

FROM THE GALLERY OF THE DESENZITIZED BEINGS: THE "ETHEREAL" WOMEN AND THE IRREDUCIBLE CORPOREALITY

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Abstract: This article discusses the posthumous, unfinished novel of Gheorghe Crăciun - "Blue Women" (Femei albastre), a work that completes the series of the previous writings by topping off the gallery of the damaged, hopeless characters and displaying the supra-theme of Vision, as well as various openings towards sensuality, eroticism, somatic exploration, film and photographic art. Persistently handling the camera throughout the text, Gheorghe Crăciun embodies a fanatic collector of images that chaotically presses down the shutter button just to collect shallow, hasty snapshots from the life stories of several characters. Inside the shell of the novel, just like an archivist of female bodies, the protagonist inventories all his adventures, whose stories are every so often brought to light by wiping away the dust of time. Recalled to the memory, the female characters gain corporeality in the very process of storytelling, being injected with the author's "syringes of metaphysics".

Keywords: Gheorghe Crăciun, blue, corporeality, Vision, femininity.

In the second edition of *Pupa Russa* Gheorghe Crăciun inserted the following paragraph: "Reality is meant to be tested in its perishable truths and the work of a writer can only be the work of a man that has willingly locked himself in a laboratory that deposits fragments of skin, strands of hair, rotten teeth and clipped nails, photos of the brain, blood tubes, boxes filled with radioactive sand, pieces of bone, insects trapped in amber, fibrous nerve capillaries, bottles with urine, injectable doses of sperm, damaged organs, mucous tissues, relics, wood and stone powder, cinder and ash, fish skeletons and megalithic skulls, scalps, fetuses, jaws, vertebrae, formalin-fixed tumors, endoscopic films, tomograms."

This vividly striking *tableau vivant* contoured in fauvist touches represents the naturalistic image of the writer's studio - an anthropomorphized *logos* saturated with an aging corporeality. The depiction is cleansed of stylistic embellishments, linguistic processing or the sanguineous infusions preceding the editing of a literary work. This is the exact stage in which the "blue" clones - Gheorghe Crăciun's last female characters - have stopped their carefully monitored growing process inside the sealed containers of their creator's laboratory, since the writer's *modus operandi* - from the inside out - is already renown: "It would be normal for a novelist to know from the beginning the conformation of the skeleton he tries to bring to life and then dress everything into flesh. But I don't work this way. I'm unable to. I build a part of the skeleton and immediately rush to hide it under a layer of muscles, nerves, blood vessels, epithelia and fabrics."¹

Femei albastre (Blue Women) - the posthumous, unfinished novel of Gheorghe Crăciun - completes the series of the previous writings by continuing the line of the damaged, hopeless characters. The book resembles *Original Documents/Legalized Copies*, as both of

¹ Gheorghe Crăciun, *Romancierii români vor lipsi de la integrarea în Europa*, în „Vatra”, nr. 1-2/2005, p. 16

the writings share the supra-theme of Vision and the openings towards sensuality, eroticism, somatic exploration, film and photographic art.

The book surprisingly lacks the meta-discursive and the self-referential register, placing fiction above autofiction and autobiography. Gheorghe Crăciun's analytical prose is dissymmetrical and does not follow the course of a classical diegesis; the novel's structure resembles the cinematographic technique of alternating the frames and retaking scenes, as well as several detours.

Persistently handling the camera throughout the text, Gheorghe Crăciun embodies a fanatic collector of images that chaotically presses down the shutter button just to collect shallow, hasty snapshots from the life stories of several desensitized beings.

The novel appears as a complex meditation on existential disorientation and the provisional condition of man. The protagonist, "an anonymous voice", partially an Oblomovian individual resembling Anton Holban's characters, is "a cynic out of necessity and a hedonist without an ideology". This unnamed character (as former high-school teacher, currently a lawyer, writing detective novels in the manner of Georges Simeon and fleeing to Austria to finalize his doctoral thesis) displays an unfavorable and inauthentic combination of qualities. In his forties, the narrator engages in an existential autoscopy but leads a life in the captivity of his real and imaginary voluptuousness.

The protagonist resembles Septimius Ilarie, Radu Țuculescu's "insomniac" character, but seems to be outridden by a Don Juanish side, that needs the continuous reinforcement of new conquests: "I'm the owner of a whole collection of women. I run into them every day, I am their boss. Each one is, in her own way, a case. Each one searches for something, trying to discover exactly what she should search more consequently for. All of them are priestesses of their own illusionary future. They all crave to dazzle their audience, to imprint their smiles on a poster, to make as tiny a hole as it gets in our cardboard sky. They have breasts and thighs, painted lips and colored hair. They walk feeling scissored by the metallic lashes of males, clinched into walls, glued to the windows, stuffed into chairs by their sticky stares. All of them are fine women. They all know it and there's nothing they can do about it. They live in a world of men and they instinctively feminize it. They have no other way. They have no other pleasure."²

Gheorghe Crăciun's unnamed protagonist lacks in the sentimental magnetism of Septimius - an ambiguous but velvety trap for a woman's soul. Abandoned by his wife after having resigned himself to a "pleasant" marriage, the narrator poses as victim to justify his uncommitted relationships with other women - an ingenuous knack that makes him the convenient, ideal partner for the adventurers who seek no emotional implications. He is a somewhat retractile character, a passive individual, a "test partner" who accepts to remain in the shadows as long as women accept him in their lives. Though acting under the pretext of an erotic quest, he never brings his investigation to an end.

Blue Women is, above all, a book of the confessed solitude: "A dislocating sensation. Loneliness is an acid."³ Even when surrounded with friends, the protagonist lives in a constant unfulfilled wandering, overcome exclusively by the act of writing and the need of storytelling.

² Gheorghe Crăciun, *Femei albastre*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2013, p. 183

³ *Ibidem.*, p. 111

The narrator feeds on the stories that he exposes to a variety of interlocutors out of an ontological urge to confess himself.

Inside the shell of the novel, just like an archivist of female bodies, the protagonist inventories all his adventures, whose stories are every so often brought to light by wiping away the dust of memory. Therefore, all the female characters mentioned by the protagonist come to life because they are narrated. Recalled to the memory, they gain corporeality in the very process of storytelling, being injected with the author's "syringes of metaphysics": "What we find in others is never a character, but a story. (...) The other's body, exposed in the space of the street, the park or the bar, functions as a screen that the beholder (the voyeur) projects his phantasms on. (...) As the body becomes more and more a privileged means of self-expression, we stand before others with a corporeal language."⁴

The protagonist's existence is haunted by Nicole Kidman's phantasmal image which he reconstitutes from pictures published in newspapers and magazines. Representing the unachievable desire of the author, the actress is gradually turned into a character in the novel, but remains a disembodied being reflecting a "celluloid" femininity that is irreducible to written words. She can only be accessed through visual perception, altered by the photographic or filmic medium.

Gheorghe Crăciun's conclusion reflects Rudolf Arnheim's theory on the expressive capabilities of the visual: "film can never be a simple reproduction of reality. On the contrary, filmic images have the ability to shape reality and produce meaning."⁵ Therefore, the perception of Nicole, filtered through the filmic image, remains intangible as, with each role, she inhabits the body of another character. As it approaches the author's microscopic lens, the idolized image of Nicole degrades progressively from that of a *femme fatale* to a puppet with cardboard cheeks and eventually to a "ghost of celluloid".

Ada, the real-life counterpart of Nicole represents a projection of Ada Monroe, one of the lead characters from the war-drama film *Cold Mountain*. Ada displays a chameleonic appearance, harboring a changing beauty, warm and cold at the same time. A strange mixture of red-haired, coffee-eyed teenager, Ada symbolizes the painfully "alive" woman, ripened by the sensuality of an incipient femininity.

The textual relationship between Nicole and Ada is mediated by blue color tones - seemingly a mixture of the blue shades used by Van Gogh and Yves Klein - as both of them wear intense aquamarine dresses. Therefore, the title of the novel explains the author's fascination with the immaterial, cold and transparent color that seems to smooth the path towards reverie and impossible dreams. Gheorghe Crăciun has found his own shade of blue, that of the wild gentian flower, a color destined to dematerialize the female being by blending it with the interstices within the text and turning it into an organic stamp.

Ondina, the third segment of the erotic triangle, represents the accessible, material woman, mature enough to understand her beloved one's need for freedom, as well as his repeated infidelities. Although the narrator seems to display his apparent emotional attachment to her, admitting her to be the only "existing" woman in his life, he is paradoxically unable to remain faithful to her: "I love her so much and so equally, that

⁴ Oana Pughineanu, *Corp și manieră*, în „Cahiers de l'Echinox”, vol. 2, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2001, p. 77

⁵ Uta Grundmann, *The Intelligence of Vision. An Interview with Rudolf Arnheim*, "Cabinet", nr.2 (*Mapping Conversations*)/spring 2001

sometimes, for hours on end, I forget she really exists.(...) Ondina is my peace. She's like a sister to me. It is as if we shared the same blood. Life without her would seem impossible. (...) Ondina walks with me as if I'm dying of happiness. That is the case."⁶

Attempting a "clinical" investigation of the feminine image, the author resents not having pierced the intimacy of the woman's soul. His eternal discontent transforms him into a victim of an illusory love, when, eventually, all women display the same ethereal corporeality of his wax puppet, Nicole: "All women are actresses. Some of them are actresses of flesh, others of celluloid. There's no celluloid without flesh. There's no waiting without reverie, fantasy without sin, smoke without fire, woman without skin."⁷

Blessed (or damned) with the gift of being a language creator, the illusions of Gheorghe Crăciun are the illusions of corporeality; it is not because he hadn't reached that state of his own, unique corporeal syntax, but because he had been living his whole life haunted by this phantasm and passed away without even realizing that his literary/textual body had already been corporalised.

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⁶ Gheorghe Crăciun, *Femei albastre*, ed. cit. , pp. 52, 70, 178

⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 229