PLURIPERSPECTIVISM AND THE PERCEPTION VALENCE IN THE HALLIPA SERIES

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Abstract*: Wishing to modernize the Romanian novel, Hortensia Papadat Bengescu created a writing marked by narrative inconstancy which emphasizes a multitude of stylistic formulae. Over the aesthetic background of balzacianism, naturalism, proustianism, expressionism, decandent-existentialism, alternating fresco with details, she uses a combination of impressionist techniques, mythical projections, archetypes and symbols that converge around a heteroclite stylistic level, so that reading of her novels plays a soteriological role. The reader is engaged in a hermeneutical labyrinth that will point out profound significance. Bengescu often justifies the stylistically changes with the reflector-character's mood shifts or psychic faculties: intuition, reflection, emotion. After the first novel of the series, the author cannot risk an introspective prose and chooses not to directly show "the house of senses"; instead, the omniscient narrator provides the necessary elements so that the reader will be able to understand the situation. Starting with the third novel, the main function is given to the account whilst the reflector-characters disappear, the consciousness conditions are thoroughly analyzed, and the lack of plot is grammatically suggested by using the past perfect tense, the tense of suspending action. Except for the first novel, where the reflector-character doesn't contest her perceptions, in the next novels these perceptions are constantly replaced or subdued by a neutral narrator. But, above all, one can identify a narrator who chaffs, debates, borrows and lends others' vocabulary. Liviu Rebreanu was the first to notice the narrative innovation of the reflector-character, the author's spokesperson, with the role of interiorizing the plot. The importance of chronological evocation is diminished due to the time-consciousness, linked with Bergson's concepts of time and duration, the uninterrupted stream, those moments of expansion or contraction accordingly with the individual meaning. Yet, the watchword for Bengescu's narrative is flashback. The characters give themselves up to recalling different events, so the present tense is put in the second place and makes the impression of alert pace exactly because most of the daily actions are less important than the past ones. The ellipse has an important function: months and seasons between actions are suspended. This "narrative delay" (Umberto Eco), that makes the past more current than the present, has lead to the similarity between Bengescu's and Proust's writing, this auctorial free movement on the hour plate, a time outside time. The Janus-faced time is recurrent at the characters' and narrator's speech level and brings the author's style closer to Thomas Mann's. The idea of time expansion or contraction, the subjective perception of time is most pointed in the reflector-character Mini. It is also noticeable the idea of human dissolution in time joint to the decadent vision of waving or undulating time.*

Keywords*: reflector, consciousness, narrative suspension*

Modern Novelistic Architecture

Hortensia Papadat Bengescu has produced, through the Hallipa series, a composition with a complicated orchestration, a specific symbolism, where motif and leitmotif lead. Carmen Georgeta Ardelean distinguishes in the weaving of the novels an obvious identity between the Wagnerian musical architecture and the literary one:

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> selecting and exposing a theme, developing variations after transitions, polyphony, they all seem to schematize the same structure, since the literary theme creates the character profile, sketches the environment, pins it in a convenient historical and social situation, introduces secondary actions that amplify or discolour the theme (Ardelean, C. G., 2013: 98).

These are narrative formulae closer to anarchy rather than to escape traditional corseting. The reflector-characters have not been designed to mark the obsessive themes, but to help creating a "novel geometrization" that favoured pluriperspectivism. It may seem "a deficit of existence" (Constantinescu, P., 1977: 70-71) this centrifugal meaning of characters' obsessive return to the past in order to extract biographical acts, giving the impression of a possible new prose grafting onto the novel stock. It's not only the typical character in typical situations, it's not only the naturalists' disease, but it's the epicentre of snobbism, the decadence at all levels, and this completely justifies some characters' occurrence throughout many novels.

Nicolae Manolescu notices too that the novels do not fall within the family chronicles typology, either as pattern or as narration, due to that "systematically refusal of motion" (Ardelean, C. G., *op. cit.*: 104), yet the sickly motifs are polyphonically introduced. In Bengescu's works, ***polyphony*** means *counterpoint* (registers that are independent in rhythm and sound but interdependent in harmony), *imitative polyphony* (the identical rerun of a musical phrase) and *dividing polyphony* (in simultaneous variations) of a single voice. The author considered that each character is allowed to come to the fore in an attempt to catch the multiple sides of life, and the continuity of the novels is given by this precise environmental unity. *The counterpoint* is used in depicting couples that evolve in different rhythms but keep, from various reasons, interdependence, joined to the imitative polyphony made by a third person in the conjugal triangle. "Families are counter pointed groups obsessed with independence but declaring an unwanted interdependence" (*ibidem*: 105). *The imitative polyphony* can be found in the obsessive introduction of themes, motifs, and leitmotifs endlessly proliferated in the novels, and it becomes a major theme itself. *The one voice dividing in a series of variations polyphony* can be traced in the narrative perspective.

Lexis and Writing. Modern Stylistics

Tudor Arghezi contradicted Buffon's 1753 statement that "the style is the man himself", and introduced the concept of indirect style, in which

> a disgusting subject is draped in verbal texture, and it its length does not become equal with immortality and academic eternity, it can survive even as an embalmed corpse… When the subject stinks, you spray perfume over it, and the pen can give so much perfume, and make the opacity become transparent. In the surgery the indirect style is called anaesthesia (Arghezi, T., *The Indirect Style*, in *Informaţia zilei*, III, no. 541, July the 10th 1943, *apud* Ivaşcu, G., Tănăsescu, A., 1977: 358)

Bengescu's novels have initiated the modernisation of Romanian novel both in typology and style, "a style that massively grasps the Romanian essay and the motion psychology analyse" (Simion, E., 2012: VII). Rodica Zafiu arrogates the tendency towards "macabre themes, obscure symbols and intense neologistic vocabulary" (Zafiu, R., 1996: 17) to the purpose of the mimetically writing. On the other hand, Tudor Teodorescu

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Branişte declared himself horrified by "the haemorrhaged sense": "Hortensia Papadat Bengescu's writing is a menace for Romanian language and a monstrous attack on literary common sense" (*apud* Simion E., 2012: VI). As for Eugen Ionescu, he considers her a merely copycat of French literature: "The writer does nothing more than repeating a formula, presenting the shabby and dimly mended masks of French literature on Romanian faces" (Ionescu, E., 1934, reedited 1991: 118). The neologistical abundance playing a main function in characters' depiction differentiates the author from writers such as Camil Petrescu or G. Călinescu.

Perpessicius is the one who defends the writer from style scarcity and "misfortuned work" allegations:

> It is less important how many people do not read it, how much do some people read it, how thrilled some people are by reading it, how trained some people consider themselves by this kind of literature, how many people are captivated or swept away. Not how many people you can count, but how many they are and what their name is (*non numerantur, sed ponderantur*) (Perpessicius, 1989: 264-265)

The style does not consist only in vocabulary (counting the mistakes), it's a sign of mature writing. The author's style is excellent, and so is the substance it expresses. She wanted to synchronise with the "aesthetic experiences of the time" but she also organically repudiated any association with Proust, whose writing she didn't appreciated, acidly considering that it represented "the chance or mischance of being fashionable. The lack of snobbery limits the investigation… A pictorial canvas of the age and a miniatural mosaic of great art" (Papatanasiu, N., 1976: 122-123). Ion Negoiţescu admits the pure aesthetic value of her works, yet he doubts the credibility of the fictional universe which is "plausible but incredible" (Negoiţescu, I., 2002: 299) whilst Eugen Lovinescu notices the originality and the force in the psycho-physiological analysis.

Her narrative inconstancy also emphasizes the multiple stylistic formulae of the time she portrays. Over the aesthetic background of balzacianism, naturalism, proustianism, expressionism, decadent-existentialism, alternating fresco with details, she uses o combination of impressionist techniques, mythical projections, archetypes and symbols that converge around a heteroclite stylistic level, so that the reading of her novels "plays an initiation anthropological role" (Durand, G., 2003: 161), and ultimately implies a soteriological function. The reader engages him/herself in the adventure of the sense, a hermeneutical labyrinth that will point out profound significance using the art of detail. Bengescu is keen to often justify the stylistically changes with the reflector-character's mood shifts or psychic faculties: intuition, reflection, emotion. Doina Modola marks especially in the first novel of the series the expressionist manner in

> the tensed and synthetic style, the nervous transcending of the detail, of the particular towards general and absoluteness, the ability of symbolically irradiating, all these giving away their expressionist style and defining the striking vision of the artwork (Modola, D., 1986: 305)

The meanings assert themselves both realistically and symbolically, the inner world of the book becomes the synthetic and dynamic metaphor of time, through simultaneity techniques, summaries, deformed suggestion, so that the author creates a synthetic novel that has a wide

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opening of meanings at all levels. Yet unfamiliar with the style and due to the fact that the numerous characters and casuistry impose their own organization, Bengescu cannot risk, in the second novel of the series, an introspective prose in which "the inner stream of consciousness to be reproduced in all its disorder" (Manolescu, N., 2008: 321), that has made the first novel difficult to understand, and chooses to be more cautious, not to fully reveal "the house of senses", instead the omniscient narrator provides the necessary elements so that the reader will be able to understand the situation. Starting with the third novel of the series, the main function is given to the account whilst the reflector-characters disappear completely at the same time with "the drowning of this lively, indistinct inner soul into the cold as ice water of caste convention" (*ibidem*: 340), the consciousness conditions are thoroughly analyzed, and the lack of plot is grammatically suggested by using the past perfect tense, the tense of suspending action. One can notice the stirring style Tudor Vianu has talked about: "every new phrase sort of comes back to the initial point, so that the wholeness doesn't look like an advancing move but like a recession and intensification… the entire stylistic process seems a depth stirring" (Vianu, T., 2002: 270).

The Dishevelled Maidens contains all the stylistic forms that were fashionable at the time: stylization and ornament (*jungenstil*), abundance of myths, archetypes and symbols, accounts of the decadent *morbidezza*, search for symbolists' correspondences, elevation of the physiological naturalism related to the social and psychological side, subtle touch of expressionism in the erotic demonism almost perverted by the instinctual forces caught up in a constant fight against individuality.

Her novels have suffered a strange destiny of various "makeovers" at the stylistic level, orthographic and phrasing level, giving here and there the impression of two different authors, so it's very difficult to posthumously certify the already edited texts. That is way Gabriela Omăt, coordinator of the most recent edition of *Fundamental Works* drawn up by the National Foundation for Science and Arts in the "G. Călinescu" Literary History and Theory Institute, pleads for revising the Eugenia Tudor Anton edition, carried out by Minerva publishing house between 1972 and 1988, and she tries to assemble the last novel through an "experimental reconstruction" (Omăt, G., 2012: CLVII) of the existing 900 manuscript pages. Bengescu has mostly undertaken the "corrections" of the editions published during her life, especially those concerning the obsolete lexical forms, but the recent edition of her works makes a giant leap by keeping the alternations, marking the method of writing the new words with asterisk in the footnotes; a major leap has been made yet at the typographical corrections undetected for decades. There have been different reading chapters printed in periodicals and not included in the first edition, so they are now reproduced in addenda after the novels they belonged to. Even the chronology of the novels publication has been respected, though it is known that before *Roots* (1938) the author produced *The Fiancée* (1935). On this occasion a rectification has been made concerning the year when the first novel of the series appeared, mistakenly recorded as 1926 instead of 1925. Additionally, the latest edition recovers the novel *The Stranger*, with its own organizational form in restitution that required a huge amount of work in articulated assembling due to stylistic gaps and adjoining texts, so that it has become a rewriting work, a creative dossier twice the volume of the novel itself, successfully keeping the logic of the narrative structure. In the absence of a basic text, the starting point was, paradoxically,

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"multiple basic texts that enlighten about the most special Bengescu's writing techniques" (*ibidem*: CLXV) but it hasn't lead to an appropriate publishing of the novel. This bric-a-brac has been the subject of the montage method, here and there of the transferable auctorial method in order to get narrative plausibility and allow the reader to develop his/her own reading version starting from this "restoration hypothesis" (*ibidem*: CLXVI), getting over the disharmonies between tone and narrative tenses, anything but to miss the chance of coming into contact with the work. In spite of this unusual recomposing process, the interpretation of Bengescu's work will be recovered and the present project will be successful. This "book building yard" (*ibidem*: CLXVII) offers the most substantial information about the writer's creative personality hidden for too long, and some shocking revelations about the relation she has assiduously disputed between novel figments and her biography.

Excessive use of neologisms might be considered a feature of the decadent style, in accordance with the urban civilisation it depicts, making it more intense psychologically and reducing the public reader. The modernity of the writing is obviously sustained by the specialised new lexis strewn within the ornamental texture. It's not the mere use of the neologisms, but their abundance that incorporates the style into decadent aesthetics, and Ion Minulescu has even counted such words.

The Polyhedral Aspect. Fiction in the Mirror Spectrum

In Papadat Bengescu's works can be traced not only an alteration of the observational angle, as Liviu Rebreanu has remarked, but also a diversification of narrative perspectives, so there is no exact account since there are many consciousnesses that perceive, assimilate, interpret, reproduce, summarise, charge, reflecting a more or less credible reality. Except for the first novel, where the reflector-character does not contest her perceptions, in the next novels these perceptions are constantly replaced or subdued by a neutral narrator. But, above all, one can identify a narrator that chaffs, debates, borrows and lends others' vocabulary. Rebreanu was the first to notice the narrative innovation of the reflector-character, the author's spokesperson.

> Unlike all the other writers, she is the only one in our literature, for now, to represent a new school, with new ways of perception and representation. In her work, world and life stay still while the storyteller is constantly changing his or her observational angle, hoping to catch life on the go, in its simultaneous course. Maybe Mrs. Papadat is closer to the real facet of life, or maybe she isn't; let the future decide (*apud* Manolescu, N., *op. cit.*: 311)

Ion Bogdan Lefter has pointed out the difference between the narrative perspective in the technical sense and the auctorial attitude as two separate things, so adopting the third person story telling doesn't necessary mean objectivity, but disguise with a false detachment. "Similar or opposed human types, the characters take the inner substance of the work, and the author can freely cast on them her confession vocation and introspective passion" (Lefter, I. B., 2007: 85). She sees her characters first from within, then corporally, and almost always in perfect contradiction. This inverted type is against the usual psychological perspective; her psychological observations are in accordance with the character typology, not ethical standards, and this "disguising technique" (*ibidem*: 86), not the objectivity, has ensured the value of her work.

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In *The Dishevelled Maidens* the classical narrator is doubled by Mini at third person, but the voices do not overlap: Mini is nostalgically sensitive, while the other narrator is rational, pragmatic, and even admonishes her divagations. The interior monologue is exposed through the free indirect speech and produces a double focalisation that "overcrowds the phrase, forcing it to express more thinking levels simultaneously" (Rădulescu, C. L., 1996: 107). The reader has the impression that the characters' thoughts are permanently reproduced and distorted by someone else, so the credibility is diminished. In *A Concert of Bach's Music*, the presence of multiple narrators, probably Lovinescu's idea, hasn't been liked because it lacks the depth of the previous sole narrator. In *The Hidden Road* the characters are not allowed to be narrators, perhaps because they don't have an authentic life and in the novel there's a "serious disagreement between the concrete author and the inner self detesting her own female condition" (*ibidem*: 121-122). *Roots* partially comes back to the double perspective, and the reflector-characters Mini and Nory reappear, bearing comparison to noesis and noema, Husserl's philosophical paradigms. Mini is noesis, the knowledge and synthesis, Nory is noema, searching for the roots and essence. There's a new voice, the absent character Mado's, representing conscience, a superior instance in the shadow, Nory's obsession. In *The Stranger* one can notice the existence files technique, Elena's double filtered diary, reproduced by Lucian and commented by the impersonal narrator's voice. Gabriela Omăt's work hypothesis ends up with the protagonists' symbolical and resigned return to Gârla, with the raisonneur character's sceptical and melancholic reflection on time. In accordance with the counter point technique, an outside observer comes into scene, Coca Aimée, left without her greatness and making infantile remarks about the Ina-Marcian relationship, with no analysing spirit when she plays the narrator. Instead, leaving the present, Ina finds in the remembrances a fertile land for her compositions, her maestro wondering if the final work will be a nocturne or a prelude. The fragment *It seemed that midst the clouds*, in which Ina is unpleased by the maestro's constrains, though she herself feels corseted in the musical creative process, somehow reminds of Mini's impressionist meditation in the first novel. Marcian has meditative moods missing Switzerland, Elena aching for the lost son. The reader feels superior sometimes, for instance in the pages about Ina's escape to Gârlele estate, finding biographical details about Nory, Grecu and Dia. The characters keep notes: Sphinx Marcian's diary, Elena's notes, Ina's notebook spending during her vagrancy, all of them being talked about posthumously to connect disparate events. Characters' complexity requires a conscious duality of their temper, often therapeutically. Lucian knows to temperate his harsh appearance by practicing music, "he'll stay around music for the need of splitting himself, for not being a single character, but another one that keeps in balance his rival" (Papadat Bengescu H., 2012: 450), to have "thoughts with no etiquette" (*ibidem*: 482) towards Elena, even after her death, to split himself during his marriage (at the railway station in Viena, at Elena's death), in the same way his wife does. But for Nory the mirror has always been an enemy, as for many females, revealing also her moral asymmetry: "The mirror was an old enemy of hers, concerning the face, and now the soul" (*ibidem*: 41). Walter has been living in an immortal future; Ina's mother has been constantly taking shelter in an unknown place and time to bear the marriage with a mediocre man; Elena has detached herself remembering things about her son and then

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about her husband. The only one who chooses to experience duality close to imponderability is Ina, "I've never felt so lively my existence" (*ibidem*: 238), who will eventually loose contact with reality. The characters are seen both in other characters' mirror, and in the mirror of their conscience, by the narrator or by their own. Some have talked about a halving of the logic and absurd in the episode describing Ina's depression, when she goes to the places so dear to her adoptive parents, "an island of light through the storm and darkness within her" (*ibidem*: 540). The reflector-character is considered an unwanted remain of lyricism by Lovinescu, but indispensable by Pompiliu Constantinescu, Anton Holban, N. Manolescu. It can be a mark of subjectivity but in the same time a new character made up by the author to hide her thoughts, and also a necessary novelistic technique. Virginia Woolf considered the reflector as part of the author-narrator-character-reader paradigm, and one can identify the author-reader perspective or the character's freedom as a narrator, an advantage for both, so that the reader recognizes himself/herself in the discourse, and the author lets the character breathe.

Inner Time and Outer Time

In the novels of the Hallipa series, the importance of chronological evocation is diminished due to the time-consciousness, and "most of the time runs in the characters' consciousness" (Ardelean, C. G., *op. cit.*: 155). There is a clear link with Bergson's concepts of time and duration, the uninterrupted stream, the continuous evolution, those moments of expansion or contraction accordingly with the individual meaning, the subjective time. This idea is analyzed in the first novel, when Mini looks at the old pendulum showing the minutes passing "slowly, unbound in lower rhythms" (Papadat Bengescu H., 1979: 10). Though the narrative perspective prefers the past and often creates the impression of suspended time, there are specific time references to the daily schedule. Even the temporal breakings abound in time references. Yet, the watchword for Bengescu's narrative is *flashback*. From Mini, who periodically reaches the past, most of the characters take the function of recalling different events, thus the present tense is put in the second place and makes the impression of alert pace exactly because most of the actions in the daily life are less important than the past ones. That way, even when recalling, the story pace is not slowed down. Some constancies are the *bourgeois hour* 4 p.m., Thursday parties, the precise moments when the characters intensely experience time (the concert, Sia's funeral). A main function is also given to the *ellipse*: months and seasons between actions, most of them during traveling, are suspended.

This "narrative delay", as Umberto Eco names it (Eco, U., 1997: 90), making the past more current than the present, has lead to the well known similarity between Bengescu's and Proust's writing, this auctorial free movement on the hour plate, a time outside time, a simultaneous time. In Bengescu's texts, most of the "plot" lies within the characters' consciousness, hence the discrepancy between inner and outer time. The energetic and involved Nory has often times of remembrance, inferior characters such as Aneta Pascu and Costel Petrescu also make introspections, permanent comparisons or references to a sublimated past. These small or big digressions "are attempts to explore the essential, profound, even more real reality" (Auerbach, E., 2000: 492).

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The Janus-faced time is recurrent at the characters' and narrator's speech level and brings the author's style closer to Thomas Mann's in *The Magic Mountain* or *Doctor Faustus*. The idea of time expansion or contraction, the subjective perception of time is most pointed in the reflector-character Mini: "Time and space seemed to her, on the contrary, longer because people and situations hadn't distracted her from that rough thought of people and places" (Papadat Bengescu, H., 1979: 38). It is also noticeable the idea of human dissolution in time: "Mini was looking at the big pendulum and at her watch. She was captivated by hours. Mika-Lé and the others were dissolved in time. They were all thousandths of seconds of the pulse beating the hours unfolded above the city" (*ibidem*: 73). Some characters are solar, their rhythm is connected to the daylight, and others are caught in the bio-physiological clock rolling down; Nory is philosophical about the male superiority and puts the blame on the ancestral time: "I probably bear within me the conscience of the time when they began dominating life, because this sense of slavery dwells in me, the liberated one!... they fill the time and space of bigger life… as well as the time and space of our smaller life" (*ibidem*: 72). The more precise is the present, the more indistinct is the past, a complementarity deriving from nostalgia for those "antediluvian times" (*ibidem*: 75). Though this time regression in which present is simultaneous with remembrance, the characters allow themselves some sort of vagrancy. The end of *The Roots* has many philosophical thoughts about time, with Madona living her final days on New Year's Eve: "How to live your last days? Ever since she knew Caro, he's been always looking for the next day… Mado alone has been living in the incommensurable time. But what is time? Declaims Nory *in peto…* Time had been divided by people's will into halves, quarters, slices... If so, she, Nory, could be younger. She'll be 36 the day after tomorrow in the arbitrary divided, revised time. She's been besieged by time, under its law, and also fighting it. She and those included in the space of a destiny that has blend them together in its complicated weaving" (*ibidem*: 543-544). These thoughts take the form of an essay in the last novel, *The Stranger*: "Our time is a moment of recollection, the one to come is a moment of doubt, and then?" (*ibidem*: 619). The series end up with a (less profound than Mann's heroes') meditation on time during the surviving characters' symbolical return to their origins.

Another important aspect has been revealed from the angle of the decadent vision on time, the abandon of the plot in the favour of stylistic preoccupations that "block, diminish or cancel the chronological progressive plot of realistic novel" (Wier, D., 1995: 17). Accordingly to Geambattista Vico's waving or undulating time theory, history follows two alternative moves, *corsi et ricorsi*, ascending and descending; this has allowed a biological interpretation. Temporal travelling overlaps or eludes the spatial travelling. The character that prefers, even causes herself slips into the past, is 25 years old Ina, called "loafer, a dirtier word than tramp" (Papadat Bengescu, H., 1979: 511). Back from Gârlele, Ina and Lucian feel immortal, experiment resignation in front of destiny and act like the last survivors of a transition time, "a bridge between two centuries, a rest that is yet showing many signs of ending" (*ibidem*: 619). In *The Stranger* there are many temporal inconsistencies concerning the Ina's, Lucian's and especially his parents' real age: a version that Lucian's mother died when he was seven and later on his father died, another version that his old and widowed mother retired in Ardeal; some rejuvenating ecstatic experiences:

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Ina feels she's 15 again after meeting The Leopard, Walter desperately tries to reach immortality but only Marcian and at some level Elena succeed. The women are frightened by time and by freedom, they want to escape the present in a pathological manner. The actions with emotional impact are deleted from their memory, so Ina doesn't know when exactly her mother fell ill and died, or where her parents are buried, she only knows she was 14-15. She remembers older events, not the near past, she's aware that "time passing grinds and also preserves" (*ibidem*: 528), she ultimately looses contact with reality and the recovering process is slow, turning into resignation in front of fate, and Godless Ina ends up feeling immortal.

The sole survivors of the Hallipas are aware they belong to a transitory generation, make suppositions about the future, and are at peace with the new generation, but they draw themselves in resignation, "shutting the door after they've passed near shadows of other destinies, all those you couldn't conceive otherwise than living beings, and that placed you in an absurd fight with death, all those who turned themselves into icons painted by memory" (*ibidem*: 624). The only one that doesn't change is disease, and time passing proves itself to favour all the characters.

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