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A Transdisciplinary Deconstruction of Ideology. Gnostic-Alchemic Imaginary, Dialectic Materialism and Atomic Physics in Vintila Horia's Novels

ABSTRACT

Vintilă Horia associates the alchemic imaginary and the paradigm of quantic Physics by applying the result to the interpretation of social and ideological phenomena characteristic of postwar Eastern Europe. Like Dante's *Commedia*, *Persécutez Boèce!* proposes a soteriology, but in a *New Age* formula, through an inter- and transdisciplinary transfer, at the intersection of atomic Physics and hermetism – an alternative to the immanentist ideologies of (post)modernity. Like his Florentine icon, Vintilă Horia reconsiders an ontology of redemption – of salvation from the “evil” of the history that has dissolved the luminous order of the world into an ideologically nourished entropy.

KEYWORDS

Vintilă Horia; Imaginary; Ideology; Interdisciplinary; Transdisciplinary; Gnostic; Alchemy; Dialectic Materialism; Atomic Physics; Deconstruction.

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A *New Age* Cervantine: Transdisciplinarity and Intertextual Imaginary

Acquainted with the discoveries of atomic Physics, which he pours with passionate curiosity into the distillation vessel of the alchemic imaginary, Vintilă Horia somehow appears as a *New Age* intellectual. He is ready to embark on a long “journey to the *centres* of the Earth”, a sort of *updated* initiation pilgrimage – which, by the way, he undertook and told – to gather the confessions of some contemporary characters from various domains, sciences, technologies and entrepreneurship, literature, arts, philosophy. Driven by an insatiable appetite for the unseen connections between objects and domains of study, a spirit of inter- or transdisciplinarity that discredits him in the eyes of a pure and tough rationalist humanist like Monica Lovinescu¹, but draws the friendship of another dissident of ideas, Stéphane Lupasco² or the admiration of Basarab Nicolescu who unconditionally sees in Vintilă Horia a “Knight of the Knowledge that Is To Come”³. Vintilă Horia approximates Basarab Nicolescu's interdisciplinary approach, from his monography on Ion Barbu – to the convergence between poetry and Mathematics – to his



own project of “literary epistemology” which is an alliance between Physics and literature⁴.

Beyond the strangeness of the interdisciplinary associations and the beauty of the game of ideas – under an ever Platonic sky at Vintilă Horia –, he is urged by what he believes to be a stringent need of the contemporary political and social context. To such a stringency he ingeniously responds with one of his “ancient ideas”, a keystone in the foundation of the Rome Institute for Western Culture, in December 1979: namely, “translating” the “science of our century” into “political concepts and norms”⁵. An idea upon which Vintilă Horia will elaborate in his novel *Persécutez Boèce!* (Lausanne, 1983). Advocating “as early as 1969” for the “agreement between politics and science”⁶, Vintilă Horia thus anticipates the concept of “transdisciplinarity” and the *Venice Declaration*⁷ (1986) formulated by Basarab Nicolescu. According to Vintilă Horia, by means of (what his Physician compatriot calls) “transdisciplinarity”, there may be achieved a “metapolitics” closely connected to a knowledge “technique”⁸.

In a certain sense, Vintilă Horia remains nevertheless “medieval”, as he introduces himself: dependent on the idea of transcendence – which he protects like the Arthurian knights had protected the right way of the Grail –, deeply Platonic and reticent, if not even completely intolerant of the immanentism of Nietzsche, Marx, Freud or Darwin and its consequences in the life of ideas and society. Instead, in the ‘60s, he builds a good press for Jung who detached himself from the positivistic, over simplifying theory of his Viennese master. For Vintilă Horia, Jung is an effigy of the “essential”: a scholar and *homo religiosus* at the same time, therefore able to “contradict all the follies of his time”⁹. However, he sanctions Nietzsche severely: “a monstrous factory, like Marx or Hugo, of all the

heresies of the 19th century”¹⁰.

According to him, Nietzsche “failed to become a philosopher” because he “despised the inner man”¹¹.

Vintilă Horia has the pleasure and skill of thinking and talking independently, even against the grain of the common places of his time, a mission which he fulfils with apostolic devotion. He is a Cervantine with remnants of donquijotism, striking openly – and equally use(fully)/lessly – in full era of the excesses of dialectic materialism and triumphant postmodernism. He is a Cervantine not just because Don Quijote’s story “has never ceased” to “haunt” him – an illustrative tale about the “apparently useless courage and gratuitous beautiful gesture”, far-off in the “horizon of archetypes, like all great things”¹², kept alive by the sap of the ideal. Not only because he turns Cervantes into a character, an intimate involved into an epistolary exchange with the hero, El Greco, in the novel *Un sepulcro en el cielo* (*A Tomb in the Sky*). But also because like his Spanish rival, Vintilă Horia writes in an explicit dialogue with a series of authors who precede him across various eras and literatures. Just like the story of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, Vintilă Horia’s novels unfold, not once, as an intertextual construction, interconnected with cultural references that the author annotates and recontextualizes. Thus, the novels extend the bookish reference point, embroidering around it and extending it with a story that is symptomatic for the way in which Vintilă Horia assumes literature (his or that of others) – more often than not like an echo of his own biography.

With an acute need to understand his individual destiny and the Romanian, collective one, in the context of the transformations from Eastern Europe, following the second World War, Vintilă Horia acted from the position of an unofficial ambassador of



Romanian history and culture, beyond the frontiers and constraints of the Eastern “concentration camp”. (It is worth mentioning Vintilă Horia’s attempt to bring Lucian Blaga to the attention of the Western intellectual circles, after he had been removed from the public and academic Romanian sphere.) This happened not just once, despite the postwar regime from Bucharest that, in connivance with members of the French left, was not at all favourable to Vintilă Horia, in the backstage of the 1960 Goncourt Awards. Thus, the prize was averted from being awarded, nevertheless still adjudicated, to the novel *Dieu est né en exil*.

In his novels, Vintilă Horia achieves the intertextual connection either by incorporating quotations or reminiscences from and allusions to literary, philosophical, artistic or scientific sources, particularly from the domain of Physics. (Not incidentally, an acclaimed interlocutor and epistolary correspondent was for him Basarab Nicolescu, a physicist with a vast humanist opening.) Vintilă Horia often reads his favourite writers through a hermetic lens: Plato, Ovid, Boethius, the “*Bible*, an encoded document”, Dante with his “*Divina Commedia* and its esoteric hideouts”¹³, its “provençal troubadours and their games of crossed words in lines”¹⁴, Edgar Poe, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jung, René Guénon, among many others. Kierkegaard is quoted in the very title of the novel *Le chevalier de la résignation* (*The Knight of Resignation*), as well as in the motto that situates its theme into a Kierkegaardian perspective. The Platonic epistolary, authentic or not – an issue yet open and controversial of the philosopher’s exegesis – represents the basis for the novel *La Septième lettre* (*The Seventh Letter*). Ovid’s poems – from his Italian or Pontic time – are a source for *Dieu est né en exil* (*God Was Born in Exile*). *Persécutez*

Boèce! (translated in Romanian under the title *Salvarea de ostrogoți* by Ileana Cantunari) is inspired by Boethius’s biography and his emblematic work, *Philosophiae consolatio* (*The Consolation of Philosophy*). It would not be inconceivable that Vintilă Horia’s interest in Boethius may have been stimulated by his readings of Dante, his never-failing model who confesses, in *Convivio* (II, 12, 4), that after the death of Beatrice, he started reading Boethius and Cicero¹⁵.

The novel *Un sepulcro en el cielo* (*A Tomb in Heaven*) is built around the work, personality and epoch of Doménikos Theotokópoulos, nicknamed El Greco, the Cretan settled in Toledo. Vintilă Horia looks at El Greco’s creation through the lens of his own theocentric vision, closer to the allegorizing symbolism of Medieval representation (that reads the world as if it were a divine hieroglyph, an encoded message from God) than to the anthropocentric realism of the Renaissance to which the artist belongs in terms of temporal location. With reference to the ideas trends from the 16th – 17th centuries and in an attempt to specify some principles of plastic creation, there converge, in the novelistic discourse, essential statements of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy, references to illustrative texts for the aesthetics of the Renaissance or classical Antiquity and also the Middle Ages, Dante, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo, San Juan de la Cruz, Teresa de Ávila – all of them, except the first, appearing as episodic characters in the novel.

Scientific sources are authentically exploited in *Persécutez Boèce!*, in a polemic dialogue between, on the one hand, the old gnostic-alchemic tradition and the achievements of quantic Physics and, on the other hand, Marxist ideology, with its excesses related to “dialectic and historical materialism”. By an authentic initiative in the intellectual and literary landscaped from the



later half of the 20th century, Vintilă Horia reiterates, through this inter- and transdisciplinary mixture, a trendy concern among the hermetic circles of the *fin de siècle* Europe, namely the “Golden Dawn” (1887-1903) and, beginning with 1912, London’s “Alchemical Society”. The latter was programmatically interested in identifying correlations between two apparently incompatible systems of describing phenomena: on the one hand, the old hermetic symbolism – especially alchemic – and, on the other hand, the new scientific theories and models, particularly those connected to discovering the structure of the atom, radium, radioactivity and radioactive transformation, seen as analogous to alchemic “transmutation”.

A major reference for the medieval scholars, whose echoes may be perceived as far back as Dante, at the dawn of the Renaissance, *The Consolation of Philosophy* was written by Boethius in prison, in 524, during a long trial. One of the “mostly read, translated and commented works during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance”, *The Consolation of Philosophy* handed down to the West the fundamental principles and themes of ancient wisdom¹⁵. A Christian thinker, familiar nevertheless with Antiquity’s traditions of pagan spirituality, Boethius applies, in his entire work – both in his religious and lay writings – a “strictly rational method”¹⁷. It is precisely this “rigorous” and integrating “rationalism”¹⁸ – to the extent in which it proves the “possibility of a theology exposed *more geometrico*”¹⁹ – that makes Boethius a relevant benchmark in the history of European, lay and also theological thought. In a similar manner, through interdisciplinary connection, Vintilă Horia attempts an analytical dismantling – a deconstruction – of the ideology (especially of the Marxist “dialectic materialism” of positivist ascendancy), on the basis of the knowledge from the “new Physics”, more specifically the

quantic one. At times of indecision and darkness – to which that “*selva oscura*” from Dante’s *Commedia* allegorically sends – reason is an Ariadne’s thread for Boethius’s, Dante’s or Vintilă Horia’s (in *Persécutez Boèce!*) *alter ego* characters.

The Consolation of Philosophy reveals a deep transformation experienced and confessed by Boethius in his hypostasis of actor and martyr on a stage of *Realpolitik* fifteen centuries ago, and towards the end of his life, of thinker in search of his “consolation” through writing and meditation. A similar process, of test of conscience and inner transformation, is covered by the iconic characters from Vintilă Horia’s fictions of historical inspiration: Boethius himself, Ovid, Radu-Negru, Plato, El Greco. Vintilă Horia chooses, from the stage of history, illustrative personalities and empathetically installs them in his own fiction, in light of certain experiences familiar to all these and himself, specifically the experience of exile: “My exile – the novelist remembers somewhere in *Diary* – begins at the age of eight months”²⁰. As a motto for *Journal d’un paysan du Danube*, Vintilă Horia chooses a fragment from Dante, in the same vein: “*L’esilio che m’e dato onor mi tegno*”. *Commedia* is, according to Curtius, the “answer of Dante’s spirit to Dante’s fate: exile”²¹. In the same relation is, in fact, also Vintilă Horia’s very biography and work.

In Vintilă Horia’s novels, such intertextual relations are usually doubled by an allusive insinuation or even the explicit statement of a historical parallelism relation. In *The Knight of Resignation*, the situation of the Danube principality abandoned by the Western countries, insecure allies within a vaguely medieval atmosphere (repeatable anywhere and anytime), indirectly sends to the situation of postwar Romania and the circumstances of its entering a new sphere of influence. Similarly, the already well-



established theme of the intellectual in relation to an oppressive political regime is mirrored in *Persécutez Boèce!* by correlating postwar biographies of former political prisoners, deported in Bărăgan – Toma Singuran or, before that, professor Diaconu – with that of Boethius who lives in Rome under barbarian rule, at the end of late Antiquity. The connection between the two poles of the novel and the mark of historical parallelism is, in this case, the text – Diaconu’s manuscript (continued by Toma Singuran) and, respectively, that of Boethius; both of them are a testimony of an experience of transfiguring knowledge, lived by their authors in a hostile historical conjuncture. It is not accidentally that the symbols of alchemic transformation return to the imaginary of Vintilă Horia’s novels, especially in *Persécutez Boèce!*. In the last one, such symbols translate changes happening in the characters’ conscience and, at the same time, the revitalization of their spiritual energies – able to support the physical and moral resistance of these undesirable people, cast on the edge of Earth, outside society and civilization, in order to perish unknown and so that their traces may be lost. (Illustrative in this respect are the episode of Sanda’s healing, in a sort of “athanor” that her modest shelter from Bărăgan is turned into or, before that, Toma Singuran’s healing, in a similar way.)

A *Tomb in Heaven* relies on the same principle of spiritual “transmutation”, which is defining for the *Trilogy of the Exile* (*God was Born in Exile, The Knight of Resignation, Persécutez Boèce!*). The novel is one of Vintilă Horia’s narrative experiments, in its resorting to the flow of consciousness technique. The writer thus attempts to rebuild a retro- and introspection process which El Greco undertakes. An old world is sinking, like the Spanish fleet engulfed by the waves of the battle lost by the Invincible Armada

and carries with it pieces from the protagonist’s life – beings, feelings, places, events –, temporarily saved from shipwreck by memories. The artist attempts to rescue them from the grasp of time and his own disappearance through an essentialized representation in his paintings. The Madonna painted by El Greco imitates the traits of Jerónima which is another hypostasis of the salutary *donna gentile* from the medieval imaginary. Inconsolable after having lost her too early, the Cretan thus places her in the horizon of the eternity of art and God, like Dante did with his *Beata Beatrix*. (The evocation of Jerónima resumes, after seven centuries, a *topos* of the pre-Renaissance Italian poetry – “raising one’s lover to the rank of heavenly angel”²² – a motif established by Guido Guinizelli and found, several decades later, in the Florentine’s *Commedia*). The character’s biography achieves thus a dimension of *exemplum* – the telling of a spiritual apprenticeship, spanning several decades and hundreds of kilometres, from one end to the other of Europe, from Crete to Castile, *via* Rome and Venice.

Reflecting on the lives of some political or cultural personalities and reconstructing them in his work, Vintilă Horia reconsiders and makes peace with his own biography. He views it from a generic perspective – of an archetype of the exile(d), particularly relevant for the Romanian ’27 generation, that had experienced the ideological temptations of inter- and postwar Europe and, moreover, bearing the consequences of the commitments, be they even temporary, that its members made to totalitarian left- or right-wing ideologies. Vintilă Horia himself, in his youth, was not spared by such ideological deviations, as shown by some of his articles issued in the Romanian press of the time. Like some of his generation peers, such as Eliade and Cioran, maybe even to a greater extent than them, this



episode significantly impacted Vintilă Horia's literary career (by way of proof, the Goncourt scandal from 1960), despite his subsequent denial of his juvenile affinities with the right-wing extremism. In *Persécutez Boèce!*, Boethius's *mea culpa*, expressed shortly before the death to which he had been condemned by his former protector, the Goth king Teodoric, is the echo of this experience that is illustrative for a good part of the Romanian intellectuals formed between the Wars, dramatically subjected to the challenges of the time and then to the postwar political context: "I have acted erroneously by collaborating with his regime" – Boethius admits²³.

Professor Diaconu from *Persécutez Boèce!* shares with Dante the same intention of finding a solution to a system crisis. Transferred to Diaconu's manuscript, such a desideratum is, in *Persécutez Boèce!*, similar to that materialized by Dante in *Commedia*, at the level – which he calls "anagogic" in *Convivio* – of the "(over)meaning". In the manuscript, Diaconu is concerned with finding a way out of the postwar world crisis, divided by the Iron Curtain and split by the adjacent political slogans. Similarly, Dante's *Commedia* sketches a way out of the (political and moral, individual and social, secular and religious) slough experienced, at the time, by the Italian Peninsula and Western Europe, torn by a war of attrition between *Imperium* and *Sacerdotium*, between Guelphs and Ghibellines, between the lay authority of the peninsular state-cities that defended their autonomy and the Papal expansionism that sought to expand its dominion over them.

Gnostic Imaginary and the Transdisciplinary Deconstruction of Ideology

Exile is a frequent theme in Vintilă Horia's novels. In *Persécutez Boèce!*, it is explicitly integrated into a cosmo and ontological vision influenced by the gnostic mythology²⁴. Gnosis is a saviour science – acquired by the neophyte through initiation – about divine beings, the origin of the world and its fatal imperfection. Besides the unknown Father of Light and the Evil Demiurge, responsible for the act of Creation, there is, among the divine entities, Sophia. She assumes the role of mediator between mortals and the Light beyond the mundane shadows. Sophia helps man bear his condition of ignorance and suffering, for which he is not responsible, like in the canonical *Scriptures*, but his uninspired Creator. In the gnostic condition, as he himself represents it, Hans Jonas discovers a "dual alienation": from the world and from transcendence; in relation to both, man is an "alien". His exile stops only by returning to an ideal, ahistorical country from which man grew estranged by his fall into time. The creation bears, according to Gnostics, the stigma of an original error, for which man is nevertheless not to blame, like in the canonical *Scriptures*, but cosmogonic, inferior divinity – the "Evil Demiurge", distinct from the "unknown Father" of Light; the latter – an acosmic, pleromatic principle with an irreducible transcendence.

The gnostic imaginary returns in *Persécutez Boèce!* under various forms: the alien, the exile, the tension between the constraints of the worldly (physical, social, historical) condition and the claiming of freedom in spirit, through access to another horizon of understanding phenomena, beyond



simplistic positivistic explanations and the ideological ordinary ideas based on these. At the beginning of the novel, there is the recurrent motif of the alien(ated), however reformulated within a context of postwar events – “alienation” by “falling” into a hostile history that disastrously precipitates along with the arrival of the “occupation, of a horrible and levelling imposition from the outside”²⁵. Exile, as Toma Singuran believes, may be experienced in two ways: externally and internally; in the later case, it is a “stagnating trans-humance”²⁶, an aloneness in one’s own country, thus turned into an “alien”, threatening, concentrationary space, as he himself experiences it. The world appears to Toma like an agonal reality, a product and terrain of the confrontation between the two rival and complementary principles, present in every dualism, including in the gnostic one: “he now had the clear conscience of taking part into a universal game, which two opposing principles had been playing as of the beginning of the world”²⁷.

“The brightness of the sun among the remains of human misery”²⁸ – “matter and brightness”, argues Bergson, cited by Diaconu, “cavern and illumination”, another formula from the professor’s manuscript – are as many iconic images of the creatural condition that justifies the ambivalence of the gnostic attitude: on the one hand, optimism generated by belief in the salutary intervention of transcendent forces, accessible through initiation knowledge (*gnosis*); on the other hand, pessimism maintained by the slough of the worldly condition, which the being “fallen” into time bears, subjected to becoming, therefore also to alteration and finiteness: a “situation typical for a world in ruins that has definitely lost its sense of redemption and innocence”, a world that “justified the very human condition in its final hypostasis”²⁹. Immediately after the

war, Bucharest is a terrifying space of collective penitence, without clarified guilt; the generalized fault, however not specified, turns the city into a Kafkian one, where the attic of each house witnesses an absurd trial: “glances of haunted, guilty, harassed people, without anybody knowing the cause of their sin or guilt”³⁰. It is not the creature’s fault, as Toma lets us understand, but a pre-cosmogonic error – that gnostic “antecedent” guilt –, responsible for the way out of the original repose: “Somebody, somewhere in the night of things, had made a mistake or a miscalculation”³¹. After the war, the world – the East-European and Romanian “camp”, in any case – appears to Toma as a place of moil, invaded by a “swarming of executioners”. One that is ordered according to an evil principle, where the gnostic “Evil Demiurge” may be foreseen – which confirms the “visible alliance between winners and evil”³² and leads Toma to a dual hypothesis: either Good God, *Deus absconditus*, has left the world to the watch of a diabolic adjutant, or everything is but an absurd masquerade, with “no explanation”³³. As Vintilă Horia writes to Basarab Nicolescu in the autumn of 1983, “without knowing it, we have been living in full Apocalypse, since 1939 (or since Yalta)”³⁴.

Like the Gnostics and, fifteenth centuries later, the existentialists³⁵, Toma Singuran perceives his condition like a “dual alienation”³⁶: in relation to transcendence (the “essential”, as he will designate it in his notes) and also to the social (the “existential”). God “has retreated” and has been replaced by the almighty Evil, through its lieutenants in history who “teem” almost everywhere³⁷. After his years in prison, after Toma’s deportation to Bărăgan, “there is nobody left for him in this world, not a single soul, to whom he may talk as to a friend. Only those that he had been forced to leave behind in the olfactory obscurity of the cell”³⁸. Toma’s exile is essentially an



internal one, a stringent alienation: he is different, therefore “alien” to the new context of the history written by the winners, vassals to the evil Demiurge³⁹.

Also recurrent in the novel is the gnostic motif of salvation (“liberation”, “redemption”). Toma is “liberated” – as he himself records – as a result of three epiphanic, transfiguring experiences: the prison and the people there, unsuspectingly receptive to the message of literature, the discovery of the manuscript in the professor’s hut and, finally, the meeting with Malvina Rareș. As a consequence of the three events, Toma becomes a sort of avatar of the gnostic “saved Saviour”, able, in his turn, to “liberate”, in a certain way, the others: his prison fellows and Diaconu by saving his work and making a way for him to the free world; also Malvina whom he “saves” from her past, her complicity with the system and what she “had been forced to be, confronted with her former innocence”⁴⁰. The major personal experiences are designated by Toma in terms such as “initiation”, “transformation” (*metanoia*), “liberation”: “the second liberating event had been the discovery of Diaconu’s manuscript, his slow ascent and the transformation that followed”⁴¹. The experience of imprisonment falls in this novitiate, a path of illumination and inner “liberation”, to the extent in which it avails to Toma an unexpected revelation, that of the “deep vital meaning of literature”⁴². This enables the captives’ revenge on the physical confinement (suddenly irrelevant) and the ideological constraint, which Toma’s intellectual and emotional solidarity thwarts in his role of *ad hoc* story teller for his prison audience. “The atmosphere in the cell was suffocating and the mates seemed to cling to his words as to a last resort for breathing. Literature is often a gate to the only breathable air”⁴³. Among those in the audience, differences become irrelevant for the moment: prisoners like their story teller and even the

guardian who watches over them are curious to hear the end of the story⁴⁴. Imprisoned and liberated at the same time by the subversive magic of the story, they all listen to the intertwined adventures of the two Ulysses – Homer’s navigator, lost in the Mediterranean sea and his Joycean replica, wandering aimlessly through a labyrinthine Dublin, roofed by the twilight shadow of modernity. Larding the stories with his personal comments, Toma combines and compares them, turning them into one telling that is worthy of the bet of Scheherazade who puts death off with fine promises, herself also imprisoned into an uncertain condition that rests upon the turn of a dice and her master’s whim.

It may perhaps be risky to say that Vintilă Horia may have borrowed the motif of liberating love from some predecessor – in an already known rhetoric, the “love that spins suns and stars around”⁴⁵ at Dante, or Gretchen’s redeeming love at the end of Goethe’s play. But, the motif is certainly there, in one form or another, at all three of them – and, by no means only at them, in the history of literature. At the end of the play, Gretchen, like another *Beata Beatrix*, belongs to a transcendental order that reminds of the Sophian mediation and the divine hierarchies of the Gnostics that may also be divined in the allegory of salvation from Dante’s *Commedia*. Besides a “once called Margareta, a *una poenitentium*”, this hierarchy – a Sophian hypostasis of the feminine – also includes, in Goethe’s play, the *Mater gloriosa*, *Magna Peccatrix*, *Mulier Samaritana* and *Maria Aegyptiaca*⁴⁶. Besides Faustus’s own acts, who “has struggled hard” – the angels remember “floating in the upper customs of the sky”, carrying with them “the immortal part of Faustus” – the “choir of the penitent women”⁴⁷, supported by *Mater gloriosa*, confesses the love “that was fully sent from heaven”⁴⁸ to seal the salvation of



the Faustian soul. (As a result, the demons “went mad./ It was not the toil, from hell./ But love that burnt their wound”⁴⁹). Vintilă Horia resumes the old motif of “liberating” love in *Persécutez Boèce!*. There, it occurs as a dual aspect: individual and archetypal, biographic and mythical. Toma Singuran aligns it with a soteriological triad, along with literature and the new knowledge – at the intersection of Physics and the gnostic-alembic tradition –, brought to him by the manuscript of an exceptional (meta)-physicist, Diaconu, whose legatee he becomes. Therefore, the theme of salvation through knowledge (*gnosis*) and love is shared by the three works – *The Divine Comedy*, Goethe’s version of the Faustian myth and the novel *Persécutez Boèce!* – where it is contaminated, in different doses, by gnostic accents.

In *Persécutez Boèce!*, historical parallelism relies mainly on the relationship of thematic and functional consonance between two texts that resemble in their threefold finality: cognitive, in relation to those who write them, deconstructive in relation to the prevailing ideology and subversive in relation to the political regime with which their authors clash. The two texts are *The Consolation of Philosophy* and the manuscript from Diaconu, a physicist nominated several times for the Nobel Prize but who refused to serve Stalin – which brought about his deportation to Bărăgan and his assassination. Hunted by the Secret Police, Diaconu’s manuscript is found, studied and secretly transcribed by Toma Singuran, just like Boethius’s manuscript is the object of the Ostrogoth prosecution and its rescuing a proof of the author’s friends’ loyalty. Boethius’s reflections, from the last pages of the novel, on the eve of his execution, are supported by Jung’s convictions, which he reveals a few dozen pages before, but fourteen centuries after.

The knowledge handed down by Diaconu’s manuscript achieves the merging of the legacy of Jakob Böhme, Paracelsus and the other alchemists, on the one hand, and of Niels Bohr, Max Plank, Louis de Broglie, Heisenberg, Pauli⁵⁰, on the other hand. Diaconu’s manuscript thus reiterates a reflection theme of the hermetic societies from late 19th and early 20th century, especially the “Golden Dawn” and the “Alchemical Society”. The “Golden Dawn” remained loyal to the obligation of confidentiality imposed on its members. But, shortly after its disappearance, an organization like the “Alchemical Society” aims to make public an alleged and strange connection between science and occultism – in other words, to explain, from the perspective of the new achievements in atomic Physics, a tradition of ancient spirituality. In line with the view inaugurated by Mary Atwood⁵¹, alchemic knowledge is involved not only in a “transmutation” of metals, of purely physical matter but, especially, in the parallel process of a conscience mutation – a purification of the soul, a sort of transmutation of the self in the hermetic Great Work. “The Great Work” – in alchemy – that the heroes of the *Trilogy of the Exile* achieve is, in fact, their own life dramatically transformed into the wide *athanor* of history, physical and moral suffering. The idea of inner change caused by an initiation experience of assimilating saving knowledge appears in *God was Born in Exile*, during Ovid’s metanoia, throughout the eight years of exile in Pont, from the order of Octavian, as well as in *Persécutez Boèce!*, where the “initiation” – as Toma himself says – is mediated by the written text: “this reading had transformed him”⁵².

Knowledge that saves, Diaconu’s manuscript initiates Toma (thus converted to another way of seeing the world, beyond ideological apriorisms and previous cultural representations) in a dimension of the phenomena hitherto unsuspected. With the



arguments of quantic Physics, the manuscript confirms the dual nature of the world and the basis for a liberating “ontology of the complementary”. This denies the postulates of “dialectic and historical materialism”, that Toma regards as the “weakest dogma ever elaborated by men”⁵³, a philosophy of “blind people” that proclaims “universal blindness”⁵⁴, but which the new regime absolutizes, proclaiming it the only legitimate ideology.

Integrative from an ontological perspective and methodologically interdisciplinary, this view correlates, in Diaconu’s manuscript, modern quantum Physics and the “ontology of the complementary” – within an authentic “confession” about the “harmonious whole” that is the “complexity of our being and of the Being in itself”. Directly connected to this vision, the ontological category of the humane is defined by the professor as “thing-movement”⁵⁵. Inspired by Bachelard, this synthetic formula comprises the unity of the being in its duality in a way that reminds us of how the new Physics defines the particle of light, the photon, as an “undulating” unity: a wave-particle, in a permanent slide from one hypostasis into another. At the antipode of reductionist postulates of the “dialectic and historical materialism”, man and the world mean – Diaconu resumes Bachelard’s formula – “matter and brightness”⁵⁶ at the same time. In other words, matter has yet another dimension, besides that which materialism is willing to admit. This duality is revealed precisely by the new quantum Physics through the “undulating” definition of matter, in its relation with a quantity of energy associated with it. The ideology of “dialectic materialism” – based on an obsolete, positivistic scientific paradigm of the 19th century – is thus demonstrated not just anachronistically but, more seriously, despite the self-proclaimed ideological hegemony, unable to bring solutions to the problems of

a world which he does not understand, as long as he erroneously represents it to himself. Based on scientific evidence – as discovers Diaconu – the world and human nature prove closely connected to a level of reality that immediately transcends the tangible, but remains “complementary” to the latter. The abolition of the (idea of) transcendence – the stake of the immanentist thinking trends, inspired by Nietzsche, Marx and Freud – has thus been proved, following the teacher’s demonstration, to lack any grounds. We now understand why finding the manuscript and Diaconu’s assassination are so relevant for the repressive system of the regime. It is because it shatters the ideological scaffolding on which the new power was built, depriving it of legitimacy.

Thus, Vintilă Horia distances himself programmatically – perhaps even, as Baudelaire would say, with “an aristocratic pleasure of willingly going against the grain with” the majority and latest intellectual fashion – from the immanentist aesthetics that dominate “*l’ère du soupçon*” and “*l’école du regard*” (a platform of the New Novel as well as the French postmodernism). *The Trilogy of the Exile*, besides other novels of Vintilă Horia, is a pre-meditated alternative to what his French confreres of the ‘60s called “experimental novel”, thus taking over and embezzling Zola’s title. In this context, there is a clearer affinity between Vintilă Horia and El Greco, a character which he (re)constructs as an *alter ego*; the novelist “reads” his model in *Un sepulcro...* like an individual who chronologically belongs to the peak of the Renaissance realism, yet still loyal to the medieval belief in a transcendent mystery; it is towards this mystery that the characters from the Cretan’s paintings seem to strive after, forever divided between the here and a luminous calling from the beyond.



Conclusions

Vintilă Horia associates the alchemic imaginary and the paradigm of quantic Physics by applying the result to the interpretation of social and ideological phenomena characteristic of postwar Eastern Europe. Like Dante's *Commedia*, *Persécutez Boèce!* proposes a soteriology, but in a *New Age* formula, through an inter- and trans-disciplinary transfer, at the intersection of atomic Physics and hermetism – an alternative to the immanentist ideologies of (post)modernity. Like his Florentine icon, Vintilă Horia reconsiders an ontology of redemption – of salvation from the “evil” of the history that has dissolved the luminous order of the world into an ideologically nourished entropy.

At the same time, through psychological projection and the strategy of historical parallelism, Vintilă Horia rewrites the biographies of several illustrious exiled, outsiders and wanderers (Ovid, El Greco, Plato, Boethius, etc.) from the perspective of his own life of wanderer, never repatriated. The intertextual writing supports Vintilă Horia in drawing a meaningful connection between different personalities and eras that were nevertheless faced with similar experiences. The novelistic construction arrangements of Vintilă Horia are closely connected to the dominant themes of his creation: the exile has turned, in his case and that of other generation mates – among whom Ionesco, Cioran or Eliade –, into a sort of “personal myth”, as Mauron said. However, this manifests differently at each one of them, according to their availability to openly or veiledly assert, or deny their relationship to Romania, in front of the postwar Western audience.

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Notes

¹ “He has some sort of categorical way in juggling with atoms, philosophy and letters that has always stopped me from taking him seriously” (Monica Lovinescu, *Jurnal (1981-1984)*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2003, p. 134, pp. 293-294). In reply, Basarab Nicolescu insists on pointing something out: “for her, culture is reduced to literature (...). Also, Monica Lovinescu was allergic to everything related to transcendence, traditional religion or thought. Hence, it is no wonder that she perceived Vintilă Horia as a lunatic, sympathising him personally but finding his work unattractive” (*În oglinda destinului. Eseuri autobiografice*, Bucharest, Ideea Europeană, 2009, pp. 11-29).

² Lupasco, waging a cold war against the Parisian academic environment from the latter half of the 20th century that found itself challenged by placing Lupasco’s research in a strict specialization domain.

³ “Your books and articles helped me, like those of Lupașcu, to find myself” – Vintilă Horia confesses to Basarab Nicolescu, in a letter dated January 1988 (*apud* Basarab Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*).

⁴ “I believe it is the only possible way of writing about a great poet. The connection you draw between Mathematics and Poetry – a Platonic relationship – is like the one I draw, in general outlines, between Literature and Physics, aiming to achieve a literary epistemology, whose first volume occurred in 1976 (in Spanish)” (Vintilă Horia, Letter to Basarab Nicolescu, dated January 1st 1980, *apud* Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*). Literature is but “a knowledge technique, like the others, including Physics” (see Vintilă Horia’s letter, dated October 10th 1982, reproduced in Basarab Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*). As he himself confesses, meeting Heisenberg “opened” for Vintilă Horia “a new



perspective upon the world”: “he has deeply changed my view upon life and literature”; “I have realized that literature is a knowledge technique, contemporary to so many other knowledge techniques that, by using different languages, said the same things”; “I have discovered how similar poets and physicists are” (*apud* Marilena Rotaru, *Întoarcerea lui Vintilă Horia*, Bucharest, Ideea, 2002, pp. 79-80). Vintilă Horia seems convinced that “we may extract from Physics, Biology, Psychology etc., an anti-deterministic idea” (see Vintilă Horia’s message, dated January 1st 1980, in the already mentioned volume of Basarab Nicolescu). As a result, “in time, there would occur a doctrine body which some man or group could put into practice” (according to Vintilă Horia’s letter, dated January 1st 1980, *apud* Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*).

⁵ See Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*

⁶ See the Letter dated June 6th 1986, from which Basarab Nicolescu quotes in the mentioned volume.

⁷ Declaration adopted within the congress on the theme *Science faced with the frontiers of knowledge: Prologue to our cultural past* (March 3rd-7th 1986, Venice), organized by UNESCO and the Cini Foundation, where Basarab Nicolescu was invited following the publication of his volume *We, the Particle and the World* (cf. Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*).

⁸ *Apud* Nicolescu, *În oglinda...*

⁹ Vintilă Horia, *Journal d’un paysan du Danube*, Paris, Editions de la Table Ronde, 1966, p. 129.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Cf. Ernst Robert Curtius, *Literatura europeană și Evul Mediu latin*, translated by

Adolf Armbruster, introductory notes by Alexandru Duțu, Bucharest, Univers, 1970, p. 410. (Orig. tit., *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, 1948).

¹⁶ Pierre Hadot, “Boèce (480-524)”, in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge. Littérature et philosophie*, Paris, Encyclopaedia Universalis et Albin Michel, 1999, p. 206.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 206.

²⁰ Vintilă Horia, *Journal...*, p. 13.

²¹ Curtius, *Literatura...*, p. 425.

²² Curtius, *Literatura...*, p. 433.

²³ Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea de ostrogoți*, translated by Ileana Cantuniari, Craiova, Europa, 1993, p. 191.

²⁴ In several of our former contributions, we have discussed some reminiscences of the dualist, especially gnostic imaginary, in literature and Romanian idiomatic expressions: “Mentalitate și structură lingvistică. Reminiscențe ale imaginarului cosmo și antropogonic”, in Luminița Botoșineanu, Elena Dănilă, Cecilia Holban, Ofelia Ichim (ed.), *Distorsionări în comunicarea lingvistică, literară și etnofolclorică românească și contextul european*, Iași, Institutul de Filologie Română “A. Philippide” and Editura Alfa, 2009, pp. 297–304; “Străini și venetici. O mitologie gnostică a exilului”, in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, series Philologica*, 2010 (tome I), pp. 87-106; “Tous les Enfers ne sont pas pareils. Réécritures (post)modernes d’un mythe à l’ancienne”, *Acta Jassyensia Comparationis*, no. 8, 2010, pp. 289-301; “Unde malum? Imaginar dualist(oid) și gnostic, de la mitologia populară la literatura română modernă”, in Tatiana Ciocoi, Emilia Taraburka (ed.), *În oglinzile democrației: literatura europeană și etica societară*, Chișinău, CEP USM (Editura Universitatii de Stat din Moldova),



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- ²⁵ Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea...*, p. 10.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 10.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 136.
- ²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 79.
- ²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 79.
- ³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 79.
- ³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 78.
- ³² *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- ³³ *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- ³⁴ See the Letter dated October 1st 1983 that mentions Basarab Nicolescu’s *În oglinda...*, pp. 11-29.
- ³⁵ See Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 3rd edition, Boston, Beacon Press, 2001.
- ³⁶ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁷ Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea...*, p. 89.
- ³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.
- ³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 91.
- ⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 101.
- ⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 100.
- ⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 101.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 101.
- ⁴⁵ Dante, *Divina Comedie*, translated by Eta Boeriu, preface and notes by Alexandru Balaci, Bucharest, Minerva, 1982, p. 301.
- ⁴⁶ *Goethe, Faust*, translation, preface and notes by Ștefan Aug. Doinaș, București, Editura Univers, 1982, pp. 383-384.
- ⁴⁷ *Goethe, op. cit.*, pp. 383-384.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 380.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 380.
- ⁵⁰ Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea...*, p. 35.
- ⁵¹ Mary Ann Atwood, *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery With a Dissertation on the More Celebrated of the Alchemical Philosophers, being an attempt towards the recovery of the ancient experiment of Nature*. London, Trelawny Saunders, 1850.
- ⁵² Vintilă Horia, *Salvarea...*, p. 76.
- ⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 79.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 82-83.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 82.