

Ruxandra Cesereanu

Andrei Codrescu – An Anarchetypal Writer

ABSTRACT

Andrei Codrescu, American writer of Romanian origin, can be seen as a creative mosaic, an artistic palimpsest and a multiple subject. In his writings, there reverberate hybrid *mélanges* of the buzzing Balkan culture and the Central-European substrate. To these two ingredients of the author's mindset are then added his Jewish sensibility and, finally, the decisive, americanized layer of the immigrant who has assimilated the culture of his host country via two carnivalesque or Babelian cities – New York and New Orleans. Andrei Codrescu is an author fascinated with decentering and anarchy, which he endeavors to put forward not necessarily as a model, but as a creative structure, clearly influenced by the techniques of the *avant-garde*, but also by postmodern techniques. From this point of view, he is an anarchetypal writer (the term anarchetype belongs to another Romanian writer, Corin Braga).

KEYWORDS

Andrei Codrescu; Anarchetype; *Avant-garde*; Postmodernism; Romanian Origins; Balkan Culture; Jewish Sensibility; Dada; Poetry; Beat Counterculture; Posthumanity; Bibliodeath; Anarchobook; Sheherazade and the Arabian Nights.

RUXANDRA CESEREANU

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
RuxCes@yahoo.com

Andrei Codrescu (born in 1946) is an American writer of Romanian origin who can be seen as a creative mosaic, an artistic palimpsest and a multiple subject. In his writings, there reverberate hybrid *mélanges* of the buzzing Balkan culture (picturesque, magical, oozing eroticism) and the Central-European substrate (the key influence being exerted by the space and atmosphere of Sibiu, Codrescu's hometown, a multicultural, Saxon city located in Transylvania, with a rigorous and institutionalized penchant for the arts). To these two ingredients of the author's mindset are then added his Jewish sensibility (with all the traditions he sometimes turns upside down, ironically and self-ironically), his peripatetic and, alternatively, flippant or stern cast of mind and, finally, the decisive, Americanized layer of the immigrant who has assimilated the culture of his host country via two carnivalesque or Babelian cities – New York and New Orleans – with all their artisticity, whether we speak of the Beat counterculture and the flower-power medley of New York or the French-American culture, mixed with the voodoo influence, in New Orleans. As a teenager, Codrescu had two Romanian cultural models, which were nonetheless radically opposed, in poetic and philosophical terms: Lucian Blaga (1895-1961, a Dionysian with Apollonian overtones, who became



a Gnostic author at maturity) and Tristan Tzara (1896-1963, a fervent avant-garde artist, the founder of Dada). After Andrei Codrescu immigrated to America, where he accepted and was accepted under the influence of the Beat poets, one of his recognized mentors was the poet Ted Berrigan (1934-1983) and, collaterally, the famous Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997). Still, the true master who steered Codrescu's artistic becoming was not a particular person, but a movement, an -ism recalibrated by the author after a personal recipe: 1915-1916, the glory years of Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, where Dada and other avant-garde movements came into being, were recon-verted by Andrei Codrescu through the lenses of the 1970s in America, the years when the Romanian writer who had just immigrated to America came under the tutelage of the Beat poets and experienced life and literature to the fullest.

These nuances that combine to form the multiple literary subject Andrei Codrescu have not revolted against one another, but cohabited with intercultural voluptuousness, each serving as a supporting platform for the others, with the effervescence of a chemical reaction.¹ Hence, a few defining characteristics for the writer who is under scrutiny here: 1. the relatively compulsive predilection for anything that might be Dada; 2. the postmodern-baroque-avant-garde carnivalesque; 3. his tuning into the rebelliousness of American counterculture, but without ever forgetting his Balkan origins or denying his ludic Jewishness; 4. his wit, which appreciates the freedom to think and write and is allergic to anything that borders on cultural coercion, censorship or (symbolic) lobotomy. Not least, his profoundly anarchetypal spirit.²

Andrei Codrescu has published fifty-three books in English (by 2015), of which twenty-two are books of poetry, seven are books of prose, eleven are books of mem-

oir-essays and thirteen are travel essays (which the author refers to as travelogues). To these are added a few books written under a pseudonym, plus three books of poetry written in Romanian (one of these, an experimental volume, *Forgiven Submarine*, was co-authored with the undersigned)³ and one of dialogs, also written in Romanian. Not to mention his anthologies, revised editions, etc. I will focus here solely on Andrei Codrescu's latest books of essays, as I have already written, on another occasion, about his novels (the most spectacular of which are – in order of my preference – *Mesi@*, *Wakefield* and *Casanova in Bohemia*) and some of his poetry.⁴ These recent essay books are (thus far): *The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara & Lenin Play Chess* (2009, translated into Romanian in 2009), *The Poetry Lesson* (2010, translated into Romanian in 2014), *Whatever Gets You through the Night. A Story of Sheherezade and the Arabian Entertainments* (2011) and *Bibliodeath. My Archives. With Life in Footnotes* (2012).

Above all, however, I ought to clarify what an anarchetypal writer is and why Andrei Codrescu is such a writer. The term *anarchetype* belongs to the Romanian novelist and essayist Corin Braga, who defines it in his book *From Archetypes to Anarchetypes* (2006). In Braga's conception, while modern man is confined to a schizomorphic state, postmodern or post-postmodern man assumes the stance of a multiple subject. In post-postmodernity, the archetypal cultural model (predicated on the central position of the subject) is no longer valid, being replaced by an anarchetypal model (anarchic, decentered, atomized).⁵ In this new type of anarchetypal structure, there is no continuity: there is unpredictability, deviation, devertebra-tion and, respectively, polydirectional evolution (this is the structure underlying, for



instance, books like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – by Lewis Carroll, *Finnegans Wake* – by James Joyce, *In Search of Lost Time* – by Marcel Proust, *Hopscotch* – by Julio Cortazar and *V* by Thomas Pynchon). Corin Braga summarizes the definition of anarchetypes thus: “An anarchetypal work is one in which the plot is atomized into a nebula of meaning”; an anarchetypal work “does not lend itself to the Aristotelian logic of classical physics, but to quantum logic”; the pulverization of the archetype turns the anarchetype into “a figurative cloud” composed of meteorites, asteroids and debris.⁶ It should be noted that an anarchetype can consist of archetype remnants and symbols, but these are no longer dominant, they are fragmented, the anarchetype coagulating these remnants. It should also be stressed that Corin Braga does not define anarchetypes from a systemic perspective, but from an artistic standpoint, as a mechanism of creation.⁷ In this sense, an anarchetype is a disassembled archetype whose structure has been reassembled. Another point to be made: an anarchetype can be comprehended, at the level of interpretation, through a subhermeneutics that no longer aims to interpret meaning, but to infra-construct it.⁸

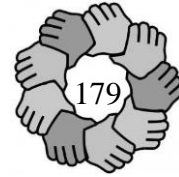
Although the conceptual dyad archetype-anarchetype could be strategically envisaged to encapsulate the disjunction between modernism and postmodernism, anarchetypes tend to define the paradigm of the post-postmodern world.⁹ An anarchetype will deconstruct an archetype, but will not be confined to this process, as it will autonomously build something else, exploring the polyhedral nature of cultural and existential phenomena and legitimizing the idea of a multiple subject. Thus, anarchetypes are specific to periods of cultural syncretism.¹⁰ From a linguistic point of view, they could also be called anti-archetypes; the central idea underlying anar-

chetypes is, of course, that of anarchy. As Corin Braga explains, “Anarchetypes involve the workings of an anarchic *mimesis*, which refuses compliance with ideal types and produces fortuitous and irreducible, singular entities...” “As its name suggests, an anarchetype is a concept that manifests itself anarchically against the idea of a pattern or a center.”¹¹ While an archetype resembles a “solar system configured around a star,” an anarchetype is more like “interstellar dust” or a “galactic cloud.”¹²

Why should Andrei Codrescu (the writer and essayist) be seen as an anarchetypal writer?¹³ Because he is an author who is fascinated with decentering and anarchy, which he endeavors to put forward not necessarily as a model, but as a creative structure, clearly influenced by the techniques of the avant-garde. Andrei Codrescu's writings are particularly open to the idea of shock and anarchy, taken from the avant-garde. As an author, he is situated between postmodernism and post-postmodernism, in my opinion, because his stylistic and authorial avant-gardism is not homogeneous and monochrome, but patchy and fragmented. The critifictions from his latest four books of essays resort to the technique of the galactic cloud or dust (theorized by Corin Braga), even though Andrei Codrescu was not aware, at the time of writing these books, (except very vaguely) with the term of anarchetype.

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The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara & Lenin Play Chess is an anarchetypal book from several points of view: first of all, because the author intends not to synthesize, in classical manner, the information about the birth and chronology of the avant-garde, but to pulverize it in the form of a dictionary, which itself is not a typical, but an extravagant critifictional dictionary (real



information is speculated on and narrativized, at times, like in an adventure or a picaresque novel). The information in this so-called dictionary (which behaves, strategically, like a trickster-dictionary rather) is delivered to the reader in an atomized, poly-faceted manner, for the author considers that only through such a tactic could the spirit of the avant-garde be continued in a living form, without being ossified. If Andrei Codrescu had written an explanatory, logical, encyclopedic Dada guide, this would actually not have been a Dada guide, for it would have denied the fundamental idea of the avant-garde that an -ISM cannot and should not be institutionalized, as its only possible form of vitality is anti- and non-institutionalization, the spirit of being against any and all things.

For the posthumans of the future, the Dada spirit could be a form of sanity since its inhumanity could serve as a primary energy source, like a Dionysian engine in a world that is excessively controlled by Apollonian technology and technocracy. The serious-ironic advice Andrei Codrescu gives sounds as follows:

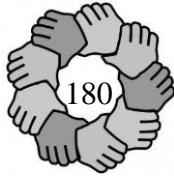
If you have any doubt as to whether you are posthuman or merely human, take a look at the following parts of your body: the city, the house, the car, the iPhone, the laptop, the iPod, the pillbox, the nonflesh surround. If sixty percent of your body is now electronic or bioelectronic, living in space designed for efficiency, you will need Dada as a corrective to what will certainly be the loss of the modicum of liberty you still possess.¹⁴

Being deliberately avant-garde in hyperbolic cyber times is a form of advanced therapy in Andrei Codrescu's coveting/sanitizing view. Posthumanity is not necessarily aware that it is posthuman; therefore,

Codrescu intends to make it lucid and provide it with a foolproof recipe (partially verified by the Beat generation in the 1970s): "Dada is the viral option to the virtual certainty."¹⁵ Posthumanity is like neuralgia or even a flaw, a vice; hence, Andrei Codrescu's frantic drive to correct and sanitize it, in a constructive-energetic way: Dada (as anti-everything and as a radical NO) is an emergency ontological and cognitive pill applicable to a diseased humanity, debilitated by advanced technology and implacable alienation. The author does not proceed, however, in a classical and objective surgical manner, but by pulverizing his discourse and ideas into bits and pieces that become imprinted into the reader. The manner is anarchetypal; the style too. Andrei Codrescu is allergic to objective lessons on the anatomy of ideas and art; his surgical lessons are always fragmentary and disseminated, with a series of playfully rhizomatic offshoots that are never gathered in a synthesis by the book; rather, they have the allure of sprightly psychiatric lessons (on mentalities)!

Still, when it comes to providing definitions, despite his irony and playful mischievousness, Andrei Codrescu puts on display a trenchant rhetoric, consistently peppered with pungent sarcasms. Comprehensive accounts are out of the question, absolute Cartesian definitions being rejected in favor of relative or partial references, which are nonetheless inserted in an equation that is compelling precisely through its freedom. To give an example: What is the posthuman?

My distinction is this: a posthuman is a human who has put nature (including her own) between parentheses. Or convinced herself that everything non-human is human and, therefore, human = nature. This used to be called "anthropomorfism," but lately it is



known as a “user friendly interface”.¹⁶

In a society that is e-everything and online-ized, Codrescu recommends a return to the wilderness, to creative audacity, but not to just any linguistic and behavioral shock: only to Dada. The author cites the example of himself and his book (the guide for posthumans), which is numbered, but this is the only guaranteed thing in light of the minimum logic evinced by his Dada dictionary, which behaves like a multiple trickster.¹⁷ Dada is not art but life; hence, Dada cannot be institutionalized (historicized) or enlisted into any kind of service, because it is the very negation of any and all things. And, denying everything, Dada remains alive, unalterable as a spirit, untrappable in a scientifically or culturally accurate definition. Dada is rather a mentality phenomenon that can be remixed or used as a remake for sanitizing and refreshing a cybernetically pathologized society.

Dada entered the DNA of the 20th century through a radical negation that stayed fresh long after its seemingly successful competitor, communism, bit the dust. The anti-ideology of dada won over ideology and inspired other artistic and political movements that were short-lived to the extent that they compromised with ideologies.¹⁸

As anti-all (and as an antidote), Dada is the sole unpredictable and ineffable formula that could defuse the current nonlife of humanity, mediated by the predatory and addictive world of computers. Because it is anti-all, Dada is also anti-Dada, a fact that is truly unique and sanitizing since it brings to the surface the universal absurd, creating thus an anti-world.¹⁹ In any case, an anti-world (as a project and as an ontological formula) would detoxify the cybernetic world and the posthuman mentality.

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Words are part of the substance out of which Dada makes worlds, not in order to communicate, but to dis-communicate, to disrupt, to make time where the communication was interrupted. [...] All words are Dada if they are correctly misused.²⁰

Andrei Codrescu’s discourse is intentionally off-center; today’s world could not be sanitized by a coherent, consistent and logical discourse, but only through a discontinuous, heterogeneous and dispersed rhetoric. What is imperatively necessary for us to break out of the cybernetic traps of our bodies and minds being collectively monitored in a universally technologized Panopticon is a Dada spirit, which can debug our brains (as one of famous exhortations launched by Romanian avant-garde artists at the beginning of the twentieth century sounded, “Readers, debug your brains!”). What Codrescu indicts (with playful charm) is the supremacy of simulacra, which have taken hold of ideas, the intellect, sensations, perceptions, and words. The only adequate way of possibly (eventually) sanitizing posthumanized humanity is by resorting to anarchetypal rhetoric and style. What does the ailment of the twenty-first century sound and look like? Here it is:

Today, the “world” is a pseudonym that stands, maybe, for the world. “Reality” is doubtlessly a pseudonym for reality. All words are in fact pseudonyms of themselves, and if they are sufficiently pseudonymous, they became symbols. The internet is almost entirely pseudonymous or anonymous.²¹

The author suggests the potential emergence of a New Age apocalypse, but avoids harsh, ultimative and official terms, because it would be inappropriate to resort

to such verdicts under the aegis of the Dada spirit. Still, Andrei Codrescu's anxiety is real and categorical: in the absence of a Dada therapy (aiming for a "disruption of networks"²² or for perturbing technology), the world today remains fatally pathologized by abusive technics and by simulacra with deliberately totalitarian implications. The chance for purification (again, this is not a tyrannical, but an infrastructural purification, whereby every statement is, or turns into, simultaneously, the very opposite of that assertion) would linguistically articulate a restorative project at the ontological-gnoseological level. The ludic dimensions thereof would play a secondary role in this regard, but they should not be overlooked.

Dada knows if Dada knows anything, that anything articulated in a form of a finished sentence means the exact opposite of what it says.²³

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Anarchetypal writing is also strikingly present in the critical-essay *The Poetry Lesson*. "Every morning when you get up, write an epitaph!"²⁴ This is how Andrei Codrescu starts the class he teaches his beginner students in a creative writing workshop at the University of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This is the last academic course in creative writing taught by the American writer of Romanian origin at university level. *The Poetry Lesson* is a journal accompanying this course, which is conceived more like a polymorphous carnival than as an activity complying with formal academic rigors. The galactic cloud technique and that of playful atomization or dissemination is also applied in this work. After the first epitaph offered as a mandatory step towards initiation, there follows the ludic command of an epigram and, then, of an epitogram (epitaph + epigram).²⁵ Typical of the au-

thor's specific style, seriousness is constantly grafted on irony and sarcasm, so that, via this argumentative deviance, readers may be left dumbfounded, stunned, and then gradually initiated into something other than what they expected. Most of Andrei Codrescu's students seem, at first, ignorant, amateurish troglodytes; however, among them there are also extravagant spirits, who are fairly tolerable and aesthetically, or even intellectually, promising. The author, who is also the Professor teaching this last course does not necessarily aspire to turn these novice students into test-tube poets, but into professional readers and connoisseurs of poetry.

The instruments that Andrei Codrescu demands, with charm, of the novices are intended as a playful *captatio benevolentiae*, a ruse that is somewhat discontinuous, de-centered and polydirectional: the students must be provided with notepads, a Mont Blanc fountain pen, an amulet, eaves-dropping places, voice recorders/ binoculars/ microphones, a Daimon, a famous fellow spirit or alter ego (*ghost-companion*), a susceptibility to hypnosis, half a meter of paper, a television subscription. The novices are invited to write down in their notepads different things: dreams, ideas, mysteries and others.²⁶ They are especially reminded of the ten muses of poetry (which I will enumerate here, as the author listed them in English and as the translator Ioana Avadani preserves them in the Romanian version of the book, to sample the author's unmistakable and spectacularly inventive style when he wants to be a juggler of language):

Mishearing
Misunderstanding
Mistranslating
Mismanaging
Mislaying
Misreading





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Misappropriating clichés
Misplacing objects
belonging to roommates or

lovers

Misguided thoughts at inappropriate
times, funerals etc.

Mississippi (the river)²⁷

Here is, then, a Decalogue of deviance (*Mis-*), based on the decentering mechanisms that are characteristic of anarchetypes: the anarchic commands laid down by Andrei Codrescu regarding the muses of poetry are specifically designed to dismantle the archetype of a logical Decalogue about and for poetry. Clearly, the novices must be taken aback/apart and then put back together again, because the first lesson of poetry is taught like a sacrament, like a spell of substance and form, in an anarchic manner. Then, the novices are assigned their fellow spirits, that is, the poetic masters that are to inspire them and be their guardian angels (of all shapes and sizes). Here is the list of *ghost-companions*: Anna Akhmatova, Paul Blackburn, William Burroughs, Aimé Césaire, Max Jacob, Gabriela Mistral, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Miroslav Holub, Jack Kerouac, Henry Michaux, Arthur Rimbaud, Walt Whitman. In teaching the poetry lesson, Codrescu assumes, in fact, the identity of a multiple subject and determines (persuades) his students to accept their collective identity as novices, forming another multiple subject. As I was saying, the students may be ignorant or foolish, but Andrei Codrescu gradually converts them and entices out of them whatever is more alive and humanly or aesthetically useful.

The Poetry Lesson is written by a hipster-trickster who is, underneath, a rational man, and who does not forget for one moment that playfulness is the essence of being. His falsely pedagogical book abounds in a few ingredients that are specific to Andrei Codrescu as a brand: ritualistic

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humor, conversational irony, whirlwind witticisms, uproarious intelligence bordering on delirium. It is a forceful demonstration of how poetry can still have the power to stun the disenchanted world and the generally pragmatic minds. About how poetry can still serve as an orientative, cognitive and affective pathway. Here is the author's mockingly meaningful comment on his recipe:

You take healthy young Americans used to sunshine (aided sometimes by Xanax and Adderall), you blindfold them and lead them by the hand into a labyrinth made by bones. Then you tell them their assignments: "Find the Grail. You have a New York minute to get it."²⁸

A (self)ironical academic "guru," Codrescu teaches his students not to get bored, to be charming, clever, ingenious, playful and fresh (until adulthood and old age). The author conceives his poetry lesson as a picaresque journey, with crossroads, adventures, mischiefs, spicy incidents, and adaptive oratory, but also with professional advice or bookish speculations. Although most of the students are innocents at first, they soon soak in the poetic matter. Andrei Codrescu asks himself, at one point, whether he is – at a playful pedagogical level – a metempsychotic recycler of famous poets, instilling them into his novices with myriad creative personalities only to give a chance to dead or elderly poets to have access to fresh bodies and souls in their old age (sic)!²⁹ As a metempsychotic recycler, Codrescu deliberately assumes the position of a multiple subject, who relies on an off-center demonstration. However, this devertebration does not undermine the demonstration; on the contrary, it increases its impact, because it expertly disseminates it by steering it along polydirectional channels.

The Poetry Lesson is a book that ought to be read by poets and nonpoets alike (i.e. by everyone). It is neither an essay, nor a novel, but a log-book about poetry (about how poetry is made, felt and thought, but also about how it is to be read or commented on) or the report of a burlesque initiation. It is a book that advocates a form of immortality, in which few people still believe, but which does have an impact, albeit a niche one. As the author says, “The whole world is a cemetery, everybody’s dead except for the poets. Poets don’t need a cemetery.”³⁰

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Whatever Gets You Through the Night. A Story of Sheherazade and the Arabian Entertainments, published in 2011, is an *anarchobook* (my term), since it explodes book archetypes. On many pages of this peculiar work, footnotes become the book itself, as the author is fascinated with reformatting the concept of the book. Sometimes footnotes look like a frame (literally), reinforcing (seriously and ironically, at the same time) the central text. Andrei Codrescu does this as a show of force, using as a guinea pig the suite of Arabian stories *One Thousand and One Nights*, a canonical book that he de-intellectualizes (with scholarly prowess), unhinging it from its erudite intellectual framework and refiltering it naturally. His method of choice resides in dismembering the *One Thousand and One Nights* (through the central narrative of Sheherazade and King Shahryar, but also of Dunyazad and King Shah Zaman – the other key couple in the *Arabian Nights*), chopping and marinating them, retrieving them later into the narrative, but in an almost anarchic way. In the end, the book looks like a sort of Dada *One Thousand and One Nights!*³¹

In *Whatever Gets You Through the*

Night, Sheherazade becomes a sort of literary Djinn (a spirit), trapped in the frame of the *One Thousand and One Nights*; the reader also becomes a kind of Djinn trapped in the narrative; the glass behind which this captivity takes place is the narrative itself, which goes on forever. Andrei Codrescu constructs two initiatory couples and a *ménage-à-trois*: Shahryar-Shahzaman, Sheherazade-Dunyazad, and Shahryar-Sheherazade-Dunyazad. The author’s essay in prose is also an essay on mentality, charting Arab customs (and their subsequent hermeneutics) about sexual, culinary, sartorial, religious, socio-political and fantasy-related aspects. Postmodernity also assists Andrei Codrescu: Sheherazade’s discourse features, at one point, the presence of Antoine Galland, Richard F. Burton and Husain Haddawy, all of them translators, in different centuries, of the *One Thousand and One Nights* suite, serving as future Moirai (or Fates) of Sheherazade the storyteller.³² Andrei Codrescu’s book of critifiction is intellectually stimulating and offers a subsidiary discussion of the mentality aspects raised by the translations of the famous suite of stories, forming a puzzle or outlining a concentrated history of ideas. The author renders the protagonist of this collection of stories as an intertextual, multicultural and multi-mythical (or inter-mythical) Sheherazade, who is akin to Ariadne and Penelope or to Prometheus (on account of his constant revolt against authority).³³ Every now and again, the author psychoanalyzes Sheherazade, not in a Freudian, but in a (Melanie) Kleinian key, inventing the childhood and the adolescence of the matricial heroine to that effect.³⁴

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Bibliodeath. My Archives (With Life in Footnotes), a book published in 2012, turns





out to be a *Bildungsroman* since its narrative and essayistic strands are so strongly entwined, against the background of the literary autobiography inserted in the text like a filigree. Andrei Codrescu produces, in fact, yet another *anarchobook* in *Bibliodeath*: this time, however, the pages are sometimes framed by the footnotes which may become more important than the central text. The author starts from the following context: since we are confronted with a fad for electronic books and libraries (and since, as prophesied by the grey eminencies of the internet, this fad will develop hyperbolically in the coming years), Andrei Codrescu manufactures his own book, published in quasi-bibliophile manner in 176 copies, 150 copies being for sale, and 26 copies belonging to the author. The number of copies of this book, demonstratively entitled *Bibliodeath*, communicates directly the idea that while printed works are about to disappear, the author Andrei Codrescu wishes to have his books published, to be recompensed, against the grain of current practices, with bibliophile versions and collections designed for gourmet tastes, recalibrating and rethinking (conceptually and concretely) the notion of books. Through such an approach, the author outlines and, at the same time, breaks the limits, like a *frondeur* with a Dada background, which is why *Bibliodeath* should also be seen, implicitly, as a work about the limitations of printed books and, explicitly, about the off-putting furor of electronic books.

What is *Bibliodeath* in a nutshell? It is “an idea of *homo scribus* who lost the war with *techne*.”³⁵ This battle is conceived and presented almost like a thriller by the author. No wonder that Andrei Codrescu recounts, in an autobiographical vein, about the libraries in his hometown (Sibiu) and that he gives a brief history of books during

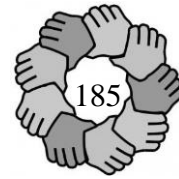
the communist period in Romania, to which he had access (up until 1968). Above all, the author talks about his poetry notebooks from the time of his adolescence, which he extended (multiplying and diversifying them) in his youth, maturity and old age, as an integral part of his literary existence (the authorial confession actually heroizes the idea of notebooks!). Obviously, *Bibliodeath* becomes, explicitly and implicitly a *meta-book* about the author’s readings, about the books in his libraries, about his experience as a bookseller (in New York, after his emigration). From this point of view, this book is the assumed testimony of a gourmet (who has corresponded assiduously with other writers, collecting signatures, dialogues and autographed books) and a lover of books, in his public and in his private life. When the internet erupts in his intellectual life, the author becomes a subject analyzed electronically (on websites, blogs, social networks), but this does not alter his vocation as a classical reader (of books that can be touched, handheld), even though, at the same time, he technically adapts himself to postmodern times. What is also captivating in *Bibliodeath* is the history of the experimental famous review *Exquisite Corpse* (which Codrescu launched and edited), published in print from 1983 to 1996, and in electronic form subsequently, up until its disappearance or volatilization even in electronic form (even though the author still posts, secretly and occasionally, poems, essays, prose narratives authored by himself or by his collaborators, only gourmets being aware of these stealthy postings!). *Bibliodeath* contains – in amalgamated or intentionally concentrated form mimicking that of library shelves – autobiographical segments on Andrei Codrescu’s typewriters and computers, on the donation of his archives and on the author’s own initiation into the world of web surfing.

From the vantage point of the history

of ideas, this essay addresses the utopian-dystopian rapport (in the sphere of hand-written or digital archives) and the dialectic of conservation v. destruction in the world of books. It is, after all, a book about memory and about its disappearance or preservation through texts (written, printed or digitized). For Andrei Codrescu, the public library has a genuinely erotic aura,³⁶ while the cyberutopian empire is legitimizing the advent of posthumanity.³⁷ In the cyberutopia of the present, the writer becomes an electronic, infinitely extensible artifact! Codrescu embarks on a personal history of the real-virtual conceptual pair, in which what is at stake the simultaneous problematization and glorification of language.³⁸ Technically *Bibliodeath* is, from beginning to end, an *anarchobook*; at the level of content, it is not necessarily anarchic, except in various fragments, since what it advocates is precisely the unity of meaning.

“Archivally speaking, there are three types of authors, and I’ve been all three of them: the Preserver, the Piler, and the *Carpe Diem*,”³⁹ as Andrei Codrescu states at the beginning of the book *Bibliodeath*, acknowledging his own hybrid structure, mixed, for that reason too, with an ineffable presence at the authorial level. Such an assumption is useful on two accounts: on the one hand, it facilitates the labor of the literary analyst, who can take heed of the author’s self-confessed polymorphous identity; on the other hand, it demonstratively (and polemically) renders transparent his mosaic-like internal structure, with external ramifications, characterized by a refusal of classification and a self-defined propensity towards anarchism (an intellectual challenge for any hermeneutist). This is Andrei Codrescu’s preferred way of manifesting himself like a voracious literary butterfly in an authorial world that he defies by refusing to adhere to its canons. Andrei Codrescu has always aspired to be and remain an *other*.

Translated into English
by **Carmen-Veronica**



Borbély

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Notes

¹ In a synthesis essay about Andrei Codrescu that I published in 2007 (Ruxandra Cesereanu – “Andrei Codrescu. One man show,” *Steaua*, 1-2, 2007, pp. 7-10), I described the author as follows, detecting, in his portrait, the insignia of Fernando Pessoa’s lineage: “The American Andrei Codrescu is, in all likelihood, the most spectacular contemporary ‘Romanian’ writer living abroad. A multiple subject and a well-nigh *anarchetypal* writer in terms of his structure (if I were to apply a concept launched by Corin Braga on the cultural market in Romania), Andrei Codrescu is, first and foremost, a fan of extravagant or strange artists like Tristan Tzara or Salvador Dali, among others. This has equipped him with a keen appreciation of the absurd practiced by Urmuz and Ionesco and has led him to develop a highly nuanced, heteronymic personality, in the manner of a Fernando Pessoa (he is a postmodern Pessoa, we might say, like a poker player, juggling with his own poetic stances). A poet, a novelist, an essayist and a journalist, Codrescu attempts to hybridize genres and obtain an alchemical palimpsest; hence, the voluptuous

curiosity with which his books are read.”

² In an interview I took the author in 2009, he refused with cautious mildness my reference to him as a multiple subject. Here is the passage in question:

Ruxandra Cesereanu: You write poetry, prose, and essays. Are you a multiple subject?

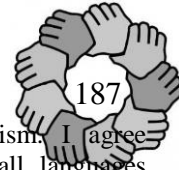
Don’t you feel you’re turning into a schizoidally fractured subject, broken into three, doing so many different things at once? What is the common ground and the germinative core that your poetry, prose and essays all stem from? Or is there no such common ground? Do you assume parallel and irreconcilable identities?

Andrei Codrescu: I am not a multiple subject, because I am not the subject. The subject is the world I’m trying to understand with the help of the keyboard or with a pen. I can hear different rhythms for different stories and write them down as I hear them. They all come from the same source and are the product of the same curiosity. Rhythm arranges them on a page. Technical and practical necessities dictate their moods: essays and novels get sold, poetry is a site for everything. I never feel any break and I don’t write, as Wordsworth advised, about things “recollected in tranquility.” I never harvest anything tranquilly; I have lively responses to the fret of life and follow rather Ezra Pound’s advice to “make it new.” I do not believe in eternal masterpieces carved out of marble and oppose classicization or mummification in any form. If it is not alive, I’m not interested in it, which does not mean that I do not study history.

Some of the dead are more alive than most of our contemporaries.

(“Toți poeții sunt femei, evrei și șamani,” *Steaua* magazine, no. 9, 2009).

Despite this answer, I still believe that Andrei Codrescu is, from an authorial standpoint, akin to Fernando Pessoa and his



heteronyms (as a multiple subject), albeit in a form adapted to the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. I will retract only a certain problematic nuance of the question I once asked Andrei Codrescu: his different creative identities are parallel and reconcilable (not irreconcilable).

In 2012, interviewed by Josh Cook and questioned bluntly about his literary multilingualism and the hybridity of his writerly persona, Andrei Codrescu explained himself as follows, with the same serene caution as in the case of the question I had asked him four years before:

Josh Cook: You've written and read in several languages in your life, sometimes translating your own work from one to the other. You've also written poetry, fiction, memoir, and have recently worked in a critico-fictional or fictional-critical voice, and those voices and styles could be considered foreign languages. Do all of these languages unify in the brain? If so, what does that sound and feel like? If not, does this mean you experience a kind of controlled multiple personality disorder, or is there a better metaphor for the experience of language and voice in your mind?

Andrei Codrescu: There is no "foreign" language. Before going to school I spoke German, Hungarian, and Romanian, but I didn't know that they were separate languages. They were just how I talked to my friend Peter, who spoke Mitteldeutsch, like my nanny Ilse; to Istvan, who spoke the way I did with my grandmother; and to Ion, who spoke how most of our neighbors did. In school, I learned that I conducted these friendships in different languages. That never took. I didn't believe it then, I don't believe it now.

Everyone can speak every language, and it's only lack of practice and opportunity that

creates inflexible monolingualism. I agree with Roman Jakobson that all languages derive from an ur-language, and that the ur-language is hardwired in the brain and can be activated to go live into any of its branches (any language or linguistic family) whenever called upon. When my writing

works well you can hear the hum of that ur-language in every sentence. If you use, in addition, the mysterious tool called The Language Crystal, you have extraordinary powers. I'm not going to describe this tool in any way here, but it's in the book."

(http://www.bookslut.com/features/2012_12_019654.php)

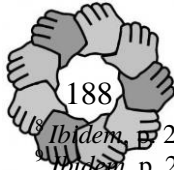
³ Ruxandra Cesereanu & Andrei Codrescu, *Submarinul iertat*, Timișoara, Editura Brumar, 2007 / *Forgiven Submarine*, translated into English by Andrei Codrescu, Black Widow Press, 2009).

⁴ See Ruxandra Cesereanu, "L'alchimie scripturale chez Andrei Codrescu," *Synergies Roumanie*, numero 5, 2010, pp. 51-62. See also the essay cited above, Ruxandra Cesereanu – "Andrei Codrescu. One man show," *Steaua*, 1-2, 2007, pp. 7-10. I have also written about all the projects or experiments I have engaged in together with Andrei Codrescu, on various occasions, see Ruxandra Cesereanu – "Povestășii ardeleni și moldavi față în față cu neworlinezii," *Steaua*, 10-11, 2010, pp. 14-16; Ruxandra Cesereanu, "Arabescuri creolo-transilvano-moldave la New Orleans," *Dilemateca*, Year V, no. 54, 2010, pp. 80-85. I would also add here the extensive, aforementioned interview I took Andrei Codrescu – "Toți poeții sunt femei, evrei și șamani," *Steaua* magazine, no. 9, 2009, pp. 6-9.

⁵ Corin Braga, *De la arhetip la anarhetip*, Iași: Editura Polirom, 2006, pp. 249-250.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 255.



⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 256.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 269.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 277.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 278.

¹³ My analysis in this essay will not focus on Andrei Codrescu the poet, as his lyrical

creation is generally circumscribed to the Beat style that he assumed immediately after immigrating to America. On the other hand, the poetry that he wrote in Romanian in his youth and was published only thirty or forty years later, in Romanian, look up to the expressionist model of Lucian Blaga or is reminiscent, at times, of avant-garde or quasi-surrealist experimentation.

¹⁴ Andrei Codrescu, *The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara & Lenin Play Chess*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹⁷ Andrei Codrescu's polymorphous trickster identity is analyzed as a creative matrix in a dissertation written in Japanese by Yoshiro Sakamoto (2013, Tokyo University).

¹⁸ Codrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁹ One of the few authors who assumed such an anti-world was Eugène Ionesco in and through the play entitled *Pedestrian of the Air*.

²⁰ Codrescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 166.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

²⁴ Andrei Codrescu, *The Poetry Lesson*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

³¹ While Andrei Codrescu was writing his anarchobook about the 1001 nights or even at an earlier time, I launched a creative writing workshop in prose which focused specifically on continuations of the suite of Arab narratives. The workshop lasted five hundred days and took place from 2008 to 2009, leading to the publication of a collective volume, *The Stories of Dunyazad, Her Slave Rashazad and King Shahzaman* (Bucharest: Tracus Arts, 2012). I coordinated that volume, which gathered the contribution of eighteen storytellers who participated in this ambitious experiment in creative writing, paying thus tribute to the ceremonious narratives of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Here are the names of the storytellers/authors: Marius Conkan, Suzana Lungu, Bogdan Odăgescu, Valentin Moldovan, Cristina Vidruțiu, Lavinia Rogojină, Alexandru Istudor, Oana Furdea, Cezara Alexis, Florin Balotescu, Bogdan Papacostea, Maria Juca, Raluca Ferentinos, Alexandra Ghejan, Valerica Mărginean, Sonia Andraș, Simina Rațiu, Mihaela Prodan.

³² Andrei Codrescu, *Whatever Gets You Through the Night. A Story of Sheherezade and the Arabian Entertainments*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 75.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 96, 97.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

³⁵ Andrei Codrescu, *Bibliodeath: My Archives (With Life in Footnotes)*, New York: Antibookclub, 2012, p. V.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 146-147.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

