

**GHEORGHE CRĂCIUN'S LATER WORKS:
THE VICES OF THE POSTMODERN WORLD AND BLUE WOMEN**

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*Abstract: The present paper aims at analysing two of Gheorghe Crăciun's works which appeared posthumously, namely *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women*. Both are characterized by a certain degree of incompleteness but they are also very interesting and novel instances of the author's writing. Consequently, there is the need to see exactly how both these titles place themselves in the context of Crăciun's works, how they relate to similar previous works and, more important, what exactly constitutes the originality they put forward. The perspective is multi-layered and aims at minutely describing and integrating the two titles, starting from the genesis of writing, style and construction and ending with possible connections that can be established with other works belonging to the same author. The end goal is to see whether there is a last phase in Crăciun's work (from what has been published up to this point) and how it can be characterised.*

Keywords: creative pattern, revelatory moment, posthumous works, incompleteness, creative definitions

Introduction

The current paper aims at analysing the two most recent titles of Crăciun's writing, *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women* from a multi-layered perspective, with the broader purpose of determining their place among the author's work. *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women* are two of the last published expressions of Gheorghe Crăciun's writing and they both appeared posthumously, the first in 2011 and the second in 2013. From several points of view, both titles can be analysed together, as they share a series of common traits, as it will be shown later on in this paper (for example, the similar way of coming into being and the fact that there was a second person taking the work from the manuscript status to the published one, other than the writer himself). What is very interesting though is the fact that they were published after the writer's death determined, especially in the case of *Blue Women*, an unprecedented and surprising popularity, even if *The Vices of the Postmodern World* is still to be properly discussed by the mainstream critics and not just addressed by texts of initial appraisal, as it has mostly been approached until now. However, unlike some other titles from Crăciun's writing, like *Theatre of Operation* or *The Somatographic Pact*, severely ignored by the critics, these two (up to this point) posthumously titles have become some sort of stars, precisely because of the contexts in which they were published. The leading titles in Crăciun's work remain *The Aisberg of the Modern Poetry* (for the theoretical part) and *Pupa russa* (among his novels) but it seems that the same is currently happening to another duo, *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women*.

Why analyse *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women* together? The choice could seem arbitrary, since the books belong to two different genres, and yet, they seem to be emerging from the same ideatic background. Furthermore, they also seem to be sharing a type of perspective that is novel for Crăciun and, what is even more interesting, they connect in a way that wasn't possible before, not even between *Pupa russa* and its journal. As

it will be demonstrated later on, there are subtle links between *The Vices...* and *Blue Women*, connections situated at multiple levels: the themes themselves, the Romanian (and not only) reality they both cover, the here and now versus then and there. The novel seems to have come before the articles: its *ok* version dates from the 27th of July 2006 and the writing period can be traced somewhere in 2004-2005, whereas the first mention in the journal of the idea of *The Vices...* bears the inscription 16th of July 2006. This is more than a coincidence or a mere sample of multitasking from the part of an author who regularly worked on multiple projects at a time. It looks like both books went along, even if it was for a short period of time. Did the revelatory idea for *The Vices...* determined the author to revise his novel or was it the other way round? Was the novel actually a trigger for the idea, which now does not seem so surprising as before? More than anywhere else, there is an interdependence between the two that cannot be denied and this is why it would be beneficial to analyse them simultaneously, whenever possible.

This paper raises a series of questions whose answers can lead to a clearer view upon these two titles and to a sharper perspective: can *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women* be representative samples of a new phase in Crăciun's writing, as is it up to this moment known to the critics and readers? Can they be considered creative definitions of the last Crăciun? Furthermore, how can they relate to his previous titles? Is there a breach between this last phase of creation and the previous ones or there are themes, obsessions, characters, language experiences, theoretical frameworks that live on but looking slightly different? Or, taking the other critical side, are they easy, mere commercial titles, only designed to fulfil the reader's pleasure and nothing more, completely lacking any kind of auctorial strategy or theoretical background? Can an author, all the more so one like Gheorghe Crăciun, simply pass from experimental, textualist, theoretical writing, to an *easy* novel like *Blue Women* is considered by some of the critics?

Creative Pattern and Revelatory Moments

Undoubtedly, *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women* stand alone in the background of Crăciun's writing. All previous works of his have been finished by himself, written and rewritten until he was fully satisfied with them. *Pupa russa*, for instance, experienced such a process, and the author only let it go out in the world when he was completely sure of its form. With *The Vices of the Postmodern World* and *Blue Women*, there is no last version as the author left it. *The Vices* firstly appeared serialised in *Observer cultural*, and the author was in the middle of working at the articles shortly before he passed away. It was Carmen Muşat's job to gather all 11 articles (published between October and December 2006), to write a preface for them, in which she describes precisely this process. There was a parallel read of the articles and the author's journal, where there are confirmations for these texts and an implicit ready for print from the part of the author. However, these pages are also included in the book and it is truly amazing to see that the road from idea to text is sometimes extremely short, as some pages are almost identical both in the article and in the journal. From this point of view, *The Vices* comes close to *Pupa russa*, title which benefits from having a whole journal of writing, be it *fake*, as the author calls it, namely *The Body Knows Better. Fake journal for Pupa russa* and, to some extent, to the second edition of *Composition with Unequal Parallels*, which is followed by some pages of

the author's journal, concerning precisely the writing of this novel and explaining, to a degree, certain of its aspects. However, *The Vices...* lacks references in the author's public discourse, for example when we was asked what was he working upon. The only place he mentions the themes which will become future articles are the pages of his journal. It is as if the serialised form was preferred as way of showing them to the world and maybe the process of writing was so fast and intense that he did not have the time to speak about it in interviews or other articles.

Blue Women, on the other hand, is still awaiting this type of auctorial confessions (which are certain to be present in the still not available literary legacy the author left behind). For a change, as opposed to many of his previous works, the author mentions this title in two interviews, one in *The Literary Bucovina*, in 2006, where he fully acknowledges the fact that he does not like to publicly speak about the projects he is working on, and the other in an interview from *Vatra*, in 2005, where there are more extended and, up to this point, the only auctorial references available. In this case as well Carmen Muşat edited the book, because she had to choose from two similar files from the author's computer and, furthermore, summarise the chain of events the writer wanted to use. She states that *the process of creation is definitely not ended, at this stage, but that the book has all the elements of a story with an open ending*.¹ However, the critic relies a great deal on the author's own confession regarding this novel, gathering all the references he made along to way in different forms, for the moment one of the most valuable tools for interpretation and, at the same time, a source of hypothesis to be tested in the process of analysis.

As the starting point is concerned, both *The Vices...* and *Blue Women* are based on what I have defined someplace else² as *revelatory moment*, defined as (but not limited to) *an image, a word, a language-related experience, a sensuous but analised experience acting as triggers for the creative process and leading to a finite work*. More than in other cases (there are several types of such moments within Crăciun's writing), here, the induction element is an image, both for *The Vices...* and for *Blue Women*. In the first case, the image is a billboard advertising for a variety of cameras which can be bought from a certain store:

I found myself on a metro platform in the morning, just coming back from the train station, when I stroke upon the idea of a book that could maybe be called <<The Vices of the Modern World>> (I know there is a poetry book by the South American poet Nicanor Parra which is entitled <<The Vices of the Modern World>> but mine will not be a series of samples but a phenomenology of values). Actually, I came up with the idea while watching a commercial billboard stating that you can find at Media Galaxy store a great variety of cameras. The word <<variety>> surprised me and I started to think of it. It is one of the key-words of today's world. And today,s world is a world of products. A serialised world. And so on. The book I am thinking about would be a sort of an index of vicious concepts of the postmodern world or, better said, of concepts viciated by the mere way in which this world runs.³

¹ Carmen Muşat, *A Fresh Novel*, preface for *Blue Women*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2013, p. 14

² In the corresponding chapter of my thesis proposal (work in progress)

³ Gheorghe Crăciun, *The Vices of the Postmodern World*, Tracus Arte Publishing House, 2011, p. 90

However, the image itself and the word are co-dependent, making this type of revelatory moment an image-language related one. There are more examples of this kind of revelatory moments throughout Crăciun's writing and the process is usually similar to the one where only the word is involved, because in both cases some small element of the outside world (in this case) or of the internal one (thread of thoughts) generates a future finite work, be it an article or a whole book.

The authenticity of this moment and the authenticity of translating it into writing is guaranteed by the same occurrence, as noted down in the journal pages inserted at the end of *The Vices...* There are only minor differences between the two fragments, in the sense that the article comprises a more concentrated form of the experience described in full in the diary page dated 16th of July 2006. Another difference is that Crăciun adds that his intention is to play upon subjectivity in such a way that the book does not become either too personal or too boring. It is as if he sees the word *variety* for the first time and it strikes a chord in his intellect so hard that it constitutes into the starting point of a book. So, literally, the book is made of words, based on words, born out of words. Of words of the type *food for thought*, fertile words which act as a catalyst and bring about a whole conceptual frame of mind. In this case, the word *variety* conjugates itself in the broader conceptual umbrella represented by the postmodernism. And from this on, the reader can sit back and enjoy a complex train of thought that basically questions Romanian postmodernism in its most detailed and at the same relevant aspects.

The need to write this book is immediate, almost urgent, the author says that he would have wanted to start the book in the very exact spot he found himself, on the metro platform. The index of the book establishes itself, apparently with no help from the author:

I was thinking that I should not only write about variety, but also about difference and uniqueness. I just could not miss the chance of a sign-analysis of presence, a possible discourse of the show outside performing arts. Then there would follow, in turns, repetition, multiplicity, virtuality, otherness, instant communication, the touching, the fantasy, the surrogate, the body, the absence, voyeurism, dissemination, indeterminacy, interface[...]. But also snobism, trendiness, cosmopolitanism, clubbing, elitism, the bigotry of imitation, the obscenity of namelessness.⁴

The task ahead is not only complex but also extremely audacious because what Gheorghe Crăciun wants to do is to actually write a thematic dictionary of postmodernism as it presents itself in his view and in the context of the post-communist Romanian society.

There has to be emphasized that these texts, even though conceived from the very beginning as parts of a book, appeared in a serialized form and any of the statements from the first text could not be edited in the way writers are regularly able to in case of books. The project presents itself as being too complex, there is no doubt about it, however the reader is left to ask himself how the finished task would have looked like. Still, this constant oscillation article versus book is yet another reminder of things left unfinished but not out of the writer's will but due to his untimely death.

⁴ Gheorghe Crăciun, *The Vices of the Postmodern World*, Tracus Arte Publishing House, 2011, p.18

Overlapping the diary pages and the articles that resulted from three considerations (initially written purely for personal use), one cannot help but notice how the texts that appeared in *Observator Cultural* are nothing but user-friendly interfaces of these ideas. The process they underwent condensed them in such a way that no word can be omitted without actually losing the intended meaning. This is why an informed reading should cover both the articles and the diary pages. Coming back to the general style of the articles and the author's predilection for condensed, short sentences, it must be said that this actually is not a very usual characteristic of his writing, not even of the one also published in literary magazines. It is less likely that this has to do with the specific limitations of article but more with the belief that this sometimes cryptic fashion of expression is the best way to make his point. The sentences are almost Twitter-like in terms of length and this proves at times to be a real challenge for the reader because not even one word can be skipped without the risk of missing the point: *Brand personalization. Uniform and person. Levelling and personalization.*⁵ Moreover, sometimes a paragraph has to be read more than once. In this way, *The Vices of the Postmodern World* proves itself to be not the easy read that the reduced number of pages seemed to promise. This is of course a stylistic point of view because the discussion appears to complicate if we approach the ideatic content, which will be done later on this paper.

Coming back to *Blue Women* and its creative pattern, it must be said that here, more than anywhere else, there is a severe need of being able to read both the semi-finite work and the journal pages or notes related to this title. As Carmen Mușat underlined at the launching event of *Blue Women* in Brașov, this book cannot be judged together with other fully finished titles, belonging to Crăciun or not and this is one more reason in favour of revealing any potential pages of this type. Undoubtedly, what has been published under the title *Blue Women* is just work in progress, the book didn't have the *permission to print* mark of the author and, moreover, Carmen Mușat also did an editorial job when selecting the contents of one of the two files named *Blue Women*, choosing the one that got to be published.

With *Blue Women*, there is a very interesting phenomenon going on, because Crăciun chose from the very beginning to start writing a *light* book, from a stylistical point of view also included. The very intriguing creative aspect here is the fact that, just like in *The Vices...* there is a pure copying of the revelatory moment in the book itself: here, both the writer and the narrator of the novel have the same revelatory moment: seeing a picture of Nicole Kidman. This triggers a real obsession of the narrator for the actress and her movies and basically every woman in his life gets compared to the film star. Here, it is clearer than anywhere else that the book is based on a moment with a creative potential and that becomes the red thread throughout the novel, and that this is precisely the piece of information relevant for understanding both the way of coming into being of the book and, from an ideatic point of view, its theoretical framework put into play here. Analysing both titles together can offer an intriguing perspective, namely that they were actually constructed like a pair, consciously or not, from the beginning.

It is not a mere coincidence that Crăciun didn't get to write about the theme of love in the postmodernist background and it cannot be argued that this was only determined by the fact that he passed away while writing that series of articles. A more reasonable explanation is

⁵ Gh. Crăciun, *The Vices of the Postmodern World*, Tracus Arte Publishing House, 2011, p. 95

that what he didn't succeed in treating in an article form, more likely by choice, he tackled upon in a more or less fictional perspective, in his last published novel. Certainly, his opinions on love in the postmodern age would have been fascinating, having in mind his previous titles and portrayals of love which can be found there and their absence from *The Vices...* (what is love and sexuality in the postmodern age if not a *vicious concept*?) should raise a series of questions. *Blue Women*, on the other hand, is full of various degrees and ways of understanding love, of relationships and feminine images (starting from Nicole Kidman, continuing with Ondina and ending with Ada, not leaving aside all the other feminine representations), in the broader context of a post-communist, ultimately postmodernist Romania (but not only). In this way, *Blue Women* ceases to be the *light* book the author itself intended and which the critics continued to see, but becomes yet another form of portraying a complex theme such as the erotic one. In this sense, this novel can undoubtedly stand as a new facet of seeing love and it echoes, to a very great extent, *Composition with Unequal Parallels*, from the point of view of the multitude of relationships and also *Pupa russa*, from the perspective of a character (a female in *Pupa russa* and a male in *Blue Women*) having a great variety of erotic experiences. From this perspective, the absence of the pure narrative thread is no more relevant than in the case of *Disembodied Beauty*, for example, or *Composition with Unequal Parallels*.

Greatly debated by critics as a *light* book, a book with no theoretical or another type of bet, *Blue Women* ceases to be even what its author meant for it to become, and turns into a full instance of Crăciun's writing, presenting a series of characteristics which can be found throughout his entire creation. In fact, it is the mechanism of Russian dolls that is put into play here, because *Blue Women* is literally encompassed in a broader frame of Crăciun's writing but at the same time being another instance of previously analysed themes. It is yet another instance of the work itself surpassing any authorial intentions, despite what the author intended for it. This is why some of Crăciun's own testimonial have to cautiously be taken into consideration and viewed not only by themselves, but in relation with the author's previous writings, in order to get a full and accurate image.

Another common point with *The Vices...* is a new and obvious dismissal of any theoretical point and abstract idea. If *The Vices...* was intended as a book without references, born out of real living and out of the author's own schizoid view of the culture (and it eventually became so), in *Blue Women* Crăciun rejects, from the very beginning, any type of unnecessary abstraction: *Although the confessions of my character develops itself in the form of some fragments written directly at the computer, I try as much as I can to guard my text against abstraction and theory*⁶. This is a clear departure from the intentionally assumed theoretical background that wired all his non-fictional works and also, up to the moment represented by *The Vices...* and *Blue Women*, his fictional one too. The highly experimental aspect of all his previous fictional works has been abandoned in favour of real life, of a more experience immersed point of departure and this is visible when relating the revelatory moment of both titles with their subsequent development. It is thus the moment where the experiment (like the one portrayed in *Original Documents: Legalised Copies*) is no longer favoured to the detriment of life and experience and in this way the moment embodied by

⁶ Gheorghe Crăciun in Carmen Mușat, *A Fresh Novel*, preface for *Blue Women*, Polirom, Iași, 2013, p. 16

theses posthumous titles can be considered a new phase in Crăciun's creation. Furthermore, as it is available to the public up to this point, these two titles are, for the moment, the only creative definitions of this new phase. This does not mean, however, that they are completely separated from what has been previously put forward. Because there is also a series of elements connecting to his earlier trademarks.

A clear trademark of Crăciun's writing, as illustrated all throughout his literary writings, is the predilection for paragraph (or even page) long enumerative lists. It is visible all over the articles comprised in *The Vices...* and they are also connected with a certain authorial intention, just like in the following example, where the writer of *Pupa russa* fails to efface himself:

Jeans which are cut, perforate, pre-washed, torn according to a pattern straight from the factory. Cardigans which are plucked, disheveled, with threads and burls usually hidden sticking out just like in a pattern. Skirts which are fringed, torn to tatters, which seem to be made out of randomly torn pieces which have never seen a pair of scissors. Summer jackets which are bought pre-washed already. New shoes with vintage leather, worn down even before you put them on. T-shirts which are randomly stained, still smelling as recent mass-production, tops which are already wrinkled that you might try to iron without any success, rusty jewelry, blackened by passing of a time without time, rings with artistically cracked stones, cotton jerseys like fish nets, loosely hanging on the body. Cloth bags made out of napping rags, rag-like swimwear, and leather jackets apparently shriveled at sleeves and shoulders etc, etc.⁷

At a first glance, there is a strong contradiction between the predilection for condensed sentences (Twitter like in form) and these ample enumerations but this is just a rushed reading. In fact, these two characteristics blend together very well and wonderfully serve the purpose of getting the points across. The concentrated sentences usually state an idea and the demonstration grows exactly by means of stringing these types of sentences. Moreover, there is another aspect that comes into play: by using this stylistic characteristic, Gheorghe Crăciun preserves the distinguishing urge to write down observations regarding the surrounding reality and facts. It is as if the distance between writing and reading is actually shortened to a minimum and the reader gets the impression that what he/she has just read is only moments away from actually happening. However, the overlapping of the articles and the diary fragment clearly shows that this is a choice of the author, a very subtle but yet even more efficient one.

On the other hand, ample examples come in handy at the end of such theoretical (and sometimes cryptic) argumentations. What seems to lack (in terms of properly conveying the message) is provided in the lists of examples, as seen in the quotation above. As mentioned before, this is a feature that transgresses the author's writing from the fictional side and the very interesting aspect to note here is that his previous theoretical/critical text works lack this particular way of enforcing the discourse. In the case of *The Vices of the Postmodern World* it is yet another stylistically informed choice because in this way the text earns a much needed

⁷ Gheorghe Crăciun, *The Vices of the Postmodern World*, Tracus Arte Publishing House, 2011, p. 31

balance. Throughout examples which crowd themselves in page-long paragraphs, the ideas stated as scarce as possible seen to gain weight.

Moreover, this also relates to the origin of the texts as reflections of experience. The piling up of images both the source and the meaning to illustrate an idea in such a way that there could hardly be any ways left to contradict it. Very briefly analyzing the quotation above, one can notice how these images accumulate and eventually they almost harass the observant viewer that Crăciun is and this is yet another classic case of *who was first in here*, here in the form of *Which was first, the image or the idea?* One can never tell for sure and this perpetual oscillations is one of the strong point of the book.

As fas as *Blue Women* is concerned, this predilection for long enumerative paragraphs is present from the first considerations of the author about the book, in the preface Carmen Mușat signs. Inside the novel, however, the long lists of words connected by sometimes mysterious associations (like the famous pages from *Pupa russa* describing series of linguistic experiences that Leotina has as a child) are much shorter than before (the chapters themselves are much more condensed, on the one hand, a clear sign of the intended innovation this book was planned to bring at the construction level and, on the other, a mark of the unfinished character governing the book). Moreover, there is a clear preference for ideatic concentration within a paragraph, in a very well defined tendency for a more eventful narrative thread. The same feeling of ample enumeration is now fulfilled by the long line of feminine representations, the narrator's relationships with the series of *blue women* and by the sometimes sensational line of events, which are more present than anywhere else in Crăciun's books (despite the very intricate controversy conducted by critics as to whether there is a preference for narration or not in *Blue Women*). The ultimate point to make here is that, compared to the previous titles, *Blue Women* can be considered the easiest to summarize, as it contains the most percentage of events in the narrative thread.

Conclusions

The demonstration conducted up to this point has called attention upon the fact that the last two titles belonging to Gheorghe Crăciun, *The Vices of the Postmodern World* (2011) and *Blue Women* (2013), published posthumously, prove themselves as more than meets the eye at a first glance, because they are obviously more than mere *easy* books, in spite of their condensed form (and it has been suggested above that there have been objective reasons why the writer didn't get to shape, reshape, write and rewrite them at will, until he considered them appropriate). They can and must be considered representative samples of a new phase in Crăciun's creation, as it is for the moment known both to critics and readers. They can even be seen as creative definitions of the last Crăciun, relating both to the previous titles in a series of ways but at the same time detaching themselves and establishing their own personality, which is a fact both for *The Vices...* and for *Blue Women*. As mentioned and shown above, there are some aspects that continue to come into play (the paradigmatic features of Crăciun's writing, at the level of some of the themes, characters, language experiences and theoretical frameworks, however well hidden in the text), combined with an auctorial strategy that gives away a new theoretical and creative background. The experiment, the textualist and theoretical writing are not fully abandoned, they become threads in a more

complex canvass. The very interesting aspect related to both titles analyzed above is the unexpected access that the critic and the reader gain into the creative laboratory of such a complex writer as Crăciun was and it is only for this, if not for some more reasons, that *The Vices...* and *Blue Women* should be seen as more than sensational appearances, traces left by the author on his way to a better world.

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