IDENTITY AND ALTERITY IN THE FANTASTIC SHORT STORIES OF E. A. POE AND I.L.CARAGIALE

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Abstract: *In this article our aim is to understand, analyze and interpret in a critical manner the intrusion of the devil, as an alter ego of the character, inside the imaginary universe of E.A.Poe and I.L.Caragiale, where it creates a game muddling the fantastic and the real in three disconcerting short stories: "Never Bet the Devil Your Head. A Morale Tale", "At Manjoala's Inn" and "At the Manor". Furthermore, we will establish connections with "Kir Ianulea" and "The Devil's Horse". The analysis of the fantastic texts will have an interdisciplinary approach, that is to say it will join literature to connected fields of research: psychoanalysis, symbology and religion.*

Keywords: *identity, alterity, fantastic.*

The short story *Never Bet the Devil Your Head. A Moral Tale* was most likely written at the beginning of the summer of 1841 and published in the same year, in *Graham's Magazine*. T.O.Mabott mentions that E.A.Poe wanted to include it with the title *Never Bet Your Head* between *The Mask of the Red Death* and *Eleonora*, in the volume *PHANTASY-PIECES* (approx. 1842), which remained, unfortunately, unpublished (Mabbott, T.O., II, 1978: 620). The short story was published only posthumuosly, in 1850, in the second volume of the Griswold edition, titled *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*. *At Manjoala's Inn* was published on 5th February 1898, in the first number of *Revista ilustrată Gazeta Săteanului (The Illustrated Villagers' Gazette)*, and *At the Manor*, on 5th March 1900, in the second number of *Gazeta Săteanului (The Villagers' Gazette)*. Both were republished in the volume *Momente (Moments)* (1901). *Kir Ianulea* appeared in November 1909, in the 11th number of *Viaţa Românească (Romanian Life)*, and *The Devil's Horse*, on 15th November 1909, in the 204th number of *Lupta (The Battle)*. Both were included in the volume *Schiţe nouă (New Sketches)* (1910).

T.O.Mabbott mentions the main source of inspiration for *Never Bet the Devil Your Head* to be a passage from the second chapter of the novel *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* by Charles Dickens, in which the head of a tall woman is cut off by the arch of a bridge (*Ibidem*). The sources of inspiration for Caragiale's short stories remain unknown. The only exception is *At Manjoala's Inn* whose origin is considered by Ovidiu Bârlea to be a folk tale from the region of Suceava. The tale, set during the first world war, tells the story of a soldier, seduced by erotic experiences, who succumbs to the devil's tempations and is turned into a dog, and not a kid/goat or tomcat as in I.L.Caragiale's tales (Bârlea, O., 1968: 12).

The titles of the short stories are significant. E.A.Poe in *Never Bet the Devil Your Head* encourages the reader to stay away from any deals with the devil, while I.L.Caragiale in *At Manjoala's Inn* and *At the Manor* emphasizes the mischievous topos of the ensuing action.

In the beginning of the autodiegetic short story *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, "[…] an amusing satire […]" (Quinn, A.H., 1941: 325), the narrating character starts from a statement by Tomás Hermenegildo de las Torres in *Cuentos en verso*

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castellano, translated as follows: "[...] that, provided the morals of an author are pure, personally, it signifies nothing what are the morals of his books" (Poe, E.A., II, 1978: 621). The first person narrator finds and uses this statement as a plea for his own idea: "Every fiction *should have* a moral […]" (*Ibidem*). To make the statement as credible as possible, he mentions several personalities which were preoccupied by ethics: Philip Melanchton, Pierre La Seine and Jacobus Hugo. The character is upset because he is blamed by some inexperts for having never written any moral short stories, so he offers "[...] the sad history appended; – a history about whose obvious moral there can be no question whatever, since he who runs may read it in the large capitals which form the title of the tale" (*Ibidem*: 622)' i.e. *A Moral Tale*. After analyzing the subtitle, Marie Bonaparte explains what the moral consists of: « […] le père reste toujours plus ou moins puissant sur les fils révoltés, et que, s'il ne les condamne pas tous à demeurer, tel Poe, des impuissants, il les prive le plus souvant d'une part notable et de leur puissance et de leur liberté viriles ». (Bonaparte, M., II, 1933: 664). Unlike the beginning of Poe's short story which does not offer us any chronotopical information, in the beginning of the autodiegesis *At Manjoala's Inn* we are informed about the trip undertaken by the young Fănică towards Popeştii de Sus, set during one chilly autumn evening. Fănică wants to stay at Manjoala's Inn (chronotope) for only three quarters of an hour so that he will have enough time to reach the house of colonel Iordache by ten o'clock, whose elder daughter he is supposed to get engaged to. The same motifs, i.e. horses and initiatic journeys, can be found in the beginning of the heterodiegetical short story *At the Manor*, in which the narrator presents the image of a young man, who, the second day after the Saint George holiday – I.L.Caragiale does not pick this holiday by accident as, like the saint who defeated the beast, his hero will defeat a lord of darkness too –, one spring morning, when "[...] the visual sensations of light, of air transparency [are] conjugated with brief auditive sensations" (our trad.) (Cioculescu, Ş., 1977: 369), comes astride from Poeniţa (chronotope), passes through the birch forest and heads towards the Sălcuţa manor (chronotope). Here the young man wants to spend just one hour, so that he can get to the boyar in town on time to hand him the fifty coins, which represent the earning from his father's tenancy. By analyzing the topographical information we are given in both texts we observe that, currently, the villages of Po(i)eniţa and Sălcuţa are located in the county Dâmboviţa, while Popeştii de Sus is located in the county Alba. These administrative units are nearby to the Dâmboviţa/Prahova topoi.

In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head* we notice that, in order to emphasize the moral character of his story, the autodiegetic narrator affirms his intentions of never denigrating his late friend, Toby Dammit, who "[...] was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog's death it was that he died [...]" (Poe, E.A., *op. cit.*: 622). Through this statement, the reader is shown the end of the story and, at the same time, the narration is projected into the past through a time loop. The narrating character considers that Toby Dammit must not be insulted for his vices because these are just the effects of his mother's flaws. They are visible in the abnormally quick development of the child. Like Cănuţă, the irresolute, Caragiale's hero, Toby Dammit had an unhappy childhood due to the recurring beatings that his mother inappropriately carried out with her left hand. These physical violences left not only traces on his body, but, in time, provoked him various seizures. Another flaw taken over from his mother is the poverty, as he never says he bets a certain amount of money, but, most of the times: "I'll bet you what you please," or "I'll bet you what you dare," or "I'll bet you a trifle," or else, more significantly still, "*I'll bet the Devil my head*" (Poe, E.A., *op. cit.*: 624). This statement, reprezenting "[...]

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a mirroring of the grotesque proportions of spiritual-material and abstract-concrete relations in Dammit's philosophy" (our trad.) (Pillat-Săulescu, M., 1983: 134), turns in time into an addiction and ultimately leads to his fall. Although the narrating character repeatedly tries to correct him by making him understand that vice is immoral, Toby Dammit is not easily persuaded. He utters "I'll bet the Devil my head" with even more fervency and persistence, thus producing the autodiegetical narrator both amazement and bewilderment. Sensing that Toby Dammit's soul is in danger, the narrating character reproves him again, only this time, the trite reproof acquires the semblance of an exorcism. Although Toby Dammit does not care much for the advice of the autodiegetical narrator, he still keeps his companionship and even starts exalting his faults and uninspired jokes. The *fantastic* narration keeps the suspense by recounting a story which alludes to a similar motif from *At Manjoala's Inn* and *At the Manor*, *i.e* the *fantastic* journey. Toby Dammit and the narrating character go out for a walk one beautiful day and reach a road which takes them to a river. In order to get to the stream they decide to pass a covered bridge which represents, as we soon discover, the mirror image of a masonic temple, a symbol of morality. The inside of the bridge is immersed in semiobscurity, which is at the same time gruesome for the narrating character and comfortable for Toby Dammit. The latter's strange behaviour – he gambols, screams, babbles meaningless words – determine the autodiegetical narrator to suspect him of transcendentalism. The motif of the bridge is in I.L.Caragiale's work converted into an inn/mansion, perfectly accessible to the Romanian reader, unlike "[...] the haunted castle or [...] sepulchral subterraneans from the gothic noves or the short stories of E.A.Poe [...]" (our trad.) (Manolescu, F., 1983: 184). Although he has a harmful influence to those around as he is under the control of the Devil, he is joyous and ravenous both in *At the Manor* – „[...] tingirile şi căldările clocotesc, grătarele sfârâie, cântă lăutarii, forfoteală şi larmă mare, şi clopote şi clopoţei, pe cari le sună vite şi cai mişcându-şi capetele" (Caragiale, I.L., *La conac*, I, 2011: 238) and in *At Manjoala's Inn* – „[...] doi ţigani somnoroşi, unul cu lăuta şi altul cu cobza, ţârlâie într-un colţ olteneşte. [...]. Bună mâncare! pâne caldă, raţă friptă pe varză, cârnaţi de purcel prăjiţi, şi nişte vin! şi cafea turcească! şi râs şi vorbă... [...] (Idem, *La Hanul lui Mânjoală*: 201 pass.). Here the young man finds Marghioala – none other than Belzebut, the leader of the demons –, in the kitchen, near the hot oven, a symbol of hell's torments. Through a narrative cutback, we find out from this latter that the inn is currently under the patronage of Marghioala, the wife of the late Mânjoală, a name with "[...] una cadenza armoniosa [...]" (Colombo, A.,1934: 122). Close to bankruptcy, this „[...] zdravănă femeie [...]" (Idem, *La Hanul lui Mânjoală*: 200), whose face is outlined by I. L. Caragiale "[...] in an enigmatic light" (our trad.) (Cazimir, Ş., 1967: 191), has succeeded in turning the inn into a profitable business, which has caused glances of suspicion and accusations of skeletons in her cupboard: „[...] ce a făcut, ce a dres, de unde era cât p-aci să le vânză hanul când trăia bărbatu-său, acuma s-a plătit de datorii, a dres acaretul, a mai ridicat un grajd de piatră, şi încă spun toţi că trebuie să aibă şi parale bune. Unii o bănuiesc că o fi găsit vreo comoară... alţii, că umblă cu fermece" (Caragiale, I.L., *La Hanul lui Mânjoală*: 200). Even more, a failed attempt to loot the inn makes us wonder whether she works with the devil, as "[...] the insistent assumption of the evil inquisitor" (our trad.) (Cazimir, Ş., *op. cit.*: 191), or whether she is the devil herself, which does not look very likely, as she seems more of a witch than a demon. However, we do notice that her powers are "[...] infernal" (our trad.) (Călinescu, G., 2003: 441). Fănică, "[...] a Ulysses of the Carpatho-Danubian landscape [...]" (our trad.) (Ciobanu, N., 1987: 366), feels very attracted to this crepuscular and

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misty space, which, according to Al. Philippide, generates the *fantastic* atmosphere, which is described in various ways: „[...] abur de pâne caldă [...]" (Caragiale, I.L., *op. cit.*: 201); „[...] fumul tutunului [...]" (*Ibidem*: 203); „[...] lumină ceţoasă [...]" (*Ibidem*: 206). The inn, "[…] temptation for mystery, the foremost intimate source of any attempt to plunge inside the *fantastic* (s.n.) (our trad.) (Ciobanu, N., *op. cit.*: 367), identify with Marghioala, "[...] a Wallachian Circe [...]" (our trad.) (*Ibidem*: 366), which represents its anthropomorphic figure, and "[...] her astonishing room - an *axis mundi* of the initiatic space which absorbs [Fanică]" (our trad.) (Cap-Bun, M., 1998: 182).

Both in E.A.Poe and in I.L.Caragiale, the intrusion of the *fantastic* takes place the moment de devil's sudden and mysterious appearance starts looming because, undoubtebly, the *fantastic* is « c'est le dérangement de l'ordre des choses, le *fantastique* (s. n.), c'est le mal » (Roy, C., 1960: 93). In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, the devil shows up in a closed and confined space, through a mild cough, similar to an „ahem!", which is according to Louis Vax a « […] rupture des constantes du monde réel » (Vax, L., 1964: 172). In *At the Manor* where "[...] the uncommon is transmuted into the *fantastic* (s. n.) [...]" (our trad.) (Micu, D., 2000: 142) – the demon appears from the east, like Jesus Christ in the Final Judgement, and reveals himself in an open field, thus forcing the *fantastic* to provoke "[...] the disruption in the chain of meaning, the disorder of meaning" (our trad.) (Călinescu, M., 1970: 8). In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, the devil appears "[...] as a buffoon, a fool, just like only in burlesque plays, never like Mephistopheles, the incarnation of evil, the deceitful instigator of human tragedies" (our trad.) (Buranelli, V., 1966: 90) and bewilders, surprisingly, not by his physique, but by his garments:

> My glance at length fell into a nook of the frame-work of the bridge, and upon the figure of a little lame old gentleman of venerable aspect. Nothing could be more reverend than his whole appearance; for, he not only had on a full suit of black, but his shirt was perfectly clean and the collar turned very neatly down over a white cravat, while his hair was parted in front like a girl's. His hands were clasped pensively together over his stomach, and his two eyes were carefully rolled up into the top of his head.
> Upon observing him more closely, I perceived that he wore a black silk apron over his small-clothes; and this was a thing which I thought very odd. (Poe, E.A., *op. cit.:* 627-628).

By carefully reading the above passage we notice that Toby Dammit is none other than the apprentice adhering to the masonry (see *The Cask of Amontillado*, where Fortunato and Montresor and masons) and the devil is the pretentious mason. He is dressed in a black suit, white shirt, wears a black silk apron (the garments of a masonry leader) and has got a square and compasses, the masonic symbol of morality. At this moment we can understand why the short story's subtitle is *A Moral Tale*. While E.A.Poe's devil bewilders, first and foremost, by his garments, I.L.Caragiale's demon from *At the Manor* is, apparently, an honest man, who terrifies by his squint glance. Throughout his initiatiatic journey, the tenant's son becomes bewitched by the mystery of this glance, in which he always notices the „[...] ciudat [...] şi luminos [...]" (Caragiale, I.L., *La conac*: 241) radiance of the eye of the devil. In *At Manjoala's Inn*, the author insists six times on the mystery of the witch's look: „[...] *ochioasă* (s. n.)" (Idem, *La Hanul lui Mânjoală*: 202); „straşnici *ochi* (s. n.) [...]" (*Ibidem*); „[...] straşnici *ochi* (s. n.) [...]" (*Ibidem*); „[...] straşnici *ochi* (s. n.) [...]" (*Ibidem*: 203); „[...] privind pe

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femeie drept în *lumini* (s. n.), care-i sticleau grozav de ciudat" (*Ibidem*: 204); „Sărut *ochii* (s. n.) [...]" (*Ibidem*). This is the diabolical weapon Marghioala uses to grow on Fănică. Enchanted by the occultism of her power of seduction, he grabs her by the waist and pinches her right arm. If Marghioala has the devil inside her, Kir Ianulea, „[...] un drac şi jumătate [...]" (Idem, *Kir Ianulea*: 502), having recieved a binding act from Dardarot himself, the emperor of Hell, becomes human, visits Earth, engages and tastes the devilish „enchantment" of marriage. However, reality doesn't always go according to plan and the devil comes undone as the devilish Acriviţa gets the better of him – she has the same demonlike seal as Marghioala, i.e the squint look, the stigma of evil –, proving once and for all that the woman is even more mischievous than the devil. The same demonlike characteristics are to be found in *The Devil's Horse*, where the imp Prichindel, unlike Aghiuţă/Ianulea, is *pro bono* endowed with little horns.

The names of Poe's and Caragiale's characters are revealing. E.A.Poe insists on the paradox of the name *Toby Dammit*, which contains a saint's name, the soothing *Toby* (< ebr. *Toviyyah* = Yahweh is good), and a cursing interjection, *Dammit* (< eng. *damn it*). The young man *Fănică* has also got a sacred name (*Ştefan* < gr. *Stephanos* = crown) in *At Manjoala's Inn*. As for the name of *Marghioala* (< gr. *Marghiola*), Al. Graur notes it is the derived form of *Maria* (< gr. *Mariam*, ebr. *Miryam* = beloved or love) and it means „mitocancă" (boor) (Graur, A., 1965: 156). The same linguist considers the name of the colonel *Iordache* to be derived from *Gheorghe* (< gr. *Georgios* = farmer, earthworker). In the short story *Kir Ianulea*, *Aghiuţă* (< ngr. *aghios* = saint) is a comical name given to Satan, a firm contradiction to *Kir* (< gr. *Kyrios* = lord) *Ianulea* (< gr. *Ianulis*; < ebr. *Yochanan* = Yahweh is gracious). As for the name *Acriviţa* (< lat. *acrus* = mischievous; < lat. *licia* = the thread which makes up the texture in a weaving machine), describes a malicious person, who has a vocation for mixing threads, i.e. spoiling everyone's plans. In *The Devil's Horse*, *Prichindel* is a name with an unknown origin denoting a small, vivacious, quickwitted and funny person, common to popular fairy tales.

In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, we notice that, after the narrating character and Toby Dammit almost cross the entire bridge, their advance is blocked, bizarrely, by a quite tall barrier shaped like a cross: „T" (symbol of Itzamna, the Snake-God, the Tau cross, the T square in the masonry symbolism). If given a christian meaning, the cross stands for both the brass snake that Moses had made in the wilderness, which healed all those looking at it, and the sins and death vanquished by Christ's sacrifice. In front of it we have the character's reactions: unflustered, the autodiegetical narrator lifts the barrier and continues on his way, but Toby Dammit bets the devil his head he can jump over it (adhering to the masonry) and executes a pigeon (masonic symbol) jump in the air. All the signes of demonic possession are present, especially when they meet the cross, the holy weapon, which causes him to feel burns and in front of which the devil disappears, as in *At the Manor*, although he had previously decided to spend some time at the inn for a snack with the tenant's son. Not only the merchant-devil from *At the Manor* runs away from the cross, but also the demon within Marghioala – the *fantastic* theme of demonic possession which M.Schneider mentions –, proof to which is the fact that she can not stand the presence of any icons on the walls of her house. The cross is a hindrance for the tomcat devil from *At Manjoala's Inn* – „Am zis: hi! La drum! Şi mi-am făcut *cruce* (s. n.); atunci, am auzit bine uşa bufnind şi un vaiet de cotoi" (Caragiale, I.L., *La Hanul lui Mânjoală*: 205), as well as the one transfigured into a black goat/kid, "[...] animals considered in the Romanian folk tradition (and not only there) as figures of mundane disguise for the representatives of the preternatural

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world and used by Caragiale as tried out props in obtaining the suggestion of *fantastic* (s. n.)" (our trad.) (Negrea, G. 2012: 152), in order to create an ambiguous oscillation between the real and the *fantastic.* The nefarious presence of the cat/kid is felt by the horse, as his/her eyes look, according to Fănică, like Marghioala's.

In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, we notice that, before the narrating character makes any observations about this strange event, Satan breaks in using the same interjection „ahem!" and thus, seeemingly, showing his dissatisfaction. He asks his friend for help three times, Toby Dammit shows up only at the third call (in the masonry, the symbolism of the number 3 is connected with, on the one hand, the main pillars of the lodge, wisdom, force and beauty and, on the other, the mysteries of the first three numbers, the being, the reality and the truth), comes out from the concealment of the bridge (the shady area of the lodge where the apprentice who wants to become a mason must stay), heads limping towards his friend, shakes his hand with enthusiasm (shaking the hand of the mason apprentice and, implicitly, the deal with the devil – a *fantastic* theme identified by R.Caillois, J.Bellemin-Noël and M.Schneider) and tells him that he must pass a test. Toby Dammit's demonic reaction is followed not by consent, as expected, but by the same „ahem!" and the same squinted look, thus suggesting doubt and irony, but also the agony of death. This confirms once more the idea that the *fantasticul* is « ambivalent, contradictory, ambiguous, [...], paradoxal ». (Bessière, I., 1974: 23). As he agrees to the test, Toby Dammit is guided into the shady – the *fantastic* atmosphere mentioned by Al. Philippide – parts of the bridge, where he is given all the necessary instructions. Unlike *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, in *At the Manor*, the devil tempts the young man with his evil glance first to a bacchic adventure, then to an erotic adventure, both meant to lead him towards sin and put a grip on his soul. In *At Manjoala's Inn*, the plans are reversed: Fănică is gripped by the strange look in Marghioala's eyes and attracted first into an erotic game – Nicolae Manolescu considers the text to be "[...] the story of an erotic initiation [...]" (our trad.) (Manolescu, N., 2008: 434) –, although, of course, the devil knows her intention of engagement –, then within a loop of alcohol and tobacco and, finally, back to the same sensual trap, by stopping the gesture of crossing himself with the aim of blocking his access to the Holy Matrimony. The same demonic temptation is to be found in *The Devil's Horse* – "[...] the *fantastic* core (s. n.) [is] presented within a realistic framework [...]" (our trad.) (Cazimir, Ş., *op. cit.*: 196) –, where a young, tall and beautiful emperor's daughter, metamorphosed through withcraft into an old beggar, „[...] fără putere [...]" (Caragiale, I.L., *Calul dracului*: 633), delights both gastronomically and bacchically the imp Prichindel, un drăcuşor „[...] crud de tot [...]" (*Ibidem:* 634), cu „[...] costiţă de purcel, [...] colaci [...] turtă dulce [...] mere [şi] un rachiu de izmă" (*Ibidem:* 635). Inside this "[...] fragment of *fantastic* (s. n.) poetics [...] coloured by a halo of magic" (our trad.) (Dimisianu, G., 1996: 118 pass.), under the light of the full moon, the two consume, from midnight to sunset, an erotic act accompanied by the smell of white roses and by the chirping of birds. In *At Manjoala's Inn*, we can observe that Fănică realizes he has spent more time at the inn then previously planned. In spite of all the persistent demands and witchcraft shifts of Marghiloaia – she casts spells on the young man's hat –, he leaves the inn by night, on a ghastly weather and is told he is to pay when he returns, a moment which the woman is sure will be sooner than he imagines. In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, we notice that, although Toby Dammit leaves the impression that he is aware he is being allured into a trap by the devil, he never mentions the name. Only the narrating character utters the name "[…] *the devil he is*" (Poe, E.A., *op. cit.*: 630) and emphasizes that he can hear an

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echo after the utterance, a symbol of transfiguration, regression, passivity, but also of duality, the shadow, the golem (Chevalier, J., Gheebrant, A., II, 1993: 11). Unlike *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, in *At Manjoala's Inn*, Fănică and his father-in-law, Iordache, utter the name of the devil („[...] m-a-mpins *dracul* (s. n.) s-o ciupesc" (Caragiale, I.L., *La Hanul lui Mânjoală*: 202); „ – Era *dracul* (s. n.), ascultă-mă pe mine" (*Ibidem*: 209); „[...] *dracul* (s. n.) te duce, se vede, şi la bune..." (*Ibidem*), and in *At the Manor*, the young and dear Dincă, his father's uncle do the same thing: "– *Dracul* (s. n.) m-a pus!. [...]. – Mă! strigă după el unchiul. Ia seama, că te ia *dracul* (s. n.) dacă te mai iei după el, nătărăule!" (Idem, *La conac*: 242-243).

Toby Dammit's test generates the climax, which brings to mind the sadism of Irodiada: his head (in the cabinet, where the masonry apprentice is preparing his will, we notice two skulls, a scythe, an hourglass and a rooster) is cut off by a bar, as the devil slinks it wearing his black silk apron. If in *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, the climax is the moment Toby Dammit is decapitated, in *At the Manor*, the climax is the loss suffered by the young man – fifty coins, a watch and two rings – after playing cards in front of his uncle and his companion. After losing a game of stos, the same devil that tempted him, offers a solution for the recovery of the loss: to put to sleep the playing card partners with a handkerchief. This does not happen, however, because the young man, does not use it adequately and becomes the victim of its anesthetic effects under the supervision of the same demonic eyes. The climax from *At Manjoala's Inn* emphasizes the *fantastic* atmosphere: leaving the inn on such dreadful weather and under the influence of the magic hat, Fănică can only roam aimlessly, wander (*fantastic* motif) around the inn for about four hours, becoming the victim of a dilated, elongated time (Marino, A., 1973: 673).

If we expected Toby Dammit to be buried, we would have definitely been wrong. In *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, the *fantastic* disconcerts once more through the unreal: the autodiegetical narrator takes the corpse home, the homeopathists administer the medicines, which, though headless, he refuses to swallow and consequently dies. The ending is both ambiguous and dreadful: after the narrating character buries the corpse, he sends a modest bill to the transcendentalists. After they did not accept to pay for the bill, he exhumes the body and sells it as dog food. Not by accident, Monica Pillat-Săulescu names it "[...] a farse within a farse, [...] a parody of the transcendentalists" (our trad.) (Pillat-Săulescu, M., *op. cit.*: 133-134). The denouement from *At Manjoala's Inn* presents Fănică's release from the demonic possession and the exorcism undertaken through a rigorous program by his father-in-law. While Fănică is set free from the evil spirits, Marghioala falls prey to them. One calm winter night, Fănică and his father-in-law are announced that the inn had burnt to the ground, symbolizing the burning of the witch in the flames of hell and the cleansing from all evil. The open ending is unclear, proof of which are Iordache's hints about his own similar experiences with Marghiloaia in his youth. Another equivocal denouement is in *At the Manor*, where the tenant's son is rehabilitated by his uncle: in the morning, the young man's uncle pays back the fifty coins, „[...] îi arde părinteşte două palme straşnice [...]" (Caragiale, I.L., *La conac*: 242) and gives him a piece of advice which unsettles him: „Ia seama, că te ia dracul dacă te mai iei după el, nătărăule!" (*Ibidem*: 243). The young man's silence hints towards his knowledge of the fact that he was subject to the devil's work and, while passing the Sălcuţa Inn during one evening, he does not give way to seek shelter there. Although a girl is gazing towards him, he continues on his determined walk towards Poeniţa. Supressing time, I.L.Caragiale realizes the symmetry between the beginning – the sunrise and the chirping of the birds

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from the birch forest – and the ending – the sunset and the return of the birds to their nests –: „Soarele, scăpătând la apus, se uită îndărăt cu stăruinţă caldă la pădurieştea de mesteacăni, unde atâtea păsări ale primăverii se cheamă, se-ntreabă şi-şi răspund, se-ngână şi se-ntrec în fel de glasuri, întorcându-se fiecare pe la cuibul său" (*Ibidem*), thus emphasizing, the cyclic character of life itself. The same cyclic character of the narration is to be found in *The Devil's Horse*, where we encounter, both in the beginning and the ending, – which remains open –, the image of the old beggar, eating slowly and with difficulty a pretzel soaked in water. Unlike *At Manjoala's Inn*, *At the Manor* and *The Devil's Horse*, where the devil is happy to discover humans falls for his traps, in *Kir Ianulea*, the imp Aghiuţă is joyous when he finally gets rid of the devilish woman that ruined his plans and humbly returns to his dad Dardarot.

Although Charles Baudelaire tells us that « [...] la plus belle des ruses du Diable est de vous persuader qu'il n'existe pas! […] » (Baudelaire, C., 1926: 104), we have not left them as prey to these shams, because, after a watchful reading, we could discerne the evil and unwonted apparitions of these alter egos of our conscience – symbols of a loss of identity – shift the narration towards the *fantastic* and disconcert the muddling game created between alterity and identity, normal and abnormal, explicable and inexplicable, natural and preternatural.

In conclusion, when F.M.Dostoievski tells us in *The Brothers Karamazov* that "life is a duel between God and the devil, and the battlefield is *me* (s. n.)", we can replace his personal pronoun with the names of Poe's and Caragiale's characters, Toby Dammit, Fănică, the tenant's son, exceptions being Marghioala, Aghiuţă/Ianulea and Prichindel who are, undoubtebly, genuine demons which populate the *fantastic* universe of demons.

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