

## THE ART OF SWERVING FROM BIOGRAPHY

### *The Doom of Biography: on the temptation of playing God*

Without regard to theoretical variety, any method of literary criticism can be tricked into mere biography. Much as it sounds as a ransacked paradox, the statement proves at once: while crediting the most insignificant bits of personal accounts, we can notice how the biographical approach is taking the lead and practically endangers the other theoretical assumptions. “It makes no sense to urge a return to biography – says Stanley Fish – since biography is not something from which we can swerve”<sup>1</sup>. Sure enough, the sentence echoes what Emerson and Carlyle had been claiming, though in an aphoristical manner, on ‘heroes’ and ‘hero-worship’ since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “There is properly no history; only biography”; “History is the essence of innumerable biographies”; or “The *history* of the *world* is but the *biography* of great men”. Hence, presumably, all varieties of literary studies can provide material for or convert into forms of *para-biography* or *pseudo-biography*. If one takes Stanley Fish’s remarks for granted...

Nevertheless, beyond the debate on the ‘miscegenation’ with other critical genres<sup>2</sup>, there are two main issues that determine the evolution of biography and its longstanding position: the first refers to the chemistry fiction-fact-(literary) form, that is, the double exposure of biographical facts either to ‘subjective’ fictionalisation or to narrative structuring<sup>3</sup>; the second refers to the biographer’s own biography, to the biographer’s business and ‘posture’<sup>4</sup>, hence, to a sort of ‘personal’ engagement – not ‘institutional’ or else! – with the subject’s intimate issues. This implies a sort of competition or amorous relationship, sometimes giving way to side effects such as jealousy, possession, revenge, envy, rivalry, and even hate<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Fish, “Biography and Intention”, in William H. Epstein (ed), *Contesting the Subject. Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue Research Foundation, 1991, pp. 9-18.

<sup>2</sup> Viz. Roland Barthes’ method in *Sur Racine*: the French critic tries to substitute the traditional biographical approach with an alloy of methods inspired from linguistics, psychoanalysis and anthropology.

<sup>3</sup> Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact & Form*, New York, San Martin’s Press, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures Littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l’auteur*, Genève, Slatkine Erudition, 2007, pp. 17-25.

<sup>5</sup> P. N. Furbank, “The Craftlike Nature of Biography”, in *Biographical Passages: Essays on Victorian and Modernist Biography*, edited by Joe Law & Linda K. Hughes, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2000, p. 22.

Theoretical settlements come first. The historians of the biographical genre make their best in specifying its methods, cultural functions ('commemoration' and 'portrayal'<sup>6</sup>), paradigm changes (from 'Lives of the Caesars', 'Lives of the Philosophers', 'hagiography', and 'autobiography' to 'Victorian biography'). Ofttimes, the durability has been correlated either to a species of versatility that biographical information has always had (nowadays it occurs abundantly in reality shows or tabloids<sup>7</sup>) or to the biography's inward bipolarity, setting a tensed interdependency between 'temporality' and 'finalism'<sup>8</sup>, between 'authenticity' and 'idealisation'<sup>9</sup> and so on. All in all, a 'die hard' genre, when taken into consideration its awesome intergeneric mobility and the high conversion rate of attested facts into pure fiction. Side by side with the theories on modernity, the biographer's permeability to imagination-whims and to experiment packs with a larger epistemological crisis: the old notion of 'Truth' opens towards Plurality and even Indetermination, whereas the old notion of 'Identity' dissolves into a fabric of subjectivities.

Secondly, the biographer's personal engagement must be viewed according to binoms such as synchronicity (contemporaneity) vs. diachrony (tradition), presence vs. absence, photography vs. negative. Wonder that the new attempts to 'write lives' take the 'manuscript hardships' as a main theme, hence, are prone to make out a narrative from the archiver's imperiled posture. Note that the *bildung* scenario (the exemplary narrative) refers not only to the subject's singularity, but also to the biographer's. Thus, the writer of 'lives' goes through a story with obstacles and succeeds to give the best data assembling, the optimum expression through evaluative processes such as re-writing and revision; the fragmentary account on the one day in the life of Ivan Denisovici equals the effort to write the liniary existence of Samuel Johnson. It follows that, leaving aside the pre-requisite conditions of 'honesty' and 'talent', the biographer's posture is way more complicated than that of his/ her character (whatsoever the character's complexity) because, in P. N. Furbank's terms, the cornerstone of biography-writing proves to be 'the author's theology'<sup>10</sup>. The biographer's posture implies not only the risks of drowning in a sea of archives and scattered documents, but also the temptation of playing God.

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<sup>6</sup> Nigel Hamilton, *Biography. A brief history*, Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 1-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Aron et Fabrice Preyat, "Introduction", *COntEXTES* [En ligne], 3 | 2008, mis en ligne le 25 juin 2008, consulté le 04 mai 2014. URL : <http://contextes.revues.org/2543> ; DOI : 10.4000/contextes.2543.

<sup>9</sup> Nigel Hamilton, *Biography*, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> P. N. Furbank, *The Craftlike*, p. 13.

*Biography and Para-biography*

What happens, then, with the literary studies that overtly take distance from either biography or autobiography<sup>11</sup>? Is the explicit disengagement with the biographer's posture – namely, 'swerving' by means of parabiography and mock-biography (pseudo-biography) – an effective method of challenging the risks and the responsibilities of playing God? Then, trailing the second question, we wonder if swerving from traditional *biographia* really understates the hold-up of all its inherent tensions and riotous potential<sup>12</sup>.

Such questions and more (from the same range) were inspired by our reading of Iliana Gregori's latest para-biographies, one which is turned to Mihai Eminescu (*Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze*, 2008 – *Do We Know Who Eminescu Was? Facts, Enigmas, and Hypotheses*), and the other devoted to Emil Cioran (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă*, 2012 – *Cioran. Suggestions for an Impossible Biography*). However, the contiguity of the two books does not establish on their common 'generic' labelling, but on their editorial 'history', that is, on their course through the final shape. In 2008 and, respectively, 2012, Iliana Gregori presented to the Romanian public two re-written studies; actually, the researcher chose to translate into Romanian or rephrase a set of ideas and perspectives she had already exposed in previous critical texts. For Eminescu's case – Iliana Gregori explains in her prefaces – the chapters were written between 2000 and 2007, whereas for Cioran the indications are still dimmer (before 2009). But the introductory notes and the dates are willingly imprecise and, perhaps, a bit too discreet and self-effacing. However, the cores of the two parabiographies are not to be found around 2000, but earlier, in Iliana Gregori's articles from the 80s; one deals with Eminescu's short prose *Sărmanul Dionis* (*Partikularitäten des narrativen Diskurses in Eminescus Traumerzählung Sărmanul Dionis*, 1983), the other, with Cioran's diffusion into the contemporary German philosophy, chiefly into Peter Sloterdijk's (*Der frühe Cioran und die deutsche Philosophie im Hinblick auf die Todesproblematik*, 1986). During the 90s, the literary critic revisits the two subjects; she publishes one text on Eminescu's *Făt-frumos din lacrimă* (*Das Märchen - eine „Hieroglyphe der Volksseele“. Einige Bemerkungen zu Eminescus Făt-Frumos din lacrimă*, 1992), and another on Cioran's *Schimbaria*

<sup>11</sup> Viz. Ihab Hassan's study on 'parabiography' ("Parabiography. The Varieties of Critical Experience", *The Georgia Review*, 34, 1980, 3, pp. 593-612) refers to all three components (to want, to read, to act) of the critical experience as 'parabiographical' forms. Hassan develops the hypothesis of 'autobiographic impossibility', grounding his assertion on the fact that the Self turns out to be 'a fierce intricacy of asseveration', that is, a construction. Therefore, no critical endeavour can touch the fruits of wisdom in absence of confession, that is, without the externalisation of autobiographical impulse. Only by this means, the critical endeavour can get to its ideal conditions: to combine the "freedom of imagination" and the "moral strength".

<sup>12</sup> William H. Epstein, "Introduction", in *Contesting*, p. 3.

*la față a României (Quelques remarques sur le „messianisme“: Pour une nouvelle lecture de „La transfiguration de la Roumanie” (E. Cioran), 1993).* It is nothing more than bibliographical update, yet it may stand for a hypothesis on the profound connections between the two para-biographies: they urge to be written and published simultaneously and surely evince a regularity of reading ‘rhythms’, if not a loyalty for certain cultural references. The act of re-writing the old interpretations of Eminescu and Cioran acquires then the meaning of turning the limited critical statement into an infinite critical manuscript, a sum of ‘versions’ of the same thematic question on the biographer’s posture: ‘Who am I?’.

Eventually, the publication of the two critical inquiries meant to articulate two distinguished methods of investigation; yet the gap between ‘oniro-biography’ and the ‘impossible biography’ counted, in Iliana Gregori’s vision, for the unresolved antinomy Eminescu vs. Cioran. In any case, the resolute act of publication – actually, a sort of ‘retro-version’, as the critic suggests – occurs only in 2008 and, respectively, in 2012, when the author had already been prompted to undertake the cultural relevance of her endeavours. Regarding Eminescu’s stay in Berlin, a critical relevance comes from the way the ‘information crisis’ is overcome, from choosing the right methods to deal with the *urban unconsciousness* (“the part of unconsciousness that is implied in the perception of urban environment”, §, p. 9)<sup>13</sup>. Contrariwise, for Cioran’s stay in Paris, the relevance is decided on how the ‘information excess’ is overcome, i.e. the critic’s method to discern among the accounts and factualism drawn in from the disputed ‘notebooks’ that actually compete with the philosopher’s works (C., p. 15)<sup>14</sup>.

Otherwise, if we maintain, as starting points, the textual congeneracy (both are sub-species of ‘parabiography’), the two writers’ congeniality and the hypothesis on the critic’s synchronous posturality toward the two texts, we can test how much Cioran’s interpretation from *Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* owes to Eminescu’s ‘onirobiography’ from *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?* Is it a case of stylistic refinement or, else, a matter of self-outrunning? By that we may understand either a still greater swerving from biography (hence, parabiography is nothing but a step toward the negation of biography proper), or a recoiling back to the tensed field of biographic approaches, which actually means taking on the traditional functions and definitions, thus, a sort of counter-revolution: “The traditional function of biography as a genre – Iliana Gregori states – is to display

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<sup>13</sup> Iliana Gregori, *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze [Do We Know Who Eminescu Was? Facts, Enigmas, and Hypotheses]*, Bucharest, “Art” Publishers, 2008 (abridged „Ș.”).

<sup>14</sup> Iliana Gregori, *Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă [Cioran. Suggestions for an Impossible Biography]*, Bucharest, “Humanitas” Publishers, 2012 (abridged „C.”).

coherently, synthetically and evaluatively a life” [my translations, R.P.]<sup>15</sup> (C., p. 22).

Thus, the project of writing an ‘impossible biography’ takes over the genre’s original aims, chiefly to be exemplary, to illustrate a ‘singular moment’ through means of a ‘moral narration’<sup>16</sup>. Once we have established that the ‘conservative’ definitions are not entirely rejected by Iliana Gregori, what exactly determines the critic to switch from biography proper to para-biography?

The study published in 2012 makes clear its methodological options; for a personality as Cioran’s, the interpreter must surpass the paradoxical and numbing relationship between the philosopher’s life and work: ‘no one among the followers of his philosophy can possibly write his biography’<sup>17</sup> (p. 23). Moreover, it appears that the end of his life enframes Cioran’s intellectual struggle with an *im-posture* air, i.e. with the disgrace of being unable to live according to his philosophic principles. This being said about the author of *The Temptation to Exist*, we can pass to Eminescu’s biography (particularly, to his ‘exit’), and judge whether the Romanian poet’s end – so observant of the Romantic paradigm – adjusts life to his work. What, among the theorists of biography, is commonly called ‘genetic fallacy’ – namely, the error that pushes everybody to look for the work’s origins into life, and not the other way round – can also be traced in Gregori’s account on Eminescu’s stay in Berlin. Notwithstanding its marginal positioning towards the biographer approach, the critic leaves the impression of having maintained the guidelines of traditional literary inquiry; therefore, the sad experience of academic failure reflects into the artists’s works, causing effects such as the aesthetics of censure, the abandon of spontaneity and the entrance of ‘resignation’ theme (resignation to great projects, such as becoming the greatest Romanian playwright, as well).

In the other quarter, we notice that Iliana Gregori does not hold herself from admiring Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnson’s biography of Cioran, even though she aims to contrive an ‘impossible biography’, an ‘unwritten biography (and, actually, one that is impossible to be written)’ (C., p. 110). For Cioran’s life ‘a soul’s true history’, regulated by the strong categories of classic tragedy, is the real deal (C., p. 236). Similarly, it is the ‘right’ biographer presumption what acts like the critical *primum movens*, which should provide the key to the character’s identity; the Romanian poet is an individual “lacking a perfectly outlined identity – one that is closed, fixed, determined and knowable”<sup>18</sup> (Ş., p. 323). However, the premise

<sup>15</sup> “Funcția tradițională a biografiei ca gen este prezentarea coerentă, sintetică și evaluativă a unei vieți”.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Aron & Fabrice Preyat, *Brève*.

<sup>17</sup> “niciunul dintre adepții filosofiei lui nu-i poate face biografia”.

<sup>18</sup> “identitate perfect conturată – închisă, fixă, determinată, cunoscutibilă”.

that an *'inner man'*<sup>19</sup> (that is, a set of psychological features) structures someone's life restates the old relationship between life and work, and proves extensively the conservatism of biography<sup>20</sup>.

To this point, the books published by Iliana Gregori meet the forerunning generic exigences. There is no need to use 'para' or 'oniro' before the rusted word 'biography'. Yet, once changed the accent on the theme of biographer's hardships, i.e. on the biographer's own posture, the two studies really make a difference; both of them biography-swervers, they recover the biographical approach through careful re-writing and patient meditation, which is the same with finding a way to educate the critical discourse and to activate its healing functions.

*Philosophical Detachment: Who are you? And, who am I?*

With a few significant exceptions, the two studies signed by Iliana Gregori do not seem, in the first instance, to communicate. On Schopenhauer's share into Eminescu's Hinduism and on Cioran's own orientation towards India, there is one single explanatory footnote (viz. *C.*, p. 174). Then, getting close to the end of her study (though also in a humbly diminished footnote), the scholar refers to the filiation Eminescu-Nietzsche-Cioran, suggested by Dan C. Mihăilescu's *Despre Cioran și fascinația nebuniei (On Cioran and the Fascination of Madness)*. Unfortunately, says Iliana Gregori, the cultural genealogy did not turn, under Mihăilescu's pen, into a 'new biography' (*C.*, p. 235). Is this a subtle means to prove that the 'impossible biography' becomes 'possible' only if the line from the Romantic poet to the Modern philosopher is redrawn? If such be the case, whom of the two personalities could be considered the most prominent in the lineage chain?

Directly responsible either for the victory or for the biographer's failure, the theme of 'Selfhood's mystery' occurs, in Iliana Gregori's critical takes, on a rhetorical level (when *recherché* interrogations are used), as well as on the level of philosophical *praxis*, which seeks after revelatory interrogations. For the literary historians, nevertheless, the contiguity between identity and biography is not by far an invention. Now, starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the assertion/ autonomy of the 'Self' lead to the coexistence of biographical and fictional accounts within the same aesthetical paradigm, conventionally named 'the portrait of the artist'<sup>21</sup>. As deep as the abyss, the 'artist' became the favourite target for every interpreter,

<sup>19</sup> Jane Darcy, "Contesting Literary Biography in the Romantic Period. The Foreshadowing of Psychological Biography", *Literature Compass*, vol. 5, issue 2, 2008, pp. 292-309.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Schläger, *Biography: Cult as Culture*, in *The Art of Literary Biography*, edited by John Batchelor, Oxford, Clarendon, 1995, pp. 1-30.

<sup>21</sup> Michael McKeon, "Writer as Hero. Novelistic Prefigurations and the Emergence of Literary Biography", in *Biographical Passages*, pp. 17-23.

especially if his/her personality could engage a score of biographer generations. Hence, for Ilina Gregori's precise situation, to revisit some old 'friends' means to reinstate their original 'myth'<sup>22</sup>; the more visits payed, the greater the biographer's philosophical detachment. As a matter of fact, the Romanian scholar refers to the art of portrayal – therefore, to biography as well – as to a form of 'philosophical practice', as to a true experience of 'inter-subjectivity' (C, p. 134).

Now, it is thousands of years since the philosophers's means have not changed consistently; above everything else, the thinker relies on interrogation. From Gregori's headline question '*Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?*' (*Do we know who Eminescu was?*), we can easily get to the core of Cioran's own stylistic particularities; Cioran himself starts all his portraits with a standard beginning: "Who are you? Where do you come from? These questions popped up instantly in your mind. Any reader will notice, sooner or later, that Cioran's central, primary, even obsessive interrogation in his portraits is "Who are you?" and "Who is he/she?"<sup>23</sup> (C, p. 63).

This is the moment when the two para-biographies really echo each other, because Cioran's 'exercises of admiration' resound Ilina Gregori's own critical tropes, enhanced by the title (*Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?*), as well as by both the preface and the ending of her brilliant essay:

"Do we know who Eminescu was? Do you? Eminescu himself, did he know who he was? But then again, who am I? In the end, who is asking who(m)?"<sup>24</sup> (Ș., p. 14).

Do you know who Eminescu was? Do you realize what gift you're asking for from him when you want to know who he was? Suchlike definition or formula sets you apart from Eminescu, from his own reflection and sense of the Self: He was never like that when he was there, and when we believe we 'get' him, he is not that<sup>25</sup> (Ș., p. 326).

That Ilina Gregori's analysis does not surrender to pure rhetorics is fully ascertained by the 'Epilogue' of *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?...*, also subtitled "*Who am I?: on the inconvenients of a too simple question*" ("*Cine sunt eu? Despre inconvenientele unei întrebări prea simple*"). Built on a close-reading of Schopenhauer's philosophy, this ending insists on the bond between *individuation principle* and *sympathy*. In the German thinker's opinion, having anything to do with psychology chances, *sympathy* represents a fixed and almost metaphysical

<sup>22</sup> Joe Law & Linda K. Hugues, *And What Have You Done?*, in *Biographical Passages*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> "«Cine ești tu? De unde vii? Iată întrebarea care-ți venea să i-o pui fără să stai pe gânduri». Orice cititor remarcă, mai devreme sau mai târziu, că întrebarea centrală, originară, obsesivă chiar, a portretelor lui Cioran este: «Cine ești?» (...), respectiv «Cine este el/ea?»".

<sup>24</sup> "«Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu? Știi tu cine a fost Eminescu? Știa Eminescu însuși cine este el? Dar cine sunt eu? Cine întrebă pe cine?»".

<sup>25</sup> "«Știi tu cine a fost Eminescu? «Știi tu ce dar îi cei», când vrei să știi cine a fost (...) O asemenea formulă-definiție te înstrăinează de Eminescu, de propria lui reflecție și trăire identitară: el n-a fost așa când era, când credem că-l «știm», el nu e»".

category. Therefore, the ‘sympathetic’ human being becomes a sort of ‘macro-antrop’ (Ș, p. 320), whose heart can encompass the troubles of the whole world, inclusively those suffered by the beasts that, on the great chain of being, come before or after. Contrary to Schopenhauer’s metaphysical vision, Eminescu’s good nature and sympathy cannot be grasped outside the human sphere; the poet’s mysterious Self goes always side to side with ‘the beloved one’, ‘the nation’, ‘the people’, ‘the community’ (Ș, p. 323). Perhaps, while bidding farewell to Schopenhauer, the poet himself used to decry Hyperion’s cold ascension; and, to a certain extent, the well-known line from *Mușat și ursitoarele* (*Musat and the Fairy Godmothers*): “He was not that when he was there, while when he is there, he is not that” (“El n-a fost când era, el e când nu e”) contains the true dimension of Eminescu’s opening to otherness (Ș, p. 322).

Outlined by its specialized hermenutic function, the reflection on Eminescu’s verse goes way beyond the book published in 2008. More than that, it places itself right in the center of the critic’s hints on Cioran’s personality and on the philosopher’s own text entitled, on the brink of mere commonplace, *Paleontology*. At any rate, changing verbal moods is changing the whole structure’s mood: “He, the Man, was never that when he was there, while when he is there, he is never that.” (“El, Omul, nu era când a fost, și când este, nu e”, C., p. 171). The verbal displacements indicate not only two extremities of Cioran’s humanhood, but also two ‘negatives’ of the same close-up shot: one, the ape’s face, is a bio-anthropological version from remote origins of the human species; the other, Buddha’s face, represents an ethical and metaphysical end of the great chain of being. Handsomely arranged on Cioran’s chimney and neighbouring Buddha’s statue, the ‘chimpanzee’ called a detail mentioned by Iliana Gregori in her previous book on Eminescu; much to the likeness of the Romanian philosopher auto-exiled in Paris, it is reported that Schopenhauer used to visit an ‘ourang-outang’ (and even to hug it!) around 1856, when the autumn fair was being held in Frankfurt (Ș, p. 321). Even though a bit anecdotic and gossipy, Iliana Gregori squeezes this information within a broader conceptual debate, while discussing the meaning of ‘*Tat twan asi!*’. Back to Cioran’s ‘impossible biography’, the same Hindu formula reiterates both in the ape’s image and in Cioran’s own warning “il homme se resingera” (C., pp. 214-215)<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Our hypothesis is that, for Iliana Gregori, the Hindu formula ‘*Tat twan asi!*’ and the ape’s image overlaid still earlier, after she had ran through Eminescu’s Ms. 2265, p. 151, from Perpessicius impeccable edition. Perfectly aware of its neologising function, the Romanian poet already mentions the term ‘Archimaimună’ (*arch-monkey /ape*) in *Petri-Notae*, the satires written against Dimitrie Petrino; thus, Petrino is nothing but ‘Archimaimună Kas. kr. de Cernăuți’ (*arch-monkey /ape of Chernivtsi*). Moreover, note that Eminescu himself establishes the right phonetic form: ‘Archimaimună *id est* Archimaimuță’ (v. Mihai Eminescu, *Opere. Vol V. Poezii postume* [Works V. *Posthumous Poetry*], edited by Perpessicius, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1958, p. 332, *infra*). Let us consider the fact that, having a sure intuition of the poet’s lab texts, Perpessicius places



But the understated ‘shackle’ between Eminescu and Cioran hides right under our eyes! Actually, F. S. Fitzgerald’s portrait (drawn by the Romanian philosopher) introduces Gregori’s cogitation on the two traditions of portrayal: Cioran would pertain to the first line, the moralists’, whereas the second line, the transcendentalists’, would emerge from Pascal’s philosophy (C., pp. 68-69). Anyway, Pascal and Eminescu belong to the same side because they count upon ‘goodnaturedness’ and human being’s condition; contrariwise, Cioran and Schopenhauer do not credit nature or humanity, taking for granted the *transcedentia*, that is, the two-edged ethics of envy-and-sympathy. Henceforth, is it possible that Cioran’s ideas from *Paleontology* echo Schopenhauer’s own vision of ‘Palingenesis’? And, when writing the two para-biographies, is Iilina Gregori inspired by the same philosophical readings? If so, we can catch a better view on Cioran’s leavetaking from Nietzsche: by dropping out Zarathustra’s father, the Romanian philosopher actually rediscovers Schopenhauer’s shape inside the ‘anchorite’ or ‘Stylite’ figures (C, p. 203); in line with the author of *The World as Will and Representation*, Cioran pursues the ‘phantasmatic latence’ as a reference identitary model. In a nutshell, according to our earlier intuition, the ‘sympathetic’ para-biographer assents to a personality transfer between Eminescu and Cioran: Eminescu’s Schopenhauerianism is actually decked out on Pascal’s ‘phantasmatic latence’, whereas Cioran’s Pascalianism drapes around Schopenhauer’s.

*The Peripatetic Biographer: rambling about Berlin and Paris toward a dreamlike geography*

Issued by ‘two interactive registers’ (C., p. 142) – one that is autobiographic and personal, the other, that is aphoristic and universal – Iilina Zarifopol-Johnson’s *Searching for Cioran* might have become, on the right conditions, a ‘virtual’ biography of Cioran. Iilina Gregori essentially admires the dynamism of Zarifopol-Johnson’s style, marked by a peripatetic perspective, by the optics of a ‘pilgrim-biographer’ (C., p. 110).

Previously applied as main technical finding in *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?*, the peripatetic biography would count on stepping into the places and postures that were once inhabited by the biographer’s subject; only ‘the subjective and personal investment of landscape’ appears to be the right filling for empty spaces (Ș., p. 11). Thus, the *character* (Eminescu, in this case) acquires a visible outline only if related to the landscape, which is, practically, the only thing we are left with from that person’s passing through world. A customizer of private and public limits, the city landscape – glanced at beyond the subject’s foreground face – bears an effect

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a poem called *Pentru tălmăcirea aforismelor lui Schopenhauer* [For the Translation of Schopenhauer’s Aphorisms] after the diatribes against the ‘ape’ (*archimaimună*) from *Petri-Notae*.

of depth and perspective. The imperial Berlin tells Eminescu's story, while post-bellum Paris tells Cioran's. For the 'pilgrim-biographer' such thing as a 'portrait projected on void' ('portretul în vid') or a portrait lacking its 'shadow' is pure ontological nonsense<sup>27</sup> (Ș., p. 36).

To draw a set of 'correspondences' between the *language of the city environment* and the *language of art*, between the *cityscape masterpieces* and the *artistic imaginary*, between the *mapped space* and the *inner man*, this leads directly to Iliana Gregori's critical technique; in effect, the goal is to turn 'positive' all the volatile 'negatives' spotted in the unconscious. Therefore, the character's 'phantasmal' traces are to be found not only on the pages of Eminescu's manuscripts or in Cioran's notebooks, but also on the monuments surface. Again and again, if we overlap the two studies, our attention should be arrested by the striking family air of places visited, even though we actually speak about journeys around two different cities (Paris and Berlin). Secretly, the places enchain each other within the symbolical network of 'openness' and 'closure'. The 'pilgrim-biographer' is always recording *the garden* (i.e., the 'gardens' of kings belonging either to Hohenzollern or to de Medici dynasties) and its complementary space, *the museum* (altogether with its monumental kins, the monastery, the fortress, and the royal castle). Then, in order to catch Eminescu's accurate portrait, it is essential to have a precise description of his strolls between the gardens and museums of Berlin, between 'Lustgarten' or 'Charlottenburg' and the Island of Museums (Ș., pp. 219-245, pp. 188-207). In turn, walking to and fro the gardens and the museums of Paris is explicitly relevant for Cioran's figure; the same with Eminescu, the journey from Luxembourg Garden/ Jardin de Plantes to the Museum of Natural History/ the Museum of Paleontology/ the Gallery of Mineralogy (C., pp. 151-159) describes the growth of openness into closure. For either one, the graveyard – Père-Lachaise, in Cioran's case, and Queen Louise's sarcophagus, in Eminescu's – represents a freeway to the other world, whether this means death or vacuity.

A true mediator among the three biographical 'F'-s (fiction-fact-form), the 'shadow'/ 'phantom' relates real life to its ethereal Emanations, if Blake's words can be accepted here. Here and now, the bond between the portrait-maker and his/her model, between the biographer and his/her character becomes pure 'intersubjectivity'. This is also the most appropriate solution to tag the biography's infinite potential with the *finis* of a life that, fatally, falls within chronological limits. Therefore, Iliana Gregori tries to detect the 'phantasmal core' (p. 213) of Cioran's writings; nevertheless, this must be carried out as a 'nocturnal, almost

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<sup>27</sup> "In lipsa unui context de viață care să-i explice comportamentul, eroul pare pierdut într-un surghiun absolut. Proiectat pe un fond alb – mai exact spus: neproiectat, fără umbră – Eminescu ni se înfățișează nu numai izolat social, ci de-a dreptul absent din lume".

dreamlike exercise' (C., p. 123), which could wash away the miscellaneous traces from all portraits and leave out only the philosopher's self-portrait. For instance, in spite of rich experience and rapid changes, F. S. Fitzgerald's figure reflects a 'life' which was 'literally a dream', as if ostensibly lived. Similarly, Cioran's true 'life' – and virtual biography – is not from the realm of consistencies and definitely should not follow the bodily man and his facts; on the contrary, it needs to be ajar and left in his 'evanescent shadow' (Ș., p. 9). That is why not Cioran's real picture (contradictory in terms of posture), but what is under the positive – read, 'negative(s)' – acquires the biographer's subjective investment.

The 'oneirobiography' – also named 'oneiromancy' (C., p. 237) undertakes a process which bears, first and foremost, 'oneiro-(auto?)biographic' characteristics (p. 225). Controlled amnesia represents thus a 'must', or, in William H. Epstein's view, it is something that claims the suspension of the biographer's identity<sup>28</sup>. So, the 'oneiro-biography' places in-between the 'autobiography without memories' and 'biography without knowledge' (Ș., p. 222), in-between amnesia and information crisis. The first goes with the biographer's posture; the second matches the character's condition. But everything else brings down to the tough articulations such as amnesia-biography, oblivion-recording/impression. Once the consciousness vanishes into dark madness, is it really possible that "a Self beneath the Self" (Ș., p. 221) should lie further?<sup>29</sup> Like that, the tunes of an interrogation rehearsed in *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?* (2008) are fully played in the chapter *Cum să te izbăvești fără să știi?* (*How can one be redeemed without even knowing?*), which is included in the book from 2012.

Converted into a guidebook, the peripateticism practiced by Cioran, Beckett, and even Eminescu do not pinpoint, eventually, the inner journeys inspired by previous readings on the printed map of the cities (C., p. 106). The etymology of 'Peripatetic' (*peripatetikos*), which now refers precisely to a person who used to train his thought while walking, unveils here a phenomenon of creative misunderstanding. Reverting back to the assimilation of *peripatetikos* and *peripatoi* (columns), we discover that the Peripatetic has both a dynamic and a steady posture, the latter referring to adjacency of the monumental column. Therefore, the Peripatetic's journey under the columns and arches of the ancient Lyceum crosses the famous allegory of Simon the Stylites. While rambling through lives and faces, the peripatetic-biographer is meant to retrieve essential memories, the inner *stylos*, of a 'Self' that lies 'beneath the Self'. Even though, this might lead to the hideous 'skeleton' in the cupboard.

<sup>28</sup> William H. Epstein, *Coutesting*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> "Nu dispăre în «ntunericul minții», odată cu amintirea trecutului, și posibilitatea autoidentificării? Să persiste oare și în această stare, cu tot naufragiul conștiinței, sămburele «miracolului» - *un eu sub un eu* (s.n.), care se simte fără să se știe?" (Ș., p. 221).

*A Self beneath the Self: the positive photograph and its negatives*

Iliana Gregori does not belong with the biographers who let themselves carried away by the mere textuality of manuscripts or notebooks. The pilgrim-biographer would rather access a set of visual representations and test their documentary value: this being the premise, the map represents a 'negative' shot of the city, whereas the 'skeleton' and the 'shadow' represent the character's Emanations or negatives. A real philosophical 'hardcore', the issue of photography-taking grows more and more obscure when taken into consideration not only the relation positive-negative/original-imitation, but also various links among imitations.

Sure enough, the success of the two studies published by Iliana Gregori is also granted by the author's interpretation of old and recent photographs (refer to chapter *Fotografii vechi și noi – tălmăcite și răstălmăcite (Old and new photographs, interpreted and re-interpreted, Ș., pp. 253-261)*). Otherwise, interlaced everywhere in the great chain of thinking, the 'hieroglyph' and the 'icon' show relevance for the way Iliana Gregori is accustomed to see ideas. In *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu?*, the text is always guarded by images. If the city and the biographer's subject correspond to each other, then the same communication establishes between word and image, close-up picture (portrait) and landscape picture (panorama). The Romanian scholar provides us with a cluster of visual references, from the panoramic shots of monuments of Berlin, Charlottenburg or Paris to exquisitely chosen (photo)portraits (Humboldt's statue, Schopenhauer's sketched outline, Queen Louise's statue, the pictures of Charles 1<sup>st</sup>, once as the crowned king of Romania, and once as a soldier of the Prussian army).

At any rate, the Self which lies beneath the gallery of book illustrations advances forth only in the *Epilogue* of the study on Eminescu. Arrived here, the reader is faced with four images and one single question: the four famous postures/pictures of the Romanian poet orbit around the text *Who am I?*, which is located right in the middle of the page (Ș., p. 324). But the postural constellation derives true meaning only when the reader's eye relates to the four photographs with Eminescu's death mask on the last page (Ș., p. 327). All words, methodological cautions and hesitations apart, the eye – my own eye! – is the only one able to record the essential memories, to catch a glimpse of the 'phantasmal core', of the human being's *stylos*.

The play upon the iconic imitations of personality (pictures, sketches, landscapes and so forth), as the play upon 'negatives', proves that the subject's uniqueness might be just an effect of the biographer's intense focalisation. It is no secret that, in the good tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century imaginary, Iliana Gregori inherits the fascination for the 'obscura camera', for the 'magical lantern', and for diorama (Ș., p. 257). Not casually, the philosophical reflection on the 'ontology of the

photographic image<sup>30</sup> leans on a specialised lexic; e.g., Cioran's reading should resemble to picture-taking, to biographical 'caption' (C., p. 31); accordingly, the two paradigmatic characters closely arranged on Cioran's chimney – the chimpanzee and Buddha – are mentioned as 'negatives' of the human being's face (C., p. 171); then, the monk's or the thinker's reclusion is defined by the critic as 'spectral self-radiotelescopy' (C., p. 195); last but not least, the stress on the adjective 'phantasmal' – in phrases such as 'phantasmal core', 'phantasmal latency' (C., p. 213) – refers us back again to the art of photography.

Once initiated in the pattern 'absence-presence' (coextensive to amnesia-biography, oblivion-recording/impression), being 'both from here and from elsewhere' (like that girl the philosopher catches sight of in the Luxembourg Garden, see C, p. 64) means being within and outside the text. But the remark goes well both in Cioran's specific case, as in his biographer's. It follows that the photograph does not play only, for Iliana Gregori, an 'illustrative' part; anyway, it is not just a blind witness of biographic accounts. Indeed, the beginning of the book on the Romanian philosopher unfolds the paradox of Cioran's pictures and postures: "Some of these shots catch him [i.e. Emil Cioran] in postures so unexpected for their 'normality', that you unpleasantly feel as the accomplice of a public disclosing. The calm, the good-temper, the cheerfulness, the burst of laughter – everything that belongs to the positive register of humanity – can turn, in this man's case, a bit compromising. Is this the true Cioran?... Look at him closely and you shall doubt!"<sup>31</sup> (C., pp. 28-29).

Because the Romanian exile himself would not resolve the question of photograph's authenticity (but he conceded to piece together a (photo)graphic 'biography' for 'Humanitas' Publishers<sup>32</sup>), Iliana Gregori extends her notion of photographic document beyond the close-up picture: a pertinent portrait of the artist/philosopher can be either the city map or the landscape, which now become the relevant 'negatives' of the subject's picture. Besides, once extended to the domains of shadows, phantasms and dreams, the 'lives' (that is, 'biographies') can also append to themselves some other Emanations and negatives, such being the recurrent structures from the 'lives of the philosophers', the 'lives of Saints', 'lives of poets'. It is slightly inquieting that the para-biographic inquiry does not rely on any of Cioran's portrait pictures, whereas it takes for granted the four pictures of

<sup>30</sup> André Bazin & Hugh Gray, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", *Film Quarterly*, 13, 1960, 4, pp. 4-9.

<sup>31</sup> „Unele instantanee îl surprind în ipostaze atât de neașteptate tocmai prin «normalitatea» lor, încât, privindu-le, te simți în mod dezagreabil complicele unei demascări. Calmul, buna dispoziție, jovialitatea, hohotul de râs – mai tot ce ține de registrul pozitiv al omenescului poate deveni în cazul acestui om cumva compromițător. Adevăratul Cioran? (...) Privește-l și te vei îndoi!”

<sup>32</sup> Gabriel Liiceanu, *Itinerariile unei vieți: E.M. Cioran urmat de Apocalipsa după Cioran. Trei zile de convorbiri* [A Life's Itineraries. E.M. Cioran Followed by the Apocalypse by Cioran. Three Days of Colloquies], București, Humanitas, 1990.

Eminescu. Yet, Cioran is seen throughout the portraits of ‘others’: through Fitzgerald’s sleek and distressed look (C, p. 67); through Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu’s bony facelines (p. 91); through old Sam Beckett’s parchment-like and wrinkled forehead (p. 117); then, through the row of skeletons sitting in the Gallery of Paleontology (p. 144); through Buddha’s self-sufficient and closed-in statue (p. 170); through that ‘elegiac animal’, the Gorilla, in whose eyes Cioran himself could read his origins (p. 225). But the authenticity of photography reveals itself also by hinting at the ‘secrets’ of an old family picture: in the end of her interpretation, Iliana Gregori presumes that the facial expression of the wannabe philosopher is to be tracked down in Elvira’s fierce posture, the cruel authoritarian, the mother impossible to confront with. However, once exceeded by such details, the biography is meant to become ‘impossible’ and swerve to ‘para-biography’.

In the first example, as in the second, the researcher attempts to overcome the shortcomings of biography by putting at trial its limits, the ‘posture’ and the ‘impotence’: on the one hand, the information crisis (for Eminescu’s stay in Berlin), on the other, the information overload (for Cioran’s stay in Paris). Both of them are dealt with in the same manner, by implying a larger discussion on photography and biography. But is it necessary to reinstall the originary links between image and text, between the literary portrait and the pictorial portrait? What Iliana Gregori discovers is, anyway, the long-standing mishap of either one of them: time after time invalidated and contested on grounds of ‘hybridity’, ‘snapshot’ and ‘life’ also meet at the crossroads betwixt art and craft. It goes without saying that, being ‘from here and from elsewhere’ at the same time, the biographer and the photographer share the same dream and, maybe, suffer the same doom.

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## THE ART OF SWERVING FROM BIOGRAPHY

(Abstract)

The essay frames a view on the verging condition of "parabiographies" by running the concept through a short theoretical discussion, followed by two case studies from the recent Romanian literary criticism. We chose Iliana Gregori's books on Mihai Eminescu (2008) and Emil Cioran (2012), either one projected as a species of parabiography. In both examples provided here, the researcher attempts to overcome the shortcomings of biography by testing its ends, i. e. the 'posture' and the 'imposture': on the one hand, the information crisis – for Eminescu's sojourn in Berlin, on the other, the information overload – for Cioran's sojourn in Paris. With the same means, Iliana Gregori deals with both experiences by implying a larger discussion on photography (whether city panoramas or portraits) and biography. But is it really necessary to reinstall the original links between image and text, between the literary portrait and the visual portrait? What Iliana Gregori discovers is, anyway, the long-standing mishap of either one of them: time after time invalidated and contested on grounds of 'hybridism', 'snapshot' and 'life' also meet at the crossroads betwixt art and craft. It goes without saying that, being 'from here and from elsewhere' at the same time, the biographer and the photographer share the same dream and, maybe, suffer the same doom.

*Keywords:* posture, (im)posture, pilgrim-biographer, oneiro-biography, para-biography, inter-subjectivity.

## ARTA ÎNDEPĂRTĂRII DE BIOGRAFIE (Rezumat)

Eseul propune o perspectivă asupra „parabiografiei” prin testarea limitelor/ deschiderilor noțiunii atât într-un cadru reflexiv, marcat de metamorfozele conceptului de biografie, cât și în două studii de caz, ilustrând acomodarea noilor perspective teoretice în critica românească actuală. Spre exemplificare, am ales cărțile semnate de Iliana Gregori, una consacrată lui Eminescu (2008), cealaltă lui Cioran (2012), fiecare dintre ele înfățișând o specie de parabiografie. În ambele cazuri, autoarea încearcă să exploreze limitele biograficului, i.e. „postura” și „impostura”: pe de o parte, se impune o „rezolvare” metodologică a crizei de informații (în cazul șederii lui Eminescu la Berlin), pe de alta, autoarea semnalează provocările și pericolele unei supraabundențe de informație (în cazul experienței pariziene a lui Emil Cioran). Iliana Gregori omogenizează cele două cazuri abordând mijloace de analiză comune, mai ales prin implicarea unei discuții ample despre relația dintre biografie și fotografie, fie că instantaneul se referă la perspective panoramice sau la portrete. Să fie oare necesară reluarea acestei legături dintre imagine și text, dintre portretul literar și portretul pictural? Prin implicarea imaginilor în procesul descifrării misterului persoanei, cercetătoarea vieților lui Eminescu și Cioran descoperă că biografia și fotografia partajează același destin nefericit, jucat între postură și impostură: invalidate și contestate pe teme de „hibriditate”, poza și biografia se întâlnesc la intersecția între pretențiile artistice și rigorile tehnice. Ca atare, condiția biografului, ca și a fotografului, intră sub incidența aceleiași determinări nefaste: demersul de a prinde viața cuiva în instantaneu sau în poveste îl transformă pe cel din spatele obiectivului într-o ființă paradoxală, care își lasă amprenta în două suprafețe, fiind, după expresia lui Cioran, „de aici și de altundeva” în același timp.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* postură, impostură, biograf-pelerin, onirobiografie, parabiografie, intersubiectivitate.