DIMITRIE CANTEMIR'S *THE DIVAN* BETWEEN THE EDUCATIONAL AND MORALIZING AIMS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WRITING

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Abstract:
Anchored in a reception formula indebted to the interpretation suggested by Cantemir himself – imposed, actually, through the paratextual elements used specifically to this end – the debate of principles in the first book of The Divan can be re-read today as empowerment of the World and the Wise Man as characters with their own dynamic and development into discourse, and also with regard to reconsidering the (not only) persuasive function of rhetoric, as applied to the theme of the relation between the expansive-hedonistic and the restrained-stoic existential models.

Keywords:
Existential model, educational-moralizing literature, literary character, re-reading.

Bilingual writing, in Greek and Romanian, aiming to reach the specialized readership both in the Romanian and European cultural spaces, *Divanul sau gâlceava Înțeleptului cu Lumea sau giudețul Sufletului cu Trupul [The Divan or The Wise Man's Parley with the World or The Judgement of the Soul with the Body]* (1698) represents, in Adriana Babeți's opinion, *"un soi de tratat de morală creștină, [care] ar fi putut proba optim imaginea tânărului aspirant la domnie în ochii compatrioților. Divanul l-ar fi putut caracteriza drept un autentic domn creștin, devotat tradiției locului, erudite, talentat, dovedind (prin textul omagial de la început) dragoste fraternă și capacitate de umilință"*[1] [a Christian moral treatise of sorts [which] might have optimally proven the image of the young claimant to the throne in the eyes of his compatriots. *The Divan* could characterise him as a

[1] Adriana Babeți, 1998, *Bătăliile pierdute. Dimitrie Cantemir. Strategii de lectură [The Lost Battles. Dimitrie Cantemir. Reading Strategies]*, Timisoara: Amarcord Press, p. 150.

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genuine Christian ruler devoted to the local traditions, an erudite and talented man showing (with the reverential opening text) fraternal love and abilities to humble himself].

Undoubtedly, the Prince's intellectual and moral profile, as he would have wanted it perceived by the people around him, is obvious from the text of *The Divan*. Equally true is, however, that, in what concerns the writing and the thematic structures, *"înscriindu-se în lungul şir al disputelor dintre suflet şi trup, Divanul se situează undeva între beletristică, litratură, religie şi filosofie. Dar chiar şi forma literară a scrierii nu este lipsită de semnificaţii filosofice, (...), izvorâtă dintr-o intenţie estetică, dincolo de cea pur moralizatoare, forma de dialog, care permite Lumii să expună, într-o formă vie şi convingătoare, textele opuse concepţiei creştine, contravene scopului religios, lăsând şanse să se întrezărească îndoielile ce frământau mintea tânărului cărturar"*[2] [inscribed in the long list of *judgements* of the soul with the body, *The Divan* is at the crossroads of *belles lettres*, literature, religion and philosophy. But even the literary form of the writing is not in want of philosophical meanings (…) born from aesthetic intents, beyond the purely moralizing ones, the dialogic form that allows the World to expose, vividly and convincingly, the texts opposing the Christian moral, contravening the religious purpose, giving a chance at a glimpse in the incredulity which tortured the mind of the young scholar.]

Elvira Sorohan also identifies in the structure, aims and ideology of the first Book of *The Divan* the principled conflict between *"concepţia despre viaţă a Lumii, libertină fără exagerare, şi ascetismul Înţeleptului (de coloratură isihastă)"* [the World's views on life, unexaggeratedly libertine, and the Wise Man's asceticism (of hesychast nuances)], and in the second, *"o importantă antologie paremiologică şi prima tipărită în limba română"* [a significant paremiologic anthology, the first ever printed in the Romanian language]. Because *"dictoanele contrapunctează ideile, întregesc şi întăresc sensurile morale"* [the dicta counterpoint ideas, complete and assert moral meanings], the three Books of *The Divan* are unified under the sign of an

[2] Angela Botez, „Dimitrie Cantemir despre «giudeţul» sufletului cu trupul", [Dimitrie Cantemir on the 'judgement' of the soul with the body]. See also Daniel Mazilu, „Influenţe stoice şi neoplatonice în «Divanul» lui Cantemir" [Stoic and Neo-Platonist Influences in Cantemir's *The Divan*].

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„aesthetic credo" which, to Cantemir might have implied that *„expresia desăvârșită în formă poate impune mai pregnant sensul etic"*[3] [the expression accomplished in form may impose the ethical meaning more poignantly]. Along the same lines, Adriana Babeți asserts that *„Divanul, așa cum e conceput, rezolvă, în prima sa parte, cea a disputei alegorizate, o problemă de conștiință a principelui, credincios ortodox la finele veacului al XVII-lea", "intelectual de formație enciclopedică, spirit umanist" și contemporan, prin capacitatea sa interogativ-dubitativă, cu veacul Luminilor."*[4] [*The Divan*, structured as it is, resolves in its first part, that of the allegorized debate, a conscience problem of the Prince, an Orthodox at the end of the seventeenth century, an encyclopaedic intellectual and a humanist spirit and a contemporary, by virtue of his interrogative-dubitative abilities, with The Age of the Enlightenment].

By emphasising the idea of a conflict of principles with didactic and moralizing aims, Elvira Sorohan identifies the type of discourse chosen by Cantemir, in the spirit of the Age of the Enlightenment, but also in the good old ancient and mediaeval tradition:

„Dezbatere reprezentată, eseu moralist desfășurat în mișcarea ideilor contradictorii, Divanul configurează, în prima lui carte, o dramă de idei, susținută de două personaje, având un deznodământ care ar fi pacificarea Lumii, brusc îmblânzită, prin propria oboseală"[5] [represented debate, moralist essay carried out by the movement of contradictory ideas, *The Divan* configures, in its first book, a drama of ideas supported by two characters, with a dénouement that would be the pacification of the World, suddenly tamed by its own tiredness.]

That, unless the World resorts to an unusual rhetoric strategy, opposed to that it used along the contents of the entire first Book. We will return to this. The researcher identifies two characters of *The Divan*, which, under the names The Wise Man and The World, stage *„două caractere sau temperamente opuse, cu mimică expresivă, fiecare afirmând o anume*

[33] Elvira Sorohan, 1998, *Introducere în istoria literaturii române [An Introduction to the History of Romanian Literature]*, Iasi: „Al. I. Cuza" University Press, p. 290.
[4] Adriana Babeți, *op. cit*., p. 201.
[5] Elvira Sorohan, *op. cit*., p. 283.

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consistență spirituală manifestă în dorință de a-și impune doctrina"[6] [two antithetical natures or temperaments with expressive pantomime, each one of them with certain spiritual consistency manifest in the desire to impose one's doctrine].

The researcher notices another interesting aspect, of great relevance to our analysis: *„patosul crescând al frazei, expansiunea ca rostire și sens, a cuvântului «nădejde», indică inserarea mărturiei autobiografice"*[7] [the rising pathos of the sentence and the expansion in utterance and meaning of the word *hope* indicate insertions of autobiographic confessions]. In other words, the stylistic imprint of the author customises the writing, even despite itself, and in that, opens the text to re-reading. The title of the book specifically indicates a stylistic duplicity which *the parlay* brings closer to the familiar, embellishing it, at times, with invectives and imprecations, and which *the divan* directs towards the authority of the sacred text, from the New Testament preponderantly, copiously quoted by the Wise Man to support his claims. Thus, mirrored here are the stylistics and rhetoric of the World, querulous par excellence, and those of the Wise Man, educational and moralizing, unbalancing, with the superiority of one who believes oneself to be in possession of the entire truth, the demonstrative architecture in the World's score.

The first part of *The Divan* sets out with *Carte către cetitoriu [A word to the reader]*, in which the invitation to a philosophic banquet is correlated with *"analogia dialog – carte – oglindă"* [the dialogue-book-mirror analogy][8], and with explicit symbolism: the three small tables, offering good and bad spiritual nourishment to the reader, corresponding to the offers of the Wise Man and of the World respectively, open up a sequence of symbols – structured along an ample metaphor gradually decoding itself – which go beyond the substitution mechanism of the metaphor with their semantics, carefully explicated, in view of a correct understanding of the text, by the author himself. The explicit association of the first two tables with the World and the Wise Man represents a first *mise an abyme* of the book structure and ideology, consolidated by the procedure

[6] *Ibidem*, pp. 283-284.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 288.
[8] Adriana Babeți, *op. cit.*, p. 153

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of semantic telescoping in the antithetic doublet of the body and soul. The third small table would certainly represent the conciliatory *via media* between the two principles and existential models, subsequently found in the interpretation given by the Wise Man to the existence of the World and of its components, as macrocosm in a non-conflicting relationship with Man, as microcosm. Careful at this point with the educational stake of his book, Cantemir provides the reader with a precise reading grid and path to deciphering the symbols. The two goblets, of life and death, added here, correlate with the motif of deceiving appearances, as the former appears to be modest, as in the Holy Grail symbolism, while the latter is richly embellished with precious gemstones. The deceitful effect of the second goblet is augmented by bringing the grapes of life and the grapes of death and the bread of life and the bread of death on the discursive stage built ad-hoc by the Wise Man. Emphasis is thus laid on the purpose of the book, that of showing and telling about various (un)apparent differences. At the same time, Cantemir signals the function of the synthesising comments which accompany every exchange between the Wise Man and the World, whose apophthegmatic character (often, they paraphrase quotes from the New Testament) allows a synthetic rewriting of Book One in philosophical grid. The chapters are addressed directly to the reader, engaging the latter in dialogue and ensuring, in the economy of *The Divan*, the preservation of the only acceptable author-reader contract and interpretation.

If, as Adriana Babeți asserts, "*cei doi protagoniști ai Divanului pot figura alegoric și altceva: două atitudini, două concepții de viață polare, care trasează un autentic câmp de forță în mentalitatea românească de la finele veacului al XVII-lea: înfruntarea dintre cleric și laic"*[9] [the two protagonists of *The Divan* may also allegorically embody something else: two attitudes, two polarised views on life which draw a genuine force field in the Romanian mentality at the end of the seventeenth century: the confrontation between the clergy and the layman], then the authorial choice for the 'style' of the Wise Man is justified. To put it otherwise, Cantemir 'favours' the discourse of the defender of Christian morals, which is precisely why *"textul înțeleptului e mai mai auster, mai puțin «meșteșugit»,*

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 174

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mai aproape de sursă, de textele sacre, în special Vechiul și Noul Testament"[10] [the Wise Man's discourse is more austere, less 'artful' and closer to the source, to the sacred texts, especially the Old and the New Testament].

It may also be here a certain *"reticență față de perisabilitatea și iluzia a tot ce ține de registrul cuvintelor Lumii", teama în fața a tot ce înseamnă podoabă"*[11] [reticence about the perishability and illusion of all that belongs to the register of the words of the World, and fear of everything that is embellishment]. Nonetheless, the same critic notes the expressiveness, rhetorical resourcefulness and persuasive pliability of the World, which uses a series of *"interogații retorice, perfidii strategice, pentru a-și muzicaliza fraza, pentru a o face cât mai seducătoare*"[12] [rhetorical questions, strategic treacheries meant to make its utterance sound musical and as seductive as possible]. Moreover, *"Înțeleptul se contaminează treptat de «procedeele» Lumii"* [The Wise Man gradually contaminates with the techniques of the World], starting in his turn to ornate his speech in order to *"a-și spori calitatea argumentelor"*[13] [improve the quality of his arguments].

As far as we are concerned, we attempt to propose a largely different reading of the first Book of *The Divan*. From the very beginning, one notes the organisation of each reply of the two protagonists of the staged dialogue/ clash of principles along the lines of two components: the appellatives, far from being flattering, thrown by both the Wise Man and the World - he accuses it of sly, perfidious and deceitful speech, and it accuses him of senselessness, simple-mindedness and, to an equal extent, of deceit, thus materializing the *parlay*, also correlative to the World; and the exposition of the ideas – i.e., ideology – of the book, structured as an argumentation reminding of the Divan and, of course, of the symbolic figure of the Wise Man. We will see further how reality is perceived from two perspectives, perpetually similar, in the sequencing and alternation of the replies. This generates an effect of relativisation of everything that is said, and amplifies and diversifies, through consecutive defamiliarisation (by

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 154
[11] *Ibidem*, p. 153
[12] *Ibidem*, p. 154
[13] *Ibidem*.

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adding more and more correlative symbols), the symbolism of the Wise Man and that of the World. The resulting unintentional expressiveness corroborates with circularity, with the persistence of a dually-oriented macro-significance which consolidates it, and which, by virtue of excess, deems the text literary.

The Wise Man begins by asking the World for how long it has been here and what it is. Self-confidently defining itself, the World claims that it is a beautiful and rich divine creation. The Wise Man interjects and insists on the perishability of the "things" of the World, which gives the latter the chance to assault him with invectives along the lines of the pace-setting dynamic structure of rhetorical questions:

„Lumea: - O, nebunule și deșertule de minte, cum că amăgitoare și minciunoasă să fiu, dzici? Nu cauți să vezi și să cunoști frumsețele mele? Nu prăvești podoaba mea? Nu oglindești bunurile mele? Nu iai aminte desfătările și dezmierdările mele?" [The World: 'Oh, thee, fool and simpleton, thou sayeth I'm deceitful and untrue? Don't you try to see and know my beauty? Don't you look at my adornments? Don't you mirror my possessions? Don't you notice my delights and caresses?']

„Înțeleptul: Vădz frumsețele și podoaba ta, ca iarba și ca floarea ierbii; bunurile tale în mânule tâlharilor și în dintele moliilor; desfătările tale: pulbere și fum, carele cu mare grosime în aer se înalță și, îndată rășchirându-să, ca când n-ar hi fost să fac" [The Wise Man: I see your beauty and adornments, as the grass and the flowers of grass; your possessions in the hands of rogues and in the tooth of the moths; your delights: dust and smoke thickly rising into the air and quickly dispelling, as it'd have never been for me to do so.][14]

The syntactic and semantic parallelism of the dialogic structures is obvious. In order to support its claims, the World brings up a famous historical personality, literary myth and, at the same time, existential model, one firmly placed under the sign of activism and not under that of stoic contemplation: Alexander the Great. Gone too young, poisoned, as the Wise Man points in his stylistic and argumentative counterpoint, Alexander the Great offers no more than an example of survival of fame:

[14] Dimitrie Cantemir, 2004, *Divanul [The Divan]*, Chisinau: Litera International Publishing, p. 30.

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„Lumea: Dară cu aciasta minte te porți și cu aceasta socotială îmbli, o zburatule de minte? Dară eu, căci dzişi că bunurile mele n-au sfârșit, n-am dzis precum cei ce le stăpânesc nu vor muri – însă de vor și muri ei, iară numele și slava lor nu moare, nu să trece, nu să săvârșește, ce în veci rămâne."[15] [The World: But is it with this mind that you demean thyself and with this reckoning that you carry thyself on, oh, knotty-pated fool? But since thou sayeth that my possessions are endless, I haven't said that those who possess them never die – but when they die, their name and glory won't die with them, won't pass away, won't expire, but here they will remain forever.]

Visibly affected by the effective rhetoric and strong argumentation of the World, the Wise Man accuses it, oxymoronically, of using a sweet and poisonous rhetoric. He reprimands it – *"vrednică ești de ocară"* [thou art but worthy of disgrace] because bringing up and problematizing a morally disputable behavioural pattern, the World proves to be a lying mentor who perverts the spirit. However, the semantic duality of the network of symbols used by the protagonists of *The Divan*, proves, at a closer look, to be marked by in-depth complementarity. In other words, the symbols are used antithetically, by virtue of authorial ideology and aims of the book:

„Însă așe erai omului până a nu să, de frumsețea și dulceața pomului celui de moarte aducătoriu, amăgi; pre a căruia pom poamă mâncând cel de întâi de zidit om, întru aceiași dată muritoriu s-au făcut (...)."[16] [But this is how you had been to Man until he was fooled by the beauty and sweetness of the tree that brought him death; of which tree's fruit the first made man ate and, at the same time, became a mortal].

Slyly, the World invokes the Christic sacrificial model, showing that Jesus was sent to the world to save it, as a result of God's great love for it. What is more, he, the Wise Man, actually inhabits the World, making use of its gifts. Thus, carefully choosing its arguments and symbolic points of reference, the World succeeds in relativizing the Wise Man's statements. At some point, the Wise Man manages to employ a rhetoric trick, one easily anticipated by the reader, asking the World, in an ascending climax, to help

[15] *Ibidem,* p. 31.
[16] *Ibidem,* p. 35.

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him to become famous, to be bequeathed rich estates, boroughs and cities, and to earn political honours – which, as the World points out, is easy to obtain, given his increasing wealth and the Heavenly Kingdom. The World openly admits that it cannot give him any of these, but praises his gains up to this moment, which make him unique among the other men. In fact, the World allows itself to be led towards the predictable direction of the Wise Man's demonstration, but even under these circumstances, its argumentation is subtler, more insightful, more elaborated and more flexible.

Reaching the climax, the Wise Man launches a plethora of rhetorical questions on the *ubi sunt* motif, apparently required by the explicit logic of his demonstration and, for this reason, lacking any appeal. Much more creative in its dynamic thinking, argumentation and representation, the World seems to be unable to refrain from barely veiled irony. When prompted by the Wise Man to state what is left of the long line of almighty emperors after their death, the World retorts that the pall and the coffin is all that remains. It is capable of overturning the argumentative scaffolding of the Wise Man – it rightfully asserts, for example, that there should be more souls in hell than in heaven, as those who choose to rejoice over the earthly delights are many. Moreover, it, the World, loves its offspring, and the delights it gives them are brotherly shared from one to the next after their death.

This is how, in the semantic economy of *The Divan*, the World's discourse is powerful enough to counterbalance the discourses of the Wise Man, of the *Word to the reader*, and even of the chapters themselves. Conjuring David's model, the World continues to catalogue the symbols that are to its advantage, by selecting a myth and, at the same time, a character of the Old Testament from whom Jesus Himself descends. Living in wealth and rejoicing, David moved away from God, shows the Wise Man. Nevertheless, the World insists, wealth can be beneficial to the spirit, churches can be erected – but it can also harden one's heart – shows the corresponding chapter. All saints inhabited it, continues the World, it gives everybody palaces, seraglios, flowers, fallow lands, etc. The Wise Man says that these gifts are deceitful mermaids. Then the World praises the active men, those who built citadels – and history! – emphasising more and more

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convincingly that no moral value can be defined, delineated and applied in the absence of the earthly values.

The invectives that constantly accompany the exchange belong, in the World's case, to the semantic area of the Wise Man's senselessness and foolishness, as well as to that of his lying and deceitful discourse. What the World offers are certainties, material objects, whereas the afterlife or the eternal youth are unsubstantiated promises: *Lumea: O, amăgitule și puțin priceputule! Nimeni n-a venit înapoi să spună ce e după moarte"*[17] [The World: Oh, thee, deluded and obtuse man! No one has ever returned to tell what is like after death]. Even being the way it is, *"spuitoare de basne și mărturisitoare de minciuni"*[18] [a tale-teller and a confessor of lies], The World proves that, in its absence, as it feeds the Wise Man and allows him to inhabit it, giving him attire and food, all the principles that he defends would be useless. After the World's indignant outburst in a series of insults – *"străinule și lipsitule de crieri*"[19] [thou art an alien, brainless man!], it accuses him of canting when he wishes a long and good life in the World's bosom. The Wise Man retorts, predictably again, that his living among the evils of the World makes him a better man, bringing him closer to God.

This interesting character, spirited, astute and imaginative, the World built by Cantemir, leaves behind the *captatio* strategy based on dialogic counterpoint and symbolic antithesis used up to this moment, and agrees with the Wise Man, while asking him to stop abashing it. The topos of humbleness is a rhetoric lever whose effect is an ideal solution for the body and soul rapport, proposed by the Wise Man and corresponding to the third small table in the *Word to the reader*. By cataloguing, in his turn, the goods provided by the World, the Wise Man builds a symbolic parallelism and an interpretative algorithm of the Creation, which rests on the isomorphic relation between Man as microcosm and the World as macrocosm. In this light, the 'things' of the World correspond to human principles, qualities and sins. Moreover, if the spiritual light emanating from the sacred reflected in the profane is similar to the light provided by the World, a perfect balance between spirit and matter emerges. We agree here

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 61.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 62.
[19] *Ibidem*, p. 69.

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with Adriana Babeți that *"gândirea simbolică ar fi atunci chemată să răspundă unor întrebări pe care nici istoria, nici știința politicii, nici filosofia nu le pot elucida"* [the symbolic thinking would be thus conjured to answer to questions that neither history, political sciences, nor philosophy can solve]. In this case, the World as macrocosm, *"lumea înșelătoare, a iluziilor, a aparențelor"* [the deceitful World of illusions and appearances], *"așa cum o descriu doctrinele orientale, cele neoplatonice și creștine*"[20] [as described by the Oriental, Neo-Platonist and Christian doctrines], could be symbolically rehabilitated.

The world switches the strategy to praising the Wise Man because, as it claims, he has made her comprehend its own structure and purpose; it gives him assurance of its maternal love and devotion, despite the corresponding chapter, which shows that *"Când lumea te laudă este oare iaste precum dzic oamenii, singur pre tine te ispitește; nici cu acesta să nu te mândrești."*[21] [When the World gives praise, could it be truly what people say, it tempts thee alone, so don't plume thyself on that]. The Wise Man quickly retorts, signalling the interpretative hypothesis and emphasising the fact that his nature is irreconcilable with that of the World – resembling the association between Fire and Water or two bullets, one above the other.

Persevering, the World sets off to its third attempt at persuasion. As a matter of fact, even until now*, "pe măsura înaintării în polemos, Lumea își polisează armele, stilul de argumentare: interogațiile sunt tot mai subtile, mai «șlefuite» (retoric), mai perfide, mai învăluitoare"* [22] [as the polemic progresses, the World polishes its weapons and argumentative style: the questions become subtler and subtler, more (rhetorically) refined, more perfidious and more enshrouding]. This time, it tries to persuade the Wise Man that he can rejoice until he is 50 years old, enjoying the earthly pleasures, only to turn to the heavenly matters afterwards. But the Wise Man counteracts with the argument that it is important to abjure the earthly comforts in order to reach the heavenly ones.

The Wise Man has the last word, as required by the educational-moralizing ideology of *The Divan*. A summative conclusion, explicitly

[20] Adriana Babeți, 1998, p. 159.
[21] Dimitrie Cantemir, 2004, p. 74.
[22] Adriana Babeți, 1998, p. 177.

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entitled *Iarăși pomenirea trecutelor* [Again, the remembrance of things past] avouches for the Wise Man's words and, at the surface level at least, for the author's moral opinion too. This goes in favour of the existential model illustrated by the Wise Man, of course, by the will and accord of the author. Under different circumstances, the World could have won the verbal duel and could have successfully turned a clash of principles into symbolic reconciliation.

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