ..., idyllic images, poor colored glass shards but without which life loses at least one of its essential dimensions »”²⁶.

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²⁵ Octavian Paler, *A muri, a dormi... a visa, poate?*, în „România literară”, X, nr. 24, 16 iunie 1977, p. 11.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.