

DUMITRU-MIRCEA BUDA*Petru Maior* University of Targu-Mures***Narrative Strategies in Mircea Horia Simionescu's Dictionar Onomastic***

Dictionar Onomastic made Mircea Horia Simionescu famous during communism by its usage of postmodernist techniques and spectacular ingenuity. Highly acclaimed as a masterpiece of parody, pastiche and avant-guard-like deconstructing goals, the novel successfully camouflaged a secret, tragic dimension, motivating its nihilist approach on culture. Nevertheless, a powerful anti-communist system of messages works on the sub-textual level of the book, making it a meta-fictional work.

The literary criticism of the communist epoch created a paradoxical status to Mircea Horia Simionescu, which was as strange as it was full of advantages for the immediate posterity. There is not doubt that the literature in *Ingeniosul bine temperat* was uncomfortable not only for the official line of the cultural ideologists, but also for the few courageous critics who where forced to notice in their analysis of the texts an unusual strangeness for the middles of communism, a humoristic spirit, permanently ready to trivialize with the serious themes and to brutally cut into the structure of taboos. After all, *Ingeniosul bine temperat* is mainly the spectacle of a temper, that is configured by the text calmly, with a special pleasure of the irrelevant details, with a chimerical profile that betrays, beyond the anecdotic appearance, a tragic profundity, a relativistic vision of things, turned into an acute awareness of the weakening of the world's essences.

The detail that the number of those who saw this appetite for the tragic in Mircea Horia Simionescu's subtext was extremely reduced did not at all increase the chances of the Dictionarul onomastic to be received positively enough by the critics to climb to the top drawer of the contemporary cannon. The accusation might have been that he was breaking too dramatically the connection between literature and life, showing an inconformism that was beyond the tolerance of the epoch. The most trusted critics of the 60 generation were trying to enlarge the concept of socialist realism towards symbolic realism, satiric realism et. Co., but Simionescu's prose would have required a much too complicated procedural compromise for those realisms to be operative in its case.

And so Mircea Horia Simionescu remained in the select company of the initiated, a highly frequented reference in the circles of literary publishing houses but about which there would be no elaborate analyses, but only fragmented writings from the few critics who were holding the luxury of commenting almost anything that seemed valuable. The most important acknowledgment of the Dictionary should have been the review signed by Nicolae Manolescu in 1969, a review which was itself hurried, only identifying the elements of pregnant authenticity of the formula and the frequent techniques of the discourse. In itself, Manolescu's article is a plan of interpretation and integration in the Romanesque phenomenon which is left in draft, in a certain ambiguity which will be solved in the pages dedicated to Mircea Horia Simionescu in *Arca lui Noe*. The condition of the Dictionary, like that of *Bibliografie Generala* that followed it, becomes, somehow, a premiere enveloped in discretion of the idea of cultural alternative, of underground, but an underground developed

in the public space of official literature, sharing the same resources with the politic novel but being refused the right to acknowledgment.

The lack of critic reception would start to be cancelled with the ascension of the writers formed in the cenacle *Cenaclul de luni*, who will be delighted by the self-referential mechanisms in the literature of Mircea Horia Simionescu, attracted not as much by the livresque parable but by the parody, by the playful strategies and by the refinement of the demolishing irony. The surface play of the formulas, the unusual talent of the writer for a virtually unlimited multitude of discursive styles, the deconstructive verve and the de-mystifying ambition immediately took the step from the condition of simple figures of discourse in that of elements of a poetics of the novel. For many, Mircea Horia Simionescu remains a humorist and his Dictionary a comedy of literature, by a reduction that is similar to that eliminating the philosophic fascination from alchemy.

The very structure on which Mircea Horia Simionescu builds his literary edifice indicates with ostentation the gravity of the project, the seriousness that undermines the appearance of a game. An unstoppable energy does not allow any relaxation of the imagination, exulting in instantaneous expansions which come out of nowhere. The dictionary contains, as any autonomous universe, its own laws of coherence, the grammar and logic articulated by its own laws of verosimilarity. A universe that permanently pulsates words, the text sustains its vital energy from the dialectics of some turbulences and normalizations of its own interior order. The appearance is of a textual world that has escaped from the control of the Author, organized into its own centers of power, precipitated in a Brownian way under the narrators' microscope.

As a matter of fact, the narrator often goes into the posture of an observer who takes notes, in the apparently innocent and lucid convention of the dictionary file, about an entire narrative screenplay, alimented by a network of micro-narratives who are in a contest with the evolution of the species of writing and with history itself. The classic argument between Cratyllos and Hermogenes is naturally solved in the advantage of one or of the other, because the names here match naturally on the phantasmatic protagonists that are associated to them, or, on the contrary, force them to match their face and letter. The name becomes itself a narrative, a minimal norm of the epic, containing in itself a virtual side that the Dictionary provokes to confession. But the story is no longer the oral one, said in the middle of the agora in order to be carried away and re-told around the corner. Once consumed into the dictionary file, it is classified because, in its archival nature, the dictionary established boundaries and holds the signification in them. This is in fact one of the dimensions of the narrative in Simionescu's text: that of manifestation of the name into meaning. The narrator uses here a strategy of conspects, thought as polemics with the expectance horizon of the virtual reader, but also with the permanently constructed and faked previsibility of the dictionary itself. Usually, the narrative is built by the magnetic effect of the names' phonetic aspect, but its resonance refers each time, even contradictory, or especially contradictory, to the celebrity of the natural association of meaning. Shocking by the de-mystifying ostentation, the story becomes the expression of a possibility, but the game is often without a finality, because this contraction into the everyday dimension of biographies also means the dramatic experience of human fragility. About CLEOPATRA the Dictionary says, starting from two characterial

enumerationand generating an epic line:: „Agresivă, trăsături aspre, în piatră. Scrie piese de teatru (când poartă părul tăiat scurt) sau e vânzătoare în vreun magazin (în care e foarte elegantă și vorbește gros). CLEOPATRA RAREȘ ... trăia singură, retrasă, se ferea de privirile oamenilor. Adesea, nevoită să iasă înainte de prânz, se ascundea de căutătura bărbaților sub un voal cenușiu. Lumea șoptea că e sfântă. Într-adevăr, de la fruntea arcuită, până la pașii aplicați cu smerenie ca pe luciul unei ape, Cleopatra Rareș era însuflețită de spiritul sfânt...” Suddenly, the miraculous, Christic register is broken by a parenthesis, by an intrusion of the everyday aspect of existence, which accelerates the dramatic details of a micro-narrative ending in a surprising tragic way and being solved in a saving hypothesis: : „- Cum, Cleopatra Rareș locuiește în blocul vostru? O cunoști? – făcu într-o zi prietena mea Marcela G. – Biata femeie! A fost cândva de o frumusețe răpitoare. Un diplomat căsătorit a întreținut-o ani de zile într-un adevărat palat, la Șosea. Primea vizite ilustre, în saloanele ei se petrecea în fiecare seară, până la zori. Ce risipă de lumină, de băuturi scumpe! Ce femei frumoase petreceau acolo! Știu că, desfrânata, n-a trăit degeaba! Se dusese faima rafinamentului cu care regiza nopțile de dragoste!

Dar viața aceasta a avut un sfârșit trist. Cleopatra Rareș s-a îmbolnăvit îngrozitor. A fost operată: tumoră canceroasă uterină. I-au scos tot. Când a reintrat în lume era alta. Până și chipul și-a schimbat trăsăturile. A devenit femeia angelică pe care lumea o privește cu sfială. Minte femeii infirme acuză viața dinainte, fiind convinsă că Cel-De-Sus a pedepsit-o pentru desfrâul ei...”

What is seen here, in the micro-narrative space of CLEOPATRA's dictionary file is, in fact, a little miracle, recorded in a register that simulates facility but in fact transcripts a parabolic scenery, on a myth of the courtesan which descends, as an archetype, through the history of Western culture down to Mary Magdalene. The narrative is therefore an intersection of referential vectors which oscillate from the cultural allusion of the name to the illusion of authenticity in the everyday life of the epic hypothesis and from the intrusive self-reflection of the narrator itself in the text to the spectacular regression in the mythological imagery.

But, of course, the narrative does not always possess the constant disposition for expansion. The mirror of the imaginary reflects the name in different ways, and it may act as an oracle or may reject the dialogue. The names are brought on the boundary of a vide and put, without precautions, to utter themselves, and the echo seems to belong to the hazard more than to option. Where the narrative becomes implicit, being held in the subtext of a few explicative sentences, a principle of profound ambiguity dissolves the logical resistance of the utterances. The story, contracted to a short paragraph, is nevertheless equally functional, even though the criterion of invention disarms here any logic attempt: „INES, notează M. H. S., *Păr de aur, mâini de aur, pânțele de aur. Idol cuminte de familie. Stricător de familie*”. Most often, the explanation is used in order to discourage by its certainty, but the possibility of truth is always disputed by a dialectics of dissimulation: „KAI Nume nordic, ce n-a coborât, ca altele, odată cu vânturișul neamurilor: Kai Kajanus apare într-o veche legendă finlandeză”.

It is also in the Dictionary... that Mircea Horia Simionescu inaugurates in a prototypal form the method of quoting from invented bibliographies, the single coherence criterion of which may still be deduced from the logic of contradictions in the references to the real. The

narrative becomes, under these circumstances, an amphibian instance of the world of discourse, levitating between the two vides, in the pressurized space that separates them. One is the semantic vide of the real world and the other belongs to the livresque, to culture, to the imaginary world of literature. From their compression the Dictionary gains its epic combustion, managing to draw its own inconsistent being, to create a third space of potentiality. The narrative imagines in the world of the Dictionary but its metaphors resonate in and from the real, just as they irradiate in and from culture, while the third referential domain is the Dictionary itself, where an intratextuality works in a sometimes too obvious manner on the work table of the reader.

But the ambitions go far deeper in the profound structure of the world, which becomes homologue to the world of culture, loosing its substance, its resistance as real as it transfers it into the circuits of the Dictionary. On the other hand, the Dictionary empties the culture of fiction and brings it closer to the condition of the real. The result is, of course, a spectacular one: the dictionary turns the real into fiction and viceversa, while it itself is something of the both.

Where the narrative conventionally forgets its pretext and becomes the protagonist, extending into the draft of an epic scenario, it is invaded by symbolic and speaks at a parabolic register of the discourse. The associations of imagery are unexpected, on the limit of absurdity, and therefore the connection with Urmuz made by the literary critics from Manolescu to Mircea Iorgulescu. The characters also inherit the exotic aspect and the mechanical determinism of the objects in *Pagini bizarre*, reciting in the dialect of some profound revelations. MARCEL becomes a strange story, subtitled *Bicicleta cu marsarier*, which starts in a hurried confession written in childish tone about the magic properties of the unusual means of locomotion. Apparently a bike like any other, once chose by the first person protagonist it gains a special feature – the march-arriere. Its passenger keeps a diary of the fantastic journeys between things extracted from dreams or projected into the dreams from the world of toys. When it carries the character, the bike in fact accesses the world differently, like it appears, infra-real, to the imaginary of a child. The adventures are like those in Alice in Wonderland and their initiation aspect is also carefully drawn. Trains and small toy-soldiers, kangaroos and giraffes, puppies and crocodiles, cows, villages and dwarves – all form the geography of fantastic elements of childhood, and the magic bike gives them coherence. In addition to that, it is not only a solution for access, but also for returning from fantasy into the real. Of course, these are all consequences of it being a bike with march-arriere and, by going backwards, the child re-lives, in an inverted sense, like in a cliché of nowadays cinematography, the experiences of the journey with the bike's wheels up, with the sun under the pedals – therefore twisting the determinations of Physics and, with them, the conventional perception of the world.

This story of MARCEL may as well function as a self-reference norm of the entire literature in Mircea Horia Simionescu's Dictionary. The apology brought to the game, at a certain moment, which was quoted by almost everybody from Manolescu cu George Pruteanu at the publishing of the Dictionary is, as a matter of fact, an apology for the playful ritual. Mircea Horia Simionescu is not just a playful writer but also a dramatic tempered one, a consciousness that feels tragically the passing nature of things and satisfies his destructive,

demolishing instinct in the energetic nostalgia of the game. This is the point where the function of a meta-novel of the text becomes clear, to use the term associated with the School of Targoviste Romanian writers. The dictionary speaks equally of itself, of its condition and conditioning as a universe, as it confesses about the illogic nature of the real world, about the human existence's emptying of meaning.

As any deconstruction, Mircea Horia Simionescu's Dictionary exploits a crisis, which is no different to that of the world's secularization in modern times, over which the acid alluvium of Western weak thinking is put. The epic spectacle of each piece of micro-narrative confesses equally about a game of puzzle and about the impossibility of the game, about potentiality and vide. In a certain sense, the postmodernist writers have every reason to see in the Dictionary a work that is almost didactically partisan to Ihab Hassan, because it illustrates exactly the death of Great Narratives, the dismemberment of discourse etc.

At a certain point, in a text that is put to explain the name GHERASE, a pseudo-quotation from a pseudo-bibliographic source (Th. Paca) speaks about the literary work in a declamation that hides, under the thin irony, the concept of a small ars organica, essential itself to the narrative way of structuring and destructuring of the Dictionary:

„O operă literară este un sistem de gândire, o secvență deschisă în structura ființei noastre, în așa fel tăiată încât să se poată distinge limpede dispoziția foliilor, a depunerilor și, totodată, întreaga alcătuire a organizării generale. Se prea poate ca unul sau altul dintre învelișuri să se înfățișeze ca un obiect eterogen și să nu satisfacă condițiile unei epici desăvârșite. Principalul este însă ca, referindu-se la întregul sistem, fiecare parte să acopere bine o zonă a prisme și să invite la descoperirea universului pe care ea îl cuprinde în interior...”

As a matter of fact, the very detail that such passages are frequent enough in the Dictionary to be choosable at anytime, without the fear that they could be exhausted, without needing to be sought a long time, induces the sensation of circularity, of covering a core, which lacks, nevertheless, consistency. The ultimate action point of the story is exactly this: the creation of the possibility of a center and its filling with hard meaning. The dictionary seems, in the absence of this center, a perfect edifice, self-sustainable but empty, a complex mine, penetrated by gigantic networks of corridors, created in the hope that it would sometimes self-generate the precious metal in its loins.

A fish waiting for the time when it would conceive inside itself a Jonas – that is the destiny of the Dictionary, the metaphysical target of which is, in fact, the possibility of refilling the last deep layers of the world with transcendence.

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