# THE IMPORTANT RECURRING THEMES OF OCTAVIAN PALER'S PROSE AND ESSAYS

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*Abstract: The themes of Octavian Paler's prose and essays are part of the writer's existence and belong to an assumed and experienced reality. Being in a perpetual state of loneliness, dominated by existential "deserts", Octavian Paler develops true obsessions related to loneliness, to indulgement into melancholy, to time, to death, etc., perhaps because of his proverbial pessimism, but also of his conversion to existentialism, being the proclaimed follower of Albert Camus. One can notice in Octavian Paler's writings some recurring themes like the solitude, the emptiness, the fear, the terror, the dream, the silence, the waiting, the time, the faith, the sea, love, the creator's condition, etc., that define him as a writer and shape him as a man.*

*Keywords: essay, Octavian Paler, prose, solitude, themes*

## Introduction

The themes of Octavian Paler's prose and essays reveal especially "the dubitative diligence of the spirit and an inventiveness specific to the latter, when it comes to the intellectual challenges."[1] They are part of the writer's existence and belong to an assumed and experienced reality. Thus, the *solitude*, the *emptiness*, the *fear*, the *terror*, the *dream*, the *silence*, the *waiting*, the *time*, the *faith*, the *sea*, *love*, the *creator's condition*, etc, represent the most important themes and obsessions, the constantly recurring themes of Octavian Paler's work.

The writer did not generally avoid playing a character's role in his Romanian essays, precisely because, by approaching essential themes, that he analyzed with a specific gravity, he *nolens-volens* becomes part of the public discussion and reflection. By the themes approached in his essays and by the philosophical speculations on them, permanently migrating among his own obsessions, Paler manages to create a world of illusions, in a reality well dissimulated by myths. His books contaminated by the issues concerned with the essay, the moralizing, but not moral reflections sping from, are actually books of ideas, more than epic definitions. The open structure of the essay, that allows for the unrestrained improvisation, is the only one that really suits the writer keen on ideas and freedom. Octavian Paler achieves by his works a *metanoia* of the spirit travelling through myths. His literature is not only varied, (poetry, essays, novels, journals), but also highly reflexive and of a rarely encountered stylistic elegance. The writer makes use of the first person singular in his essays, a choice that announces a mythical theme, related to the generic human condition, as well as to the emotionally intense experience of existence, everything in a painful, tragical note. The alienation from the destiny related challenges of the characters, auctorial voices, turns into lyrical ends as modalities of coming to terms with himself.

[1]Vitalie Ciobanu,*The Fear of Indifference*, the Romanian Cutural Foundation, Bucharest, 1999, p. 190.



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The letter, the confession, that abound in autobiographical elements, the travel journal and the memoirs are genres that glide from one structure to another.

Octavian Paler aims at "a personal world," allowing us to penetrate into "his personal chaos," according to a perspective where the parties are subjected to the whole that does not alter their identity; his texts represent several elements, the first headstones in a "unique universe," whose object is to help us discover the details, their high effects, the colour, to the detriment of the whole, relying on ambiguity, "more fertile than clarity,"[2] on the labyrinthic notes, that challenges us to find the exit. His writings are concise, expressive as global structures, displaying however a vision that often lacks substance, generated by the text's incoherence: "The parabolic construction, present at various levels of the text, consisting of certain interpretation keys offered to the meritorious reader, did not take the shape and structure of a rigid, closed, abstract system; the ideation and the essayistic speculation found a compositional fulcrum characterized by well combined epic elements, a slightly ceremonious style and an ingenious rhetoric. The only flaw is generated by the frequency of the authoritative quotes, famous sentences launched by famous people and their sometimes forced association with everyday life. However, even this additional textual task is part of the author's project: to approach things from different perspectives and complicate the simple, real, palpable, «elementary» things; and, symmetrically, to isolate and bring to light the last fiber of the complex matter of the cultural elements."[3]

## The recurring themes of Octavian Paler's prose and essays

***Solitude*** remains the basic theme of Octavian Paler, turning into a real daimon that populates the interior and exterior universe of the author. This need of solitude, transformed into an auctorial leitmotif shapes the axis of his personality. Octavian Paler's solitude is moral, generated by the deep falling into one's own self, in order to save himself from the aggression of the social and historical, exterior reality. This thing can only lead to a voluntary, deliberate and interior self-exile, as a chance of individual salvation, of survival in an epoch marked by the "historical terror."[4] The author himself declares in an interview: "I have always been obsessed with solitude. I have always been both solitary and solidary, as the real solitude is best experienced in the crowd."

Emil Cioran mentioned in one of his essays two kinds of solitude: one individual and another cosmic. Octavian Paler is associated with the first one, more precisely a loneliness where " (…) you feel suspended in the world, incapable to adapt to it, worn out inside yourself, destroyed by your own deficiencies or exaltations, tortured by your insufficiencies, irrespective of the exterior aspects of the world, that can be bright or sombre, while you remain the prisoner of the same inner drama, here is what individual solitude means."[5] (Emil Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*). The confession is described as an antidote for solitude, that solitude where "Nobody exists for somebody else" and where "Each is preoccupied with his own life, under his glass bell."[6] Confession is a therapy, whereas solitude can only be healed by logos, as "(…) I was

[2]C. Stănescu, *Transition Interviews*, The Romanian Cultural Foundation, Bucharest, 1996, p. 171.
[3]Daniel Cristea-Enache, *Bucharest Far West – Sequences of Romanian Literarture*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2005, p. 441.
[4]RaduSorescu, *Octavian Paler's Work*, Didactica Nova, Craiova, 1996 , p. 5.

[5] Emil Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, the third edition, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1993, p. 52.
[6] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 32.



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overwhelmed by solitude, I was living in its cage…"[7] The confession can become a dangerous game, he who makes endless confessions does away with solitude, but he is seized with subjectivism. Silence and emptiness are two faces of solitude.

The protagonists of the two novels *Life on a Station Platform* and *A Lucky Man* retire in universes dominated by solitude: *the deserted station* and *the rest home*, as an answer to the aggression coming from the exterior. However, isolation gives rise to doubts, to such questions as "who am I?"[8] It may turn into a solitude that suffocates, generating contradictions: "I wanted to study my loneliness, examine it carefully (…) Then, I just felt the need to be exactly like all the other people around me."[9] The *rest home* is a space of estrangement, of alienation, of the assumed exile, a "refuge," "a land of illusion, of dreams. The spiritual loneliness caused by the absence of a faith, an attachement becomes unbearable:"[10] "I did not believe in anything, I was not emotionally connected to anything, I was alone, awfully alone, unbearably alone (…) this was the desert's disease, resembling the cancerous cells that grow in number, until they destroy and kill (…)." Suffering from loneliness, Octavian Paler's heroes seem to find different ways of speaking up their minds, the first one by means of dialogue and the second by an exacerbation of the *self*, by a therapy based on big doses of egoism.[11] It seems that solitude is not really searched for, it is rather psychical constant, the sign of a melancholic temperament, inclined to observe the world from the exterior. The man's chance to save from himself and his anxieties lies however in the human solidarity: "despite its evil things and injustices, the world is the only place where we can hope to be done right."[12] The writer is condemned to talk to himself, to ask himself questions and give answers, and this time of interrogative self-salk is that of surviving: "My life consists in a long series of successive initiations into solitude." (Octavian Paler). The writer prefers sometimes to abandon the noisy stage of the world, being content with a room overcrowded with books, because people will manage to be really solidary only by means of culture. This abandonment does not signify that he gives up fighting, as it is within four walls that the fight with one's own doubts begins: "(...) I can say I know everything about solitude and I understand better than I would like to, why Nietzsche sustained that a man's quality can be estimated according to the amount of solitude he can bear."[13]

Octavian Paler is condemned to a tragical solitude, without recourse to appeal,[14] turning into the prophet of his own world marked by inadaptation.

The ***fear***,the ***terror*** are both facets of an exterior aggression, by the image of the cobra charmers and the dogs trainers, or an interior one, as an appanage of failure. Nicolae Steinhardt observed that by the novel *Life on a Station Platform*,there penetrates into our literature the theme of terror, a terror that belongs to the plunge into history and to the nightmate the writer wants to do away with. [15] Thus, the cobra charmers become the terrifying symbol of fear, that lays hold of the inhabitants, generating a real social phenomenon: "It (…) was only fear they

[7] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 196.
[8] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 13.
[9] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
[10]Dumitru Micu, *The History of the Romanian Literature: From the Traditional Creation to Postmodernism*, Saeculum I.O, Bucharest, 2000., p. 574.
[11] Radu Sorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
[12] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, p. 273.
[13] Octavian Paler, *SolitaryAdventures*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1996, p. 84.
[14] Radu Sorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
[15]Cristian Crăciun, *The Involvement in the Real*, "România literară," Year XVIII, no. 7, Thursday, 14th of February, 1985, p. 4.



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believed in, they spread fear, (…) they contented themselves with enslaving, with scaring (…) they preferred to impose their faith by means of the cobras."[16] The nuances of fear understood as "a disease of those that think," are numerous, starting with the most elementary reaction that opens and ends in a frightening parenthesis *Life on a Station Platform*: the *cry* and reaching the troubling revelation, according to which, "to think" means to wake up the snakes inside yourself in Constantin Noica's terms: "To eliminate fear, an estrangement from the world should be possible." However, we cannot estrange from the world, we cannot run away from it, or avoid it, without our irremediable alteration: "I discovered fear, living among the people (…) In this station I found that the fear of desert and nothingness is even worse than the fear of people (…) The desert is unmerciful, unforgiving and always insurmountable (…) It is white and implacable."[17]

The fear of not being dominated or controlled by the desert must be refused from inside the world: "Fear is a plague, a danger that must be daily refused, similar to death, precisely because it railroads the rat into considering himself justified by its destiny."[18] The cobra charmers become a symbol of terror, of dehumanization, they become the absolute masters in a world where fear was supported by the victims themselves: "I realized that by the fear we experience, we help the charmers to frighten us even more; gradually, fear came to act in their absence, too, magnifying."[19] Fear turned people into cowards, that will finally say, similar to the citicizen called Sieyes "I lived!," this being the only form of manifestation, that of indifference, in a world under terror: "(…) everybody around had glass masks,"[20] explains somehow that tendency to hide oneself under the masks shaped by a fear that sometimes fascinated everything around "as a cobra" and that homogenized the dehumanized consciences "(…) do as everybody else does (…) if you have to bark, then bark (…)"[21] The phenomenon of the haunting proliferation specific to the cobra charmers shapes a nightmarish, unbearable universe, complemented by the dogs trainers from Eleonore's story. Everything here is controlled by terror "(…) we were all seized with fear (…) that influenced the peoples' trust in themselves."[22] Fear becomes a dominat theme in the novel entitled *A Lucky Man*, too. Here, it relies on denunciations, on cowardice, in a deteriorated world, based on an illusory hope, that seems claustrated between the walls of the *hall of mirrors* "(…) we must not say everything we think. If all the people spoke up their minds in a loud voice, (…) the streets would become deserted. Everybody would be frightened."[23]

There is also a therapy of fear by confession: "He has always believed that, in order not to be afraid anymore, man must begin by confessing his fear." The endless monologue of the solitude experienced by the hero of *Life on a Station Platform*, with pathetic, justice related pleas, constitutes an argument for life, for the triumph over fear.[24] The fight against fear is an utopia, it cannot be annihilated, it can only be refused and you do not have to give in to it, as it is only the mistake of letting yourself crushed that is "irremediable."[25] Without docility, that

[16] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
[17] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 179.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 223.
[19] *Ibidem*, p. 64.
[20] *Ibidem*, p. 41.
[21] *Ibidem*, p. 106.
[22] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 99.
[23] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984.
[24] Cornel Moraru, *Text and Reality*, Eminescu, Bucharest, 1984, p. 149.
[25] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 180.



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nurtures the terror, terrorism disappears by starvation. The chance to recover, to save oneself depends on man himself, who "was born to fear only himself (…)." It is from here that stems the last phrase of the book, "God, defend me from myself," by which the novel *Life on a Station Platform* becomes an elevated and powerful plea, meant ot defend the human dignity.[26]

The political element becomes obvious only by suggestion[27] in the parable novels of Octavian Paler and the form that it wears is that of the terror that generates the oppression characteristic of the totalitary period. The socio-political conditions of that period are rendered in a symbolic register, by: *cobras*, *cobra charmers*, *dogs trainers*, elements that amplify the really nightmarish atmosphere of the moment.

***Time*** becomes a real boomerang in the case of Octavian Paler, eternity being nothing else than a permanent return to oneself. There is an interior time that relies especially on the autobiographical obsessions, "Time ran over my soul, letting its sludge there"[28] and another, historical one, based on moments from the history of mankind. The pages overflowing with memories represent a series of pretexts, around which imaginary universes are sewn.[29] In the universe of imagination, time cannot be measured because it does not exist. The descent into oneself creates the possibility to experience a historically indefinite time, by the transition into a universe of imagination, where "(...) life was clumping around myself."[30] Temporality has one single direction in Paler's works, from the past to *something*, (to a certain thing), from where the paths divide into a multiplicity of symbolic gestures: "Man must sometimes tread like a woolf through the leaves. Leave no traces. Too many traces begin to smell like the past."[31]

One form of abandoning time is representing by the ***waiting***, a waiting that risks to become eternal: "Then I decided to wait for it. I will wait for it until I finish everything I have to say."[32] While waiting, the heroes have the necessary time to ask themselves questions and the answers resemble some sentences sometimes. Waiting stands for survival, for hope, for the fact that there can still happen something: "Waiting is a way of remaining alive,"[33] but it also involves a risk, more precisely, by waiting too much, you may lose everything and you may no longer what it is that you are waiting for: "We got exhausted while waiting. Waiting wore us out and now we are no longer able to enjoy the obtainment of the thing we had waited for."[34] This waiting is *de facto* an escape from the real, a consequence of our inability to get out of a universe dominated by our own memories, where time is busy with itself. The motif of the road and the search, that also involves waiting: "Waiting is our journey, our way of travelling"[35] and the wish to find something at the end of the journey, belongs to the man that tries to discover his inner self. "To be" means waiting and travelling – static and dynamic – as, the word is the one by which waiting can be stimulated: "I do wonder sometimes whether my destiny was shaped from words. I myself seem to be the product of my words..."[36]

[26]Pompiliu Marcea, *Critical Attitudes*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1985., p. 119.
[27] Radu Sorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
[28] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 186.
[29] Radu Sorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[30] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 47.
[31]*Ibidem*, p. 80.
[32]Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 271.
[33]*Ibidem*, p. 266.
[34] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 266.
[35]*Ibidem*, p. 260.
[36]*Ibidem*, p. 262.



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The ***dream*** is also described as a modality of escaping from the real, as a possible method of subjugation: "You dream the dream and you belong to it. You you barge into its bars as if it were a cage."[37] Consequently, *time* and *space* are abolished in a station where the clock pointers are absent and in a rest home where the character is projected into the real by means of the dream. The exile, the run, the withdrawal of the two characters: the History teacher and Daniel Petric no longer represent a salvation, as in the case of Mircea Eliade, but rather a transgression into instability and ephemeral. The idea of *life as a dream*, approached by Octavian Paler in his novels is extremely punctuated, the surrounding world being mentally and sensorially perceived by its characters. The dream becomes at Octavian Paler a pretext to set the imagination free, a reason for introspection. The similarity with the fantastic prose dealt with by Vasile Voiculescu or Mircea Eliade is obvious in the case of some of the writer's novels, where the real plan intermingles with the unreal one, giving shape to a magical, enigmatic atmosphere, open to mystery and interpretations, as: "(…) the world is full of signs."[38] In Octavian Paler's novels, we come across a double truth, one objective truth, that corresponds to the daily reality and another subjective truth, projected into an imaginary world, the only possible world. The *station* and later the *rest home* become prototypes of atemporality, spaces that save the being from the spiritual annihilation. There is a real tendency to evade from the profane, especially by narration and fiction: "(…) I can no longer distinguish the border beteeen dream and reality. I feel like following a thin and slippery line, sliding from one side to the other, without realizing exactly which side."[39]

The ***desert***, ***the emptiness***, an obsessively recurring theme in the writer's work, is always rendered in the epic discourse under the form of a station, of a swamp, of a hall of mirrors, where the character constantly returns in order to free himself from the feelings of anguish and distress: "(…) the hall of mirrors. I could forget about everything there and I felt like I was taking vengeance for myself."[40] Solitude and silence correspond at the psychic level to the desert, as a singularization of the desert, that "only he who experienced it can comprehend it,"[41] finally leading to the annihilation of existence, of being: "(…) in the desert, you cannot say I think so I am. You no longer think in the desert, so you no longer exist."[42] The desert appears as a form of extreme loneliness, where you cannot run away from yourself anymore, where you no longer need any masks, where you do not need to act anymore. It is a space where you are your only companion, the only voice you can hear, in order not to go crazy. **Silence**, as part of solitude and emptiness is actually a descent into the world of memories, where the being breaks free as the petals of a flower in thousands of facets and undergoings. We discover the conflict of his novels behind the silence, somewhere in the underground. It is natural that man should keep silent, in order to survive, guided by his instinct of conservation, but this attitude does not make him less guilty: "The guilottine fell not only in the name of terror, but also of silence, even if this silence was only a form of living..."[43] Everything in the case of Octavian Paler, even his own existence is thoroughly examined: "I sometimes revoltingly practised the experience of solitude. I know how it feels to be suffocated by the emptiness surrounding you, that you cannot free yourself

[37] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 120.
[38] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 143.
[39] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 365.
[40] *Ibidem*, p. 336.
[41] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 83.
[42] *Ibidem*, p. 261.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 226.



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from, but I was faced with a strange conclusion, namely that you feel less lonely in a desert than in a large city where nobody cares about you. In a desert, the illusions are stimulated, whereas in an overcrowded street, where nobody is interested in you, how could you keep up your courage?"[44] The desert is a real spatial icon in Octavian Paler's imaginary world, with a-well determined symbolic function, it is that place where: "(...) everything turns into sand."[45]

Beyond the solitude, the terror and the desert, ***love*** is the only one that can heal, as: "To love is maybe to reveal the most beautiful things inside ourselves"[46] Octavian Paler mentioned in his imaginary letter to Unamuno. However, by the following statement, "(…) I dramatically missed the power to love, to form an attachment to something, unselfishly,"[47] the soul of Octavian Paler's hero seems to be irremediably lost, trapped in a solitude he feeds on and that finally constitutes his only reason to be: "I was living (…) with the fixed idea that I must not commit myself to anything, grow attached to anything, in order to be free. I was telling myself that any kind of loyalty, of fidelity would tame and unchain me."[48] In Octavian Paler's works, the feeling of love does not elude solitude, on the contrary, it helps it to continue to exist, as the women in the writer's novels, irrespective of the typology they are associated with, turn into ideas he has a dialogue with: "This is what women did not understand. They were very keen on healing my solitude, when I only asked them to help me bear it."[49] These superior women become pretexts for an interior dialogue, for a search and for a definition of the proper *self*, while the apology of love remains only at the level of idea. Octavian Paler seems to have missed the paradise of love: "I think love makes us go up in our own estimation. How much you would like to be exactly as the other one perceives you! You would like and you do try to reduce the distance between what you know you actually are and what you infer the one that you love sees in you. (...) Actually, there is one single way of experiencing love: experiencing it."[50]

The real love remains **the sea**,"as round as life,"[51] that signifies a lot for the writer. It is part of his own being and the place whare everything becomes simple, possible: "I fell in love with the sea as I if it were a woman. I could no longer discern between feeling and desire, or between joy and happiness."[52] This "Neptunian space" that constantly reccurs in the writer's works, is sometimes a pretext for other kind of dissertations: "By the sea, while the sun reigns alone over the beach, no rhetorics is necessary anymore in order to give life a meaning.The body itself fills the lacunae of philosophy. He finds comfort in a truth that does not content the philosophers: the fact that he exists."[53] The sea can only be the place where reflexivity becomes primordial, where you free yourself from the shell of daily life, from the immediate history and where you remain alone with yourself, in a recreated universe: "The truth is that, here, at the seaside, everything becomes simple. The thousands of insignificant things, that make me feel suffocated by Bucharest, disappear. All of a sudden, I rediscover that life, love and death are the

[44]Mihaela Cristea, *The Initiatic Experience of the Exile*, Roza Vânturilor, Bucharest, 1994, p. 7.
[45] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 260.
[46] Octavian Paler, *Imaginary Letters*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1998, p. 19.
[47] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 181.
[48]*Ibidem*, p. 68.
[49] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 47.
[50] Octavian Paler, *Self-Portrait in a Broken Mirror*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2004, pp. 222-223.
[51] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, p. 294.
[52] Octavian Paler, *Life as a Bullfight*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1987, p. 273.
[53]*Ibidem*, p. 294-295.



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only ones that matter. The rest is spectacle. Dash. Illusion."[54] The sea seems to be part of the writer's destiny, of his original coordinates.

**Destiny**, for Octavian Paler, as a continuation of Heraclitus' thinking, is part of man's character: "(...) I wondered whether destiny does only what it must do, that is to follow the orders dictated by our characters."[55] Each of us fights with his or her own destiny, the taurus unleashed from the arena of life: "The toreador plays in the arena with destiny itself, trying to deceive it, to offer it only his shadow."[56] Octavian Paler's protagonists play with destiny, falling victims to it. They consider themselves winners in a fight lost from the very beginning, as the writer's characters carry inside themselves the germ of their own failure. In all his writings, the destiny of Octavian Paler's novels are actually an attempt to save themselves, to know themselves better and to permanently learn from their own defeats.

In Octavian Paler's writings, destiny is conditioned by biographical, apparently insignificant, or really ordinary elements, which, once they are explained, prove to contain major significations. In the absence of such statements as: "if «uncle George» had not existed…" or "if my father had not had his own reasons concerned with my «escape» from Lisa," or "if I had not avoided to go beyond a fence that was my little Rubicon…,"[57] my life would have certainly been different. The solution to this identitary issue is represented by that convergence between biography and destiny.

**Divinity** has its own role in the way of destiny, a role which is not to be neglected, offering the writer the possibility to relate himself to an unalterable entity, able to validate his acts of revolt: "(...) I cannot imagine God surrounded by angels. I imagine Him to be alone. This makes Him more human. (…) I can share you the formula according to which God can be found. (…) You beat the drum, as I do know, that you do not need Him, that you are enough to yourself and that very moment, you realize you are lying. You are lying to yourself. You are not enough to yourself. The whole world is not enough for yourself. You do need something more, beyond everything you are and you are able to be. Well, that moment, you found God. He is that «something» that you miss and that actually, you will always miss. God is an absence we cannot dispense with. He is a void that we can neither fill, nor ignore."[58] The inferno of our inner duplicity, "half saints, half rats," of the permanent doubt, determines Octavian Paler to outline in his parabolic novels a God that does not enlighten, but commands: "(...) Instead of enlightening us, God discovered that it was much more simple and comfortable to command. He solved everything by means of ten commandments. Then, he could retire in peace. The commandments were to exert force against the one that had to be compelled, to kill the one that had to be killed, so that the people should see that they could not play with the kingdom of heavens and that the sinners would be forced to redeem themselves, if that was the case."[59]

The man that resorts to waiting and solitude, that experiences the limits, can only see God as: "(...) that part inside ourselves that does not want to die, that cannot console itself. He was born from such a revolt; at the beginning, it was a protest."[60] The writer's tendency is to offer us a humanized God, that can be comparable with the gods of Olympus, that seem to him more

[54] Octavian Paler, *Solitary Adventures*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1996, p. 11.
[55] Octavian Paler, *A Lucky Man*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 68.
[56] Octavian Paler, *Life as a Bullfight*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1987, p. 55.
[57] Octavian Paler, *Self-Portrait in a Broken Mirror*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2004, p. 13.
[58] Octavian Paler, *Desert Forever*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 96-97.
[59] Octavian Paler, *Life on a Station Platform*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1991, p. 10.
[60] *Ibidem*, p. 44.



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friendly and less compelling. This endless indecisiveness and oscillation between the confession of one's sins and the hope for salvation confers Octavian Paler a vivid and conscience and the conviction that neither life nor the act of creation can be conceived in the absence of God: "I am not afraid of God, I am afraid of His absence. I am incapable to imagine a world where He did not exist, because in that case everything would go to pieces. God means to me the failure of my reason, that point where reason begins to be incomprehensible, where I start to grope in the dark. I do not believe in the Afterlife. (...) I belive in God when I am writing."[61]

**The art related theme and that concerned with the creator's condition in the society** are approched by the author from the subjective perspective of confession. In most of his essays, especially in *Life as a Bullfight*, the writer depicts all the significant moments that brought him face to face with literature. The experiences of Octavian Paler's initiation into literature represent modalities by means of which destiny makes its presence felt. At the beginning, the adolescent Paler was crafting love epistles for his colleagues from Făgăraş, that can be associated with a kind of "(...) literature imbued with «ohs» and «ows», where the temperature was never below one thousand degrees, whereas the effusions were unbounded."[62] During his studentship, in Bucharest, young man's decision to write a rehabilitation of the Middle Ages and then the loss of the particular manuscripts in a library, seems to put an end to his evolution as a writer, but: "(...) writing is for me the freest way of communication; the most accurate way of speaking out."[63] Octavian Paler believes in literature, in the freedom that you can experience by writing, discovering yourself page by page, in silence and solitude: "(...) literature is something so necessary, that, if the clay, the rock, the pergament, the paper, had not existed to serve it as a support, library-people would have probably appeared, thta would have been consulted and asked to narrate. (...) as long as I write, I will never feel alone."[64]

The issues concerned with the art and the creator's condition in a superficial and hostile world are studied thoroughly in the book entitled *A Museum in the Labyrinth*, that turned into "an intimate emergency" for the author. The review of the self-portraits of such artists as Giotto, Raphael, Van Gogh, Michelangelo, etc., is a study of the creative natures – but also of the human natures and last but not least, a descent at the level of one's own emotional experiences. Octavian Paler underlines the biographical elements related to the lives of those painters, that become meaningful from the perspective of destiny, more precisely those elements that take part in the metamorphosis of a life fact, which is ephemeral, into something permanent, which is art. This is actually the essence of the painter's fight with himself, of the artist in general and maybe of each and every being: the dissolution of one's own self, of the hateful self, that is of what we think about ourselves and which comes in contrast with the others' selves, in favour of what we really are. The artist-related theme, debated upon in this book, seems to capture the image of the self during the act of creation and the pact with eternity that must be made in the name of art: "(...) the individual must choice between anonymity and solitude."[65]

The issue that deals with the artist, who considers the destiny of his work and the idea that it is only by suffering that the writer can find himself in the deepest fibers of his spirit, to be more important than anything else, is debated by Octavian Paler in *Imaginary Letters*: "These

[61]Simona Chiţan, *30 Remarkable Interviews*, Tritonic, Bucharest, 2008, p. 11.
[62] Octavian Paler, *Life as a Bullfight*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1987, p. 267.
[63]*Ibidem*, p. 295.
[64]*Ibidem*, p. 154.
[65] Octavian Paler, *A Museum in the Labyrinth. A Subjective History of the Self-Portrait*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1987, p. 11.



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gentlemen who insist upon demonstrating us that there are no reasons of veneration, as the exceptional intellect is nothing but a failure of mediocrity, should stop. Unable to snatch the laurels lying on the foreheads of some martyrs of art, the same gentlemen pity them for their diseases. (...) not because they are really sorry for them. There is a stratagem here. Pity makes them feel superior to the others, it saves them from the unpleasant and uncomfortable obligation of regarding with respect or warm approval. (...) They consider suffering more important than the work itself, not with a view to admiring the heroism of those that were faced with these pains, but to gaining the right to pity them, instead of envying them. They look down on the poor health of Höderlig and they feel compassion for Van Gogh, when it comes to the sunny inferno he paints in. They console themeselves for not being gifted by stating that they do not crave for diseases, sufferings and the sadness found in the hospices."[66]

**Conclusions**

The Octavian Paler's prose and essays is a journey among the most important themes of the universal culture and at the same time, a passionate confrontation with himself. Octavian Paler stands for the catalyst of the meditation upon the mythological themes, from the position of the lucid intellectual inclined to reflection. The theme concerned with the loneliness of the self is resumed in this interior, haunting space.

Solitude is a theme that constantly recurrs in Paler's work, all his characters suffering from a suspect solitude. A sign of a melancholic temperament, inclined to observe the world from the exterior, solitude is not intentionally searched for, or esthetically exploited, but we have to do with a psychic constant. One of the solutions proposed by the author would be the memory, as an experience of past time recovery by "the fascination of memory." Paler proposes a return into the past because, "we cannot give public lectures" on solitude[67], and not in the sense of Proust's recovery of the past time, but with a view to re-establishing the path of errors and becoming aware of the refusal of our own human experience, of the imperious need to save ourselves by love: "We need somebody to love us and especially somebody to love. Maybe our big challenge is not to be happy, but to be and feel less alone"[68].

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[66] Octavian Paler, *Imaginary Letters*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 36-37.
[67] *Ibidem*, p. 110.
[68] *Ibidem*, p. 115.



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