Time Representations in E. Lovinescu's Novels

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Cette étude vise l'utilisation de la technique innovatrice de Proust dans la littérature roumaine. Nous allons suivre les contributions théoriques des plus importants critiques et écrivains modernistes (E. Lovinescu, Camil Petrescu) pour observer la manière dont les personnalités roumaines les plus familiarisés avec le circuit des idées occidentales, ont réussi à donner une interprétation personnelle de la notion de « mémoire volontaire ». Bien que Proust semble avoir favorisé la mémoire involontaire comme un moyen fertile de création animée exclusivement d'un stimulus musical (et pas du tout visuel parce qu'une telle image n'éveille pas le souvenir), l'écrivain français n'a pas oublié la mémoire volontaire. En fait, il considérait que seulement le procès volitif développe dans le conscient un cadre de la représentation spatiale de Proust. Malheureusement, Monica Lovinescu et Camil Petrescu eux-mêmes ont traduit les écrits de Proust sur les deux types de mémoire d'une manière manichéenne favorisant soit la sensibilité et la mémoire involontaire (Camil Petrescu), soit la raison et la mémoire volontaire (Monica Lovinescu). Cependant, la conception de Proust est inclusive et affirme la nécessité de transposer le temps en image, c'est-à-dire en représentations spatiales, ce qui conduit vers l'hypothèse d'une «architecture » innovatrice.

Mots-clés : mémoire volontaire, mémoire involontaire, inconscient

When writing psychological novels, E. Lovinescu was having in mind Proust's narrative model which he intended to emulate on the Romanian culture so as to give a practical example to the other young prose writers gathered in his modernist circle. This partially explains why in the foreground of his autobiographical novel, entitled *Bizu* (1932), there is a deliberate emphasis on the writer's character and, more precisely, on Bizu's frustrated self who, unleashed from social conventions, returns back home to Falticeni in order to retrace both his "Moldavian" origins and his former literary inspiration. One could easily guess here Marcel's underlain profile, half worldly figure and half, a neurasthenic enclosed in his balsa anti-noise room in Combray domains, where he started searching the lost time. Therefore, the incipit of both novels insists on a certain dreamy posture which would be able to draw out the author from history and help him regain the lost paradises.

Proust used to enhance the same hints when bringing out the so called „musical pattern" which releases the hidden springs of involuntary memory and, along with it, the creative energy of the restrained artist, immersed in the fanciful daydream of his profound self and taken away by the rhythm of sheer stylistic clinches. The theoretical distinction between the two "selves" (the former, a superficial and empirical one, the latter, the artist's true, abysmal self), came to be considered afterwards a sort of modernist dogmatic postulate (whose specific difference is

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given by aesthetic autonomy alone, and, side by side, by the refusal to "biographize", render reality and write mimetically) that corresponds to a even more radical split between the two main functions of memory[1]: the reproductive-mimetic function (illustrated by memories), focused on "contents"/ "icons" that are mechanically reset, and the phantasmal-visionary function (implying both "forgetting" and "reminding" effort) that bind together the mentioned memories, arising them in more sophisticated forms. Taking the pains to explain his own poetics, grasped only by a privileged few (Gide's misunderstanding represents the most famous case of reception block off), Proust asserted that the genuine artist "must look for his raw matter only in the involuntary memories", most likely able to reanimate the past "in its extratemporal essence" (that is, on a scale differed from the regular one, cast adrift by "any contingence"), through a "precise dosage of memory and forgetting"[2]. In other words, the involuntary memory enlightens a whole line of "forgotten" trifles, of „reminiscences" (the repressed contents of the psyche are just a category amongst many others), and, once this process put on, it demands total ignition through a strenuous "effort of reminding" that might be either a success or a failure.

Even though these theories had been contradicted by rationalist and positivist philosophers, they caught up with that type of literature that fought back realism (the art of immediate perception) so as to explore the unseen side of the world by means of a new and "autonomous" language, musically stressed (music served as model for that universal language whose "form" and "content", "spirit" and "matter" embody the one and the same reality). Consequently, trying to be true with his own theories, when he was speaking about literature in general (referring not only to the category of comic genre), Bergson underlined almost exclusively its formal side, of empty automatism. Therefore some scholars have been tempted lately to throw the hypothesis of a "radical linguistic pessimism"[3], divulging an

[1] In Ricoeur's opinion, Bergson „remains undoubtfully the philosopher which understood the best the tight connection between „iconic survival" and „the key phenomenon of acknowledgment". Starting from the distinctions drawn in *Matter and Memory*, Ricoeur identifies a „habitual memory" („which is simply activated and lacks explicit acknowledgement) and the „reminding memory" („which cannot exist outside a declared acknowledgement" (Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea* (*Memory, History, Forgetting*), translated by Ilie Gyursik and Margareta Gyursik, Amarcord Publishing House, Timişoara, 2001, p. 520). The first is a „memory that reproduces", the second, „a memory that imagines".

[2] *Swann explicat de Proust*, in vol. *Eseuri* (*Essays*) by Marcel Proust, translation in Romanian, preface and notes by Irina Mavrodin, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 214-217.

[3] William Marx, *Rămas-bun literaturii. Istoria unei devalorizări (sec XVIII-XX)* (*L'adieu a La Litterature: Histoire D'une Devalorisation, XVIIIe-XXe Siecle*), translated by Liliana Dragomir, Ana Stan, Carmen Habără, Diana Coman and Alexandra Gheorghe, coordinated by Alexandru Matei, prefaced by Alexandru Matei, România Press Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008. Lessing was the first aesthetician that „created a gulf between visual arts and poetry, invalidating the traditional parallel *ut pictura poesis* so as to replace it with the musical pattern" and, in his wake, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Eliot or Bergson upheld „the musical model and the art autonomy, irreducible to the principle of paraphrase".

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unprecedented mistrust in the word's knowledge and representation powers. Hence, lacking the ability of visual arts to transfer into the blank page all the richness of phenomenal concreteness, literature (as sheer art of words) had to take all the bumpkins of distrustful minds on the basis that it is not able to render, as music and such, all the hues confined in the human soul, and all the less the power to convey the treasure of unconscious "hidden images". Notwithstanding the unfavorable context, the shoot into celebrity of a writer such as Marcel Proust substantially proved that literature, freed by all connections with music and painting, can resurrect sometimes out of its own ashes as the word, contrary to the somber warning of philosophers, might be a bit more than sound and image.

The French prose writer actually accomplished the miracle to turn the novel in a sort of complete art, surpassing both the "literary" and "realistic" frames by a superior synthesis, mixing revelatory experiences (transfigured within the language of musical suggestions and themes such as the Vinteuil sonata or the counterpoint composition) and an alluvial "style" that puts flesh on the discourse and proves the essential quality of the vision. Furthermore, Proust's autobiographical vein was not laid in a memoir-like manner, but only as a psychological fact and record, susceptible to provide the raw matter for a fiction, without any real link with the writer's biography. Besides that, the author seized upon the chance to disclaim all the prying presuppositions about some juicy details of his own intimate life (in fact that would be Lovinescu's attitude too). Deeply anchored in life, *In Search of Lost Time* stays not, however, within the strict barriers of Bergsonism (*i.e.* anti-intellectualism, vitalism). Still owing a great deal to idealism and French Cartesian tradition, Proust actually announces some of the postulates of phenomenology, especially in his exploits of psychology primary sources. Yet he never ceases to pursue meaning and meaningful experiences. This is the reason for Proust's novel has been called a „cathedral", suggesting namely the neat, orderly and systemic structure almost inconceivable within the frame of Bergson's "vitalism", related in effect to Balzac's idea of "*comédie humaine*". The realist masterpiece carries through a rewriting process, heated by the high temperatures of the modern spirit who considers that the "characters" do not square into typologies and do not allude to a canonical humanity, encouraging the perception of faces on the canvass of time, as in a dumb movie, where images catch glimpses from both time sequences and life.

Once with Proust's innovations, indeed the character is no more considered as a classical "character", as a one-dimensional monolith where time hits feebly. As pointed by Camil Petrescu in one of the few comprehensible studies on the French writer's work (unfortunately not retrieved by errors), the modern novel shows the human soul in the dimension of its inner development, stamped by a series of discontinuous moments and moods, most of the times contradictory, and therefore difficult to capture in a single "representation". Briefly, nonetheless placed in the center of the story, the "self" does not circumscribe a compact and irreducible unity anymore, but a bulk of conscious and unconscious "moods". Therefore, in order to

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convey the sensation of time passing, the Proustian hero goes through a series of metamorphoses, changing in all seven volumes of the narrative cycle in "as many successive and distinct characters"[4], suggesting altogether the idea that the human being is never the one end the same. This is not the case of Lovinescu's novels where the Proustian diversity gets replaced by repetition and cliché, the characters being unvaryingly equal to themselves. Consequently, whereas the old narratives had been ruled by the mimetic-pictorial principle engendered by the "voluntary memory", the new novel fashions itself according to "musical" technique pertaining to "involuntary memory" and to an open and dynamic structure, moulded by the "hidden image" of time immolated in the written page.

One must pay attention at the fact that, even though Camil Petrescu is among the first that signal the blending of Bergsonian and Husserlian elements in Proust's renowned novel[5], yet the Romanian reading detains only Bergson's and the "new structure" references, without any other niceties so necessary in the particular complexity of the case. For instance, when he tackles with the difference between voluntary and involuntary memory – a key point for the proper understanding of the method patented by the French writer –, the author of *Doctrina substanţei* (*The Doctrine of Substance*) makes appeal to some Proust's hearsay confession, where the writer reportedly claims that only the involuntary memories belong to the time flux (here he is right!), while the voluntary memory "releases only abstractions" and "cannot become the object of artistic inspiration" (and here he is disappointingly wrong!). Nevertheless, only Bergson (and not Proust as well) considers voluntary memory as a "pure abstraction" that "binds up organically to almost nothing" except to „the act of presentation at the outskirts of self"[6]. On the contrary, in Proust's mind, the voluntary memory is "a memory belonging with intelligence and eyes", hence subsequently linked with the "icon" and not with the void abstraction! Due to its iconic value, this type of "memory" had always been

[4] *Swann explicat de Proust*, in the quoted volume, p. 215: „exactly as the town that, while the train follows its intricate course, comes either in the right or in the left side of the traveler, the various appearances that one and the same character would have had in the other character's eyes so as to impress upon the latter the illusion of as many successive and distinct characters, will convey the sensation of time passing".

[5] In a footnote of Camil Petrescu's *The Doctrine of Substance*, the Romanian writer and philosopher restricts Bergson's influence to a sort of "sincerity" after rejecting the ascendancy of a clearly articulated doctrine. The great Proustian novel enacts the role of a „*brouillon*": „Proust is not exactly true to himself as, permanently vacillating among the various ideological trends, he manages to express contradictory opinions (on soul, love and art); yet he had never toiled upon an elaborate doctrine as he did not take experiments guided by a sole idea" (*Noua structură şi opera lui Marcel Proust* (*The New Structure and Marcel Proust's Work*), in vol. *Teze şi antiteze. Eseuri alese* (*Theses and Anti-theses. Selected Essays*), edited and prefaced by Aurel Petrescu, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971, p. 5). In some other paragraph, the famous essayist points at the fact that „there are however some moments in Proust's wide work that disclose the French writer's interest in significance and perennial experiences, a topic which comes within the phenomenology specific issues" (*ibidem*, p. 22). His mere observation fades away among the other assumptions.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 34.

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and will always remain the very object of art, even if one might argue it is rather an obsolete form of art, expressing just "the untrue facets of the past".

After allotting the great French novel a span of rereading, we will say conjunctly to his theory that "this distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory is not only irretraceable in Mr. Bergson's work, but it is also strongly objected at"[7]. Yet, beyond Camil Petrescu's subtle error hunt, the Romanian philosopher's interpretation rests abusively on the Bergsonian grounds, asserting that Proust's poetics derives from the "affective structure" that rudders the narrator's memory even in those sequences where "the stress is on knowledge as such": thence, guided by sensibility and not by intellect, the Proustian narration would follow a centrifugal trajectory, assessing the authenticity of "living" (and, under no circumstances, the exclusive authenticity of knowledge). For the Romanian essayist, "the new structure" would be reducible, in its last resort, just to the mechanism of involuntary memory, the only one that would be "able to render the concrete reality"[8]. As a matter of fact, the Proustian novel mingles both types of "memory" (both voluntary and involuntary), by transgressing from the "psychological" to the "phenomenological" self due to a ineffable dosage able to grasp not only the sunny, but also the shadowy side of the human soul.

Going back to the discrimination between the two kinds of memory, one could notice that the Proustian narrator "looks at the reality" just waywardly in order to reset it within the inner eye, waken up to life by some strange and obscure sensations, calling from other times, such as the perfume of the Madeleine soaked in the tea cup. Thus the "musical pattern" of the Proustian novel (hinting both at conscious and unconscious sensations as well as their specific modalities of expression) came to be „translated" mainly in the language of „minor" senses (smell, taste), a technicality that avers an organic connection between soul and body and, on the top of it, a "corporal" contact with reality and present time. The very inter-dependence between "soul" and "body" ensures, on the one hand, the "aesthetical" processing of immediate perception (in the intelligible shape of "iconic memories"), and on the other, the physicalization of memory which, in its turn, turns memory (and also art) in a type of unmediated living.

Lacking the catches of the French writer's theories, Lovinescu has always identified at the basis of the re-minding process a visual and hearing stimulus (the sound, the word, the musical pattern), after the complete banishment of minor senses and corporality. This is the main reason which explains the tough "intellectual" countenance of his characters, all downsizeable to a sole "hero", endowed with an excessive self-analysis appetite, but radically bereft by sensibility and intuition, as long as he relates to himself and the others only *via intellectualis*, that is only by means of sight and hearing senses. Thence, the memory of Lovinescu's hero sticks to „a memory of intelligence and eyes", a clear sign that the Romanian critic took on his own the search of lost time, unavailing himself the

[7] *Swann explicat de Proust*, in quoted vol., p. 215.
[8] Camil Petrescu, *Noua structură...* (*The New Structure…*), in quoted vol., p. 35.

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grace of inspiration. Accordingly to his impatience, when he purposely wants to explore the unconscious (a common shibboleth of all modern writers), Lovinescu betakes the most inappropriate techniques, driving from the old artistic formulae – wherefore the feeling of "hybridization" as well as of frequent inconsistencies, reproachfully noted by all critics.

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This paper is supported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number SOP HRD/89/1.5/S/59758"

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