



Constructed Spaces in Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion**

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Abstract. The study offers an analysis of Liviu Rebreanu's novel entitled *Ion* based on the viewpoints of the narratology of space. It examines whether a narratological approach based on distinct terms of space is capable of revealing such aspects of narration which other narratological methods fail to provide access to.

As space construction (more precisely, the restructuring, thought as radical, of traditional space concepts) is also one of the central themes of the novel, the analysis provides the opportunity for the author not only to identify the different variations specified by the narratology of space and their narrative functions respectively, but also to examine the narrator's narrative strategies from viewpoints which would remain unexplored for traditional methods of analysis.

Rebreanu, who initially imagines his career of an intellectual as a Hungarian writer, but because of an affair as a military officer has to leave the country, has to be in hiding in the strongly nationalist political atmosphere experienced in Romania. His dual attitude (his powerful literary vision and his nationalism arising from the mentality of the Romanian community of the time) leads him to create a complex narrative structure, which – apart from minor contradictions – makes possible two consistently justifiable, but radically differing readings, namely a nationalist one and one which overwrites the former through irony, also reinforced by satirical elements.

In this way, in the reading created with the contribution of the unbiased reader, even today an exciting and modern textual corpus unfolds from the complex relationship among

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the (demonstrably nationalist) empirical author, the model author (weighing things in a much more complex and objective manner) and the narrator (converting the debate of the former two into a narrative text), revealing the more profound theme of the novel, that of a narrative remapping of the ethnic, social and political spaces of Transylvania, and respectively, the author's hidden concerns related to this.

Keywords: ethnic, social, political, narrative spaces, empirical author, model author, nationalism, assimilation, nation-state, heterotopia

“National” space – national spaces

The spaces in the *narrated world* outlined by the *narrator* are categorized into four main types in narratology (based on the criterion of *unfolding the plot*): *intrinsic spaces*, *target spaces*, *liminal spaces* and *taboo spaces* (Krah 1999, 8). This category system is suitable for analysing Rebreanu's novel, as one central theme of the novel is the very act of reinterpreting-remapping the *geographical*, *social* and *metaphysical* spaces, what is more, the novel itself is one of the most noteworthy culture-historical documents of this process. It is not only the protagonists of the novel, but obviously also Rebreanu, the empirical author, moreover, model author of the novel,¹ who consider the radical transformation of the spaces determining their individual or community existence as the main purpose of their lives, and regard the given space constructions as *liminal* (more precisely, transitional) *spaces*.

The *spaces of narration*, which in Rebreanu's case are always created from the viewpoints of the particular characters, based on their imagination and senses, are subordinated to the space constructing efforts of the *model author*, creating the narrator and “subconsciously” guiding its speech acts. Similarly to the heroes of the novel, he also strives to construct a new individual and/or community space against the desired or actual space conception(s). The *geographical*, *family*, *citizen*, *social*, *cultural* and *metaphysical* spaces in which the lives of the novel's heroes take place are determined by the Hungarian state framework forming part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with its historically grounded social, demographical and cultural processes and with the tensions of its present. The “valid” national doctrine, which shapes the relationship between the cultural (“national”) and social groups of society, is the theory of the Hungarian “political nation,” according to which the culturally non-Hungarian citizens of the state are the “foreign language speaking” members of the Hungarian nation, who have to acquire the Hungarian language and culture at a native speaker level – for the sake of integrating into the

¹ Concerning the terms empirical author/empirical reader and model author/model reader see Eco (2002, 33, 38-40) and Lintvelt (1989).

Hungarian national culture –, which they can “enrich,” so to say, with the elements of their own cultures and linguistic universes. Otherwise, this ideology does not differ in any respect from the national ideology on behalf of which today’s western societies strive to “integrate” the “foreigners” (the non-majority “natives” or the “immigrants”). The “cultural approach” is particularly unilateral in the case of Hungary of the time: the state does not prescribe for the Hungarians co-existing with Romanians to know the language and culture of the Romanian (and Serb, Slovak, German, Jewish) community – being in majority locally, whereas in minority at a national level. It also belongs to truth, of course, that those Hungarians who are in connection with the minority community acquire its language and culture spontaneously. They speak Romanian or they speak broken Romanian. There is no hero in the novel (living in a Romanian environment) who does not know – at least at a level suitable for his place in the system of social relations – also the language of the local majority. And those Romanians who need the Hungarian language speak it or speak broken Hungarian. Those non-Hungarians, however, who lived all their lives in a Romanian community (as the most sympathetic figure of the novel, Zaharia Herdelea, the schoolmaster from Pripas), are not able to acquire the “language of the state” at a “native level,” in spite of their intellectual status and their best intentions. In their youth this was not needed, the “minority” children could learn in their mother tongue also in the state school, and the state did not even claim the knowledge of the Hungarian language from them, entrusting them in a way to learn Hungarian – if they felt necessary.

In the beginning the local representatives of the educational administration after the 1867 Settlement are also aware of the difficulties of learning the Hungarian language, which can be rarely used in confined peasant communities – and this is why it is far from live communication. Inspector Csernátonyi, a man of the old stamp, still highly appreciates Herdelea’s work (merely aiming at the acquisition of the basics of Hungarian language). The schoolmaster can thank him even the secure state job (and his bees also highly appreciated by the inspector). Until the 1880s the Romanian myth of the thousand-year-old Magyarization efforts does not have much ground. For centuries the “official language” of the country is Latin. In this way, until the Reform Age it is out of question that the state should force anybody to speak Hungarian, which is only one of the vernacular languages...

However, this symmetry, operational for centuries, is gradually overthrown by the national ideologies of the Reform Age – imported from developed European states – and by the 1879 law article no. XVII. created in the spirit of these – concerning teaching the Hungarian language in state schools –, then by the Aponyi laws (1907). The latter make the knowledge of the Hungarian language compulsory for every minority pupil, while they do not prescribe even optional (not to speak of compulsory) “minority” language knowledge for the Hungarians living together

with minorities. However, in the case of a pluralist nation concept (somewhat analogous to the one from Switzerland²) – adjusted to the real structure of society – only this would have been *reasonable*, that is, natural. But the Hungarian state was not willing to make a distinction between the terms of “citizen nation” and “culture nation” in the same way as later the successor states of the Monarchy and earlier France, England and the United States of America. The Romanian minority, differing from the Hungarians also in its religion, in addition, linguistically-culturally related to the populations of one part of Europe’s most powerful states, France, Spain and Italy, could not take the Hungarian assimilation claims for granted. One reason for this was that there could have been a more attractive alternative for them, namely the German. For in the officially bilingual state the Romanian communities were also living together, almost everywhere, with Saxon, Swabian and Austrian ethnic groups.

Thus it is understandable that the nationalist heroes of Rebreanu’s novel do not object to asymmetry (as it would be natural and reasonable), but they *reject* learning the “state language,” which in the moment of finishing the novel (in 1920) is already prescribed also by the Romanian state after the Treaty of Trianon, what is more, forced, even more violently than by the Hungarians, upon the members of Hungarian communities from Transylvania as well. Even where the latter – similarly to the Romanian community from Pripas – are in absolute majority.

The reason for the fact that the heroes of the novel oppose to the efforts of the Hungarian state, instead of the alternative of mutual multilingualism, the claim of their own monolingualism, and implicitly (though only tacitly) that of disannexing Transylvania from Hungary, of establishing the monolingual-monocultural Romanian state, lies in the ever more violent (that is, more “western”) politics of Magyarization of the Hungarian state. National unilateralism necessarily generates national unilateralism. As a consequence of the Hungarian coercive measures, gradually also those Romanians seclude themselves from the use of the Hungarian language who otherwise speak it excellently (Titu Herdelea, Belciug). Not to mention the fact that – as I have already tried to prove it in two other studies – the members of Romanian – basically peasant – communities cannot really be assimilated into the Hungarian nation “inherently” of noble character. Or if so, only in exceptional cases. At least as citizens of equal rank (Bíró 2011b, 79-89). But in this way no other solution remains for the Hungarian state, but to try, by suppressing the Romanian (Serbian, Slovak, German) national resistance(s), with more or less openly violent means, to create *fait accompli* (similarly to the French and the English). Entirely without any chance, as this effort also forces the ethnic

² In the nineteenth century the ethnic composition of the population of Transylvania is almost perfectly identical with that of Switzerland: two third Romanian, 20% Hungarian and 5% German. In Switzerland: two third German, 20% French and 5% Italian.

groups to find solutions to their problems outside the framework of the Hungarian state. (To which there are opportunities in each case.)

The national efforts based on mutual distrust, moreover, on fears instead of mutual trust, put in motion processes – aiming at the reshaping of the cultural and implicitly the political space – which, *clearly, mutually exclude each other*.

Rebreanu's novel is the precise and objective representation – with a few exceptions – of these processes. And since objectivity, in Rebreanu's case, is also accompanied by a type of narration called *personal* in the German specialist literature on narratology (Stanzel 1993, 39-52), which formally excludes the narrator's person from the narrative discourse itself, a surprisingly profound and thought provoking textual corpus can be formed. For in this type of text, which is close to the *immediacy* of dramatic form, narration is determined in each case by the characters' viewpoints, emotions and thoughts. The narrator himself rarely comments, evaluates or analyses. He rather leaves all this to us, readers. Of course, never fully, as the choice of topic, the characters of the narrative, the choice of the model reader, etc., already take place along value preferences, in other words, the model author confronts the reader with *fait accompli* in several respects already when he employs a *personal narrator*. What is more, the narrative situation created by Rebreanu the model author is made strongly *ambiguous* also by the fact that the major elements of the story of the novel's key figure, Titu Herdelea, coincides with the events of Rebreanu's youth. And this may create the impression in the well-informed reader (who largely knows Rebreanu's biography at least) that Titu's ideological development, his desires and fantasies are identical with the views, desires and fantasies of the (typologically *authorial*) *narrator*. Point-blank, Titu is a kind of spokesman of Rebreanu's.

Nevertheless, Titu's character and behaviour immediately contradict this appearance. And not only his. As I have also pointed out in an earlier study (2008), all the heroes mentioned as Romanian nationalists in the narratorial text (Belciug, Spătaru,³ even Grofșoru) are doubtful figures; Belciug, for instance, is also a strongly selfish, malevolent, unscrupulous character, and the narrator adopting the viewpoints of the heroes cannot do anything other than describing him like that. But in this way Titu's emotions, desires and fantasies, assertively assuming the nationalist⁴ title, viewed with the objective reader's eyes (who is not blinded by the

³ Spătaru is also a vindictive, prejudiced character. After the Hungarian Madarassy rebukes Ghițu, who is indignant at the singing of *Deșteaptă-te, române*, considered as irredentist by the authorities, he enthuses like this: "Sir, let me kiss you! You are a great man! – he added, and staggering to Madarassy gave a smacking kiss on his cheek. – We know well that the renegades are to be blamed for all our persecution! ... The renegades, the Jews and the rest of the villains!" (152)

⁴ In the narrated world *nationalism* does not have a perjorative meaning (it is a kind of synonym of today's term patriotism); only the term *chauvinism* is associated with a perjorative value meaning (even in Mrs Herdelea's discourse, more biased than the average in national terms).

Romanian national idea), are forced into ironical brackets in spite of their essential grounding.

In my view, the complexity and, moreover, contradictoriness of this irony can be clarified by the very analysis of the processes of space construction. The model author can see three theoretical solutions to the reorganization of the ethnographic, social and cultural spaces of Transylvania, mostly inhabited by Romanians, but historically forming part of the Hungarian Kingdom.

The first possibility, namely *the concept of the homogeneous Hungarian political nation* – as I have already referred to it –, is completely and obviously unacceptable from the viewpoint of the Romanian intellectuals. But for Rebreanu (first lieutenant Olivér Rébrán), having reached the threshold of definitive assimilation (Bíró 2011b), who knows the Hungarian concept regarding the future of the Hungarian state not only from the viewpoint of the outsider, but also from the inside (as a live reality) and so he cannot have any illusions even with respect to the most liberal and minority-friendly Hungarian intellectuals, the second solution, namely *the federal restructuring of the Hungarian state*, cannot be viewed as a real alternative either. Not even in spite of the fact that this alternative has supporters in certain layers of the Romanian intellectuals, and in a favourable case it could have supporters also in wider circles of the Romanians. In 1905 (in the period immediately preceding the plot of the novel) Aurel C. Popovici publishes a federal proposal in German in Leipzig, in which Szeklerland figures as the 12th member state of the confederation (1997). However, Rebreanu knows too well that the Hungarian intellectuals of the time are not willing even to consider such an alternative (which now seems like a dream). Apart from a few parliamentary reactions, indeed the proposal remains without an echo in the Hungarian publicity. It is true that Popovici's proposal also has its shortcomings (Bíró 2011b, 89-98). Besides his strong anti-semitism, he himself is not willing to take notice of the Transylvanian Hungarians living outside Szeklerland. While (in order to win the Austrian and German power circles over to his side) he proposes autonomies for the German communities, of much smaller number, in the future Romanian member state (embracing the part of Transylvania outside Szeklerland), he would deprive of this right the Hungarian population of Câmpia Transilvaniei, Țara Călatei, Banat, Țara Bârsei, Satu Mare and Maramureș. To quote him, he would doom them to assimilation, "well deserved, but without violence."

Thus, for the *empirical author* (Liviu Rebreanu), whose assimilation fails as a consequence of the embezzlement of one part of the sum kept in the regiment's chest, and consequently the failure of the military career and the flight to Romania, nothing else remains but the third alternative. That is, the *unification* with the "homeland" (namely Romania, recently formed from the unification of Moldova and Țara Românească). Obviously, this is the alternative that the narrative alter ego of the empirical author, the creator of the narrator of the novel, the *model author*

also identifies with. It is true, however, that this alternative is explicitly referred to, even from among the nationalist heroes of the novel, only by Spătaru, he himself doing it in a heavily drunken state. But there is no need of it: at the moment of finishing the novel this alternative is already part for reality. The presentation of it as a Romanian national effort would be not only unnecessary, but it could also confirm retrospectively the Hungarian charges referring to the irredentism of the Romanians from Transylvania (then still vehemently denied by the Romanians).

Space construction as a narrative

Rebreanu – as testified by his confessions and memories – strived from the “start” to write a *national epic*, embracing the problems of each region inhabited by Romanians. The novel *Ion* would be the first volume of this novel series. However, the main purpose of Rebreanu’s model author is not the justification of the Treaty of Trianon in the case of Transylvania, as this was already outdated at the moment of rewriting the novel (which had already been largely completed before the end of the war), but rather the (unavoidably incoherent, as we will see) “justification” of the policy of the new Romanian state towards the Hungarians. As this policy does not differ in any respect from the policy of the Hungarian state towards the Romanians. On the contrary! In several respects it is more radical and “more consistent.” So that this policy can become acceptable for the Romanian and the non-Romanian reader, the model author has to reshape the ethnic and social spaces of Transylvania. Thus it is not accidental that one central theme of the novel will be the relationship between the geographical space and the Romanian community, and within, the *matter of the land*, both in national and social terms.

The novel starts with presenting the surrounding of Pripas, which will be the main scene of the action; however, in Rebreanu’s novel space construction is itself action (also in this respect). The text personifies the road itself. Still, this procedure does not seem naïve, as the reader can perceive that in fact the personification converts the road memories of the walker approaching the village into stylistic figures.

From Cârlibaba to Cluj and even beyond, a highway meanders near the Someş, either on the right or on the left bank of the river, and above Armadia a white road starts from it, leading through the old wooden bridge covered with mossy shingle, bisecting Jidoviţa and heading for Bistriţa, where it meets another highway descending on the Bârgăului pass from Bucovina.

Leaving Jidoviţa, at first the road laboriously clambers up among the squeezed hills, but then it advances merrily, smoothly, playing hide-and-peek among the young beech trees of Pădurea Domnească, resting at the Cişmeaua Mortului, from which cool spring water flows day and night, then it suddenly

turns under the Râpele Dracului and immediately arrives at Pripas, hiding in a curve of hills. (9)⁵

The description starts with a bird's eye perspective and the narrator narrows the angle to the house of the Herdelea family. From here the quasi-memories of the wanderer arriving from Armadia to Pripas, offered as a contracted narrative give way to a simultaneous description. The images of the schoolmaster's house, the sultriness trembling in the summer hot spell, the dog slumbering on the side of the road, the cat sneaking in the dust of the road are already epic snapshots. The description finally stops at the images of the Sunday Hora (a specific Romanian circle dance) taking place in the centre of the village. But the enlargement continues also here. At first we can see only groups of people, later on, during the elaboration of the scene the later heroes of the novel will mark out from these. As one of the expert analysts of the novel (Săndulescu 1976, 158-159) states, everybody who will play determining roles in the threads of the plot – running in parallel from now on – is present in the scene.

The image embraces the largest possible view. The road comes from the infinite, and in the final sentences of the novel it opens again to the infinite, typographically marked by the three dots. The members of the Herdelea family definitely move to Armadia, and in perspective they merge into the infiniteness of the successive generations. The younger daughter, Ghighi, however, leaves only temporarily, she is expected by her future husband, Zăgreanu, who is at the same time the successor of the retired schoolmaster. After the inauguration of the church building, marking the centre of the narrated world, the space turns, also explicitly, into space-time in the Bakhtinian sense (2008), into chronotope...

It seemed as if nothing had changed in the village that they left behind. Some people died, others took their places. Time passes by the bustle of human life with indifference and removes all traces. Suffering, passion, desire – whether small or big – are all swallowed by the painfully deep sea of secrets, as a fine noise is swallowed by the roaring storm.

The Herdeleas are silent, all the three of them. It is just their thoughts that are racing steadily forward, thoughts fed by hope that never dies out. The horses' hooves are clapping hard on the tamped road, the cart's wheels rattle monotonously, monotonously as the passage of time.

The road bisects Jidovița, goes through the wooden bridge of the Someș covered with shingle and disappears in the big highway coming who knows from where... (484)

⁵ In the case of quotations from *Ion* the numbers in brackets refer to the respective page of the 1967 Hungarian edition of the novel (Rebreanu 1967).

This specificity of space construction, as it is also referred to in Săndulescu's small monograph, is rooted in Rebreanu's concept of the *sphericity* of the novel form. "Each element has to form a unity, they have to become round in order to give the impression of a universe in which the beginning and the end merge into each other. This is why the novel has a spherical shape, which ends as it has started" (qtd. in Săndulescu 1985, 155).

However, the *sphericity* of *Ion* is not a mere adaptation of a narrative scheme. The space construction of the novel is an organic consequence, an expression of the archaic Romanian peasant world view, that is, the narrative replica of the *invariability* underlying the troubles and tragedies of the natural and social world, burdened with inner contradictions, renewing in the eternal bustle of birth and death. In the closure of the novel a metaphysical vault is formed above the geographical, social and cultural spaces, unifying the parts in an organic construct. At the most significant turning points of the novel, through the mystery of birth, marriage and death, the action comes into contact with this metaphysical space dimension. In the closure, however, the archaic myths of folk culture will be overlapped with the elements of national mythology, of intellectual roots, of the modern age (not devoid of contradictions and impertinences either).

The heterogeneity of the novel's spaces

Under this metaphysical-mythical horizon, considered as invariable (and in the absence of an ironical interpretation seeming a little anachronistic today), surprisingly modern space structures are formed. Everything is in the state of change, of transformation. Formally, those dividing lines which separate the spaces that organize society are still valid, but nobody accepts them as being indeed valid any longer.

In principle, spaces are transgressable in every direction. This transgressability, however – and it is this that the actual tragedy of society lies in –, with a few exceptions (peripheric from the viewpoint of social trends), is perceived by everybody as a threatening danger rather than as a possibility, and this is why they want, instead of exploring the advantages of transgressing the boundaries (in the widest sense) and of dissolving the seclusion, to modify the boundaries – both in the literal and figural sense of the word – to their own advantage and to the detriment of the other. That is, the determining figures of both communities would like to adjust the ethnic boundaries to the current or desired political boundaries.

Each ethnic group would like to interpret the social trends as a transition towards an idyllic ("national") unity, regarded as organic. In Rebreanu's universe the temporary spaces are themselves merely transitional; their unilateralism is marked by strong taboo spaces on both sides (Krah 1999, 8). Both Belciug and Titu think that speaking in Hungarian means the betrayal of the Romanian community. The one

who speaks in Hungarian is a renegade. Titu, who is more and more caught up in the wave of the nationalist ideology of the age, tends to regard even his father as “slightly renegade” in certain moments, although he generally accepts his father’s concessions, about which he knows that they are forced, with understanding.

On the other side, Horváth, the new school inspector is not willing to utter a word in Romanian in a purely Romanian community either, and he would also expect that Herdelea, employed by the Hungarian state, should talk in Hungarian even at home, with his family members. It is in this spirit that the Hungarian schoolmaster of the state school from Gargalău forbids his pupils to talk to each other in Romanian – even in the breaks.

It is only the old Herdelea, the forest engineer Madarassy and the school inspector Csernátónyi, a man of the old stamp, who create some connections among the cultural spaces mutually tabooing each other. However, socially they are all on the periphery and passively suffer the changes of the times.

In my interpretation the central figure of the novel is Zaharia Herdelea.

The old schoolmaster is also depicted by the narrator – viewing the world with his heroes’ eyes – as a decent Romanian man, who finds himself in awkward situations due to politics, but who does not become, even despite this, unfaithful to his cultural or citizen community. The schoolmaster possesses not only healthy national feelings (in the cultural sense of the term), but also healthy civic sentiments (in the Western European sense of the concept of nation). Although he does not approve of the way Spătaru, the teacher of Greek calls Ghițu, the district administrator a renegade in the banquet in Armadia, “deep in his soul” he admires the “audacity with which the teacher decries the district administrator and the Hungarians” (153). His attitude towards the Hungarians does not arise only from compromise either. By his built, Herdelea is an understanding personality, capable of weighing the other’s viewpoints. He is a worthy peer of the Hungarian Madarassy, viewing the Romanians with honest and disinterested sympathy, understanding their endeavours. The fact that Herdelea is the only Romanian hero of the novel – capable of true empathy – is clearly certified by his thoughts about the indifference of the elder girl, Laura:

Herdelea had a moment of anger, but he tempered himself quickly. Children are like that, when they grow up and become estranged. Wasn’t he like that too? He went to the funeral of his father, but he never bothered how long he had been staying in bed, seven weeks. And it was not far off, the fourth village. Whenever his mother comes here, he honours her with sweet brandy. But apart, it is as if she didn’t exist. He keeps his concerns and love for his home. Then why should he wonder that Laura no longer cares about his problems? Life is like that. It is sad. Who could change its sense? Life overcomes the old and the weak. Life belongs to the young and strong. Selfishness is the basis of life. (328)

Indeed, every kind of irredentism is foreign to the schoolmaster's personality, as in his view, by *his built*, the problem of the Romanians from Transylvania is solvable, on condition of readiness to compromise on both sides, in the Hungarian state as well. He does not only believe in the future of the Romanians, but also in the Hungarian state, in the possibility of justice and fairness. This is why he assists Ion in appealing against the decision of the Hungarian judge of the district court.

Madarassy's views are not thematised by the text. However, the way he silences Ghițu, the district administrator, who officially calls the people singing *Deșteaptă-te, române* chauvinist (151), also makes his opinion unambiguous...

The moment of space construction in which the nationalism of the *empirical author* considerably influences the choices of the model author directing the narrator from the background (more precisely, from the "subconscious") is the reshaping of the ethnic map of Transylvania. There is a strong asymmetry in the presentation of the co-existing communities. It is only the members of the Romanian community that appear as a community. The non-Romanian heroes of the novel are only "foreigners" living in a Romanian environment. Even Madarassy!

The narrator describes in detail Titu's fantasies and day-dreaming in the night of Lușca:

He imagined the wonderful day in advance, and was caught up in the stormy waves of imagination... There he is in Cluj, where he was only once, years ago. One can hear only the Romanian language everywhere... And what language! As if everybody were speaking "as in the mother country," sweeter than the engineer Vasile Pop from Vărarea, who has wandered all over the whole territory of Romania... The inscriptions of the shops, the streets, the schools, the authorities... everything, everything is Romanian... [...] But he was carried, flown further by the wings of imagination... Look, Sibiu, Brașov, Oradea, Arad, Timișoara! ... Proud national flags were fluttering on each fabulous palace... (312)

This episode also has a corresponding scene: travelling to the appointment of the Astra Romanian cultural association, from where he will emigrate to Romania, he contemplates the landscape from the train window:

Titu could not get enough of the land of Transylvania, which got distanced, curved, stretched far away, then came close again... And the train was passing proudly by the Romanian villages, bisecting some of them, as a cruel tyrant, and rarely rested for a while, the stops were signalled by staccato Hungarian voices, hastening or scolding the travelling peasants, men-in-the-street. Titu saw the same peasants everywhere, humble, brave, patient: on the white roads, along which they were working industriously in the yellow fields

grubbed by their arms and watered by their sweat in-between the poor, languid villages. Where there was work, one could see only them. Then the big railway stations, the anterooms of the towns followed, and the peasants could no longer be seen. But then the hurrying, noisy and impatient townspeople appeared, speaking, in a commanding tone, only in a foreign language.

‘We work so that they can have fun!’ Titu thought, choking with an ever bigger revolt. ‘This is the illustration of the injustice and oppression exercised on us!’ (441)

The narratorial text treats with distance both episodes. It is obvious that these are the fantasies of a young man insulted in his national feelings, thus with a broken spiritual balance. After the first scene Titu himself comes round: “What is with me? Am I delirious?” (312) Further on, the second scene can be put into ironic brackets not only by the metaphor of the train bisecting the Romanian villages “as a cruel tyrant” or the epithets exaggerating on the love of work of the Romanian peasants (as compared to the Saxons or Hungarians), but also by the reader’s existing or acquirable knowledge. As the major part of the Hungarian and Saxon population (the overwhelming majority in the case of the Szeklers) – amounting to one third of the population of Transylvania – are also peasants. And they too, just like the town workers, work hard; a significant part of the economic achievements of Transylvania (in any case, more significant than their proportion) is the result of their work.

Under the given circumstances (irrespective of the supreme state power) they would also be worthy of respect, in other words, for Transylvania the *natural* solution (again, irrespective of the supreme state power) would be multilingualism. Irrespective of which community constitutes the majority in the country, that is, whether Transylvania politically belongs to Romania or Hungary. At least, in the present time of the action, the Romanians officially fight for such kind of bilingualism. In the present time of finishing the novel (according to philological data, of its rewriting in fact) it is already the Hungarians and the Germans who would fight for the mutual bilingualism (that is, also for the free use of their native language), and it is the Romanian state which, similarly to the former Hungarian state, rejects this claim – based on historical arguments.

Rebreanu’s narrator, however, does not perceive this contradiction (at least explicitly). The tacit acceptance of the (anticipated) reshaping of the ethnic boundaries would serve that the reader might not perceive it either. And the nationalist reader does not perceive it, as for him even Madarassy’s attitude confirms that the Romanians are fully and unilaterally right and the Hungarians are all exploiters and enemies. To the extent that this has to be admitted objectively

even by a decent Hungarian. Thus, Madarassy is an (illustrative) exception which reinforces the rule itself.

But, I insist, Rebreanu's model author is an incomparably better writer than ideologist. The objective and sociologically and also aesthetically authentic depiction of the relations within the Romanian community prove that he cannot regard this black-and-white way of seeing as authentic, not even in relation to his own group. But if the Romanian community is also a mixture of decent and indecent people, then the question may rightfully rise in the reader: why the decent members of the Hungarian community can be denied what would be the legal due of even the indecent members of the Romanian community, namely the right to preserve community identity? And this question, although it cannot be thematised in the strongly nationalist atmosphere prevailing at the time of writing the novel (and in the following decades of the inquestionability of the French idea of the nation-state), can hardly be excluded from (the empirical and model author) Rebreanu's consciousness.

Thus, the fact that those heroes who represent the German or Hungarian national viewpoints (perhaps not less biasedly and passionately as Titu or Grofşoru give voice to the Romanian ones) are squeezed out of the Transylvania-space of the novel turns into a *positive fact* of the narrative. It "relates" that for the Romanian community, which the narrator and model author of the novel is also a member of, these considerations do not exist. More precisely, they *cannot exist*. The ideological space in which these considerations could appear as the components completing the Romanian viewpoints would have to appear, in terms of the "national idea" sanctified by the political practice of modernity, as a *taboo space* for a "decent" Romanian. Just as the space of the actual national (see: cultural) pluralism is a *taboo space* for the Hungarians.

In this case, however, today's objective reader (carefully distancing from the obsessions of nation-states) may perhaps ask the obvious question: why is what the Hungarians do not correct if the same thing is correct when done by the Romanians? As the problem of Pripas and Armadia cannot be modified to the least extent by the fact that two thirds of the population of Transylvania are Romanians. As, similarly to Pripas and Armadia, it does not change the problem of the almost exclusively Hungarian Vârghiş and the neighbouring small town, Baraolt (to remain on my motherland) that only one third of the population of Transylvania are Hungarian. And, of course, it could not have changed in the past either if both communities could have lived their own changing lives freely, not restricted by the state.

Surprisingly, the narratorial discourse does not exclude the *raison d'être* of these questions.

Social spaces

In a *sharp contrast* with Titu's daydreamings and nationalist obsessions, the novel's social spaces are not formed along ethnic boundaries. The reason for the fact that Ion does not have land is not that the Hungarian power deprives him of the possibility of acquiring land, but rather because his father, living for the clarinet and for revelry, has frittered away the lands. And Pripas's large farmers are themselves not Hungarians, but Romanians. Baciú and Toma Bulbuc, George's father are also Romanians. The tragedy of Ion, loving the land almost with sensuous love, would not change even if it took place beyond the Carpathians. (If the Romanian peasant from Old Romania could possess considerable lands at all.) As the revenge of the Hungarian judge of the district court is not an essential element of the conflict between the schoolmaster and the priest either. And there is no proof for the fact that in a similar case a primary school teacher from Old Romania could get off easier. On the contrary!

As we could also see above, Titu's suppositions regarding the global division of Transylvanian society are mostly mistaken. To mention only one example, well known to the Romanians as well, János Hunyadi rose from being a Serb-Romanian small noble to member of the Hungarian peerage. And he was not the only one. In the case of proper services, the Hungarian peerage was open also for non-Hungarians (Borsi-Kálmán 2010, 67).

Of course, it is a fact that in the centuries of the Middle-Ages the major part of the Romanian community are indeed serfs. As the most part of the Hungarians are, too. And the Romanian peasants are not without exception serfs either. After the termination of serfdom, however, the peasant communities also underwent a strong division process. Nevertheless, there are significant differences among the Hungarian and Saxon and, respectively, the Romanian peasants, but these cannot be traced back (or at least not exclusively) to the politics of the Hungarian state hostile to minorities, but rather to the traditional order of the particular communities. The living conditions of the Romanians from Old Romania and those from Transylvania also differ significantly (and the reader can precisely know this fact from Rebreanu's novel entitled *The Uprising*), although the latter cannot exploit anybody at all! The wealthy peasant from Pripas gets rich from his work and preserves and augments his fortune in the same way as his Saxon or Hungarian fellow. The descriptions of the large farmers Baciú's and Bulbuc's farmyards belong to the most beautiful chapters of constructing the *physical space* in the novel.

It is not proved in the case of Gargalău, with a mixed population, either that the economic differences could be traced back to national oppression. What is more, Titu's thoughts, also here just like in the train episode, are conveyed by the narrator in quotes, indicating distance: "Here [at the periphery of the community – B. B.] we,

the oppressed and poor, live, while there [in the centre of the community – B. B.] they swank in wealth’ – Titu thought” (204).

The myth of the *Hungarian* noble and *Romanian* peasant, which constitutes the ground of Titu’s fantasies, is an intellectual construct which has little to do with reality. Titu is the member of a new intellectual layer which grounds the concept of nation – in accordance with the logic also represented by the plebeians of the Hungarian 1848 – upon the “nation” interpreted as “peasants.” It is, of course, also a fact and thus contributes to the formation of the Romanian myth that in the case of the Hungarians, after the Settlement (and partly as its consequence) an idea of the nation also based on the mythical ideal of the “nobility becoming middle class” and “middle class becoming nobility” respectively becomes prevailing (Borsi-Kálmán 2012, 241-250). However, the former Romanian intellectuals, although due to their situation they are undoubtedly closer to them, despise the peasants in the same way as the Hungarian aristocrats do. Mrs. Herdelea’s gestures, having recently risen from peasant existence (70), as well as the “ladylike” pretences of the Herdelea girls speak for themselves.

Physical spaces

The physical spaces function mostly as the scenes of the action. Since the narrator of the novel perceives the world with the heroes’ eyes, his space perception is also adjusted to the heroes’ space perception. Thus, the mode of vision of the latter is determining also from the viewpoint of space construction. Those elements of space structure are always pushed to the foreground which are determining from the point of view of the heroes’ experiences or from that of the actions carried out by them.

The spatial position of the heroes represents that point of origin which determines the various space directions. The descriptions are laconic, but the narrator activates the reader’s visual imagination with an excellent sense. In the majority of the cases the reader can also see in front of his/her eyes fixtures, parts of buildings and landscape elements which are absent from the description, but which are involved by the visual elements appearing in the narrative as organic accessories. Rebreanu often suggests instead of explicitly depicting.

The *enigmatic character* of the representation is also assisted by the fact that the physical spaces always have a powerful social dimension. The house of the Herdelea family, the Glanetaşu property, the parish house, Baciú’s house, Avrun’s inn, the inns from Jidoviţa and Armadia where the aristocrats revel, the building of the district court, the ballroom of the school from Armadia are important social spaces as well, separated by sharp boundaries. Ion does not have access to the ballroom of the school, not even as a gaper. He is allowed to go to the Herdeleas only because, as the schoolmaster’s favourite pupil, he is regarded as belonging to

the family, at least he is perceived as being different from the other members of the peasant community.

From the point of view of the members of the Romanian community the spaces of power are always represented as Hungarian ones, whereas the spaces of heavy drinking as Jewish ones. After the warnings of the Hungarian schoolmaster (“Only in Hungarian!... In Hungarian!... It is compulsory in Hungarian... In Hungarian!...”) the spectacle of the Hungarian school building from Gargalău will acquire symbolic significance in Titu’s eyes:

Titu’s whole being was transformed in an instant: nothing else remained in him but the bottomless hatred against the schoolmaster. He felt an irresistible desire to dash over and to make his threatening words freeze on his lips... But then the bell started to ring, the noise calmed down and the schoolyard became empty in seconds. Only the school building busking in the sun was looking around with an even more ostentatious and derisive gaze, like a beast which had devoured its prey and, being full, was licking its lips. Titu had never experienced that even an inanimate object could drive one into ultimate despair. He felt that the opposite brick-red building, with those shiny big windows, wanted to insult him, to despise him. It infuriated him and reminded him again of the old woman, tormented by sufferings (whom he got to know during tax collecting – B.B.). ‘Well, should I take away even the soul of that wretched so that they can cry even more haughtily: only in Hungarian!’ (208-209)

The spaces of Jewish inns also acquire symbolic meaning: in the eyes of the heroes and of the narrator conveying their views they function as the spaces infecting the innocent peasant world, being profoundly foreign to it as the spaces of immorality. And this is, of course, not an invention by Rebreanu. It is (also) a recurrent motif of the Romanian literature of the time (Bíró 2011c).

As concerns the Jews, it is also Herdelea who feels and thinks in a more subtle manner. Contrary to anti-semitism – universally characterising the heroes of the novel –, regarding the Jews as the agents of capitalist destruction (Bíró 2011c) and representing the Jews as the enemies of the Romanians of equal rank with the Hungarians,⁶ Herdelea’s attitude towards the Jews is also empathy. We can learn from Grofşoru’s thoughts – also conveyed by the narrator – that the Jews from Jidoviţa trust him so much that this trust can even bring votes for the one who wins over the schoolmaster to his side. After the suspension of the schoolmaster the

⁶ The – basically liberal – assimilation strategy, also influentially represented by the Jews in the Hungarian political publicity, virtually eliminates the strategy of the Romanians (and the other ethnic groups) based on sovereignty, autonomy and – if no other possibility remains – separation from the state. Thus, Romanian anti-semitism, much more visceral than the Hungarian one, has not only religious and cultural, but (also) strong political-ideological foundations.

lawyer supports Herdelea mainly for this reason, and it is only later that he starts playing nationalist chords.

The opening up of the social spaces of modernity paradoxically forces the communities which perceive their existence threatened to seclude themselves. The majority of the heroes of the novel are the captives of these secluded spaces. Not only the schoolmaster's wife, whose living space is the family home, but also the priest Belciug, who in spite of knowing the Hungarian language is not willing to speak in Hungarian, or if he is, only in order to enforce his interests. Ion feels that he is suffocated by the perspective of having no land. He hates his father, who squandered the lands on which he could live as a satisfied and respectable peasant. Florica, who is in love with Ion, is also captive of her social situation. However, she cannot even think of stepping out of the social frameworks. She binds her life – almost as a being without will – to the men whom destiny puts her in touch with.

Titu, with aspirations of becoming a poet, also experiences his exiles to Gargalău and Lușca with frustration. The spaces of the notary office and respectively, the spaces opening from these, called *experiential* in narratology (Dennerlein 2009, 170) appear as personality shaping factors in his case. Using another specialist term, they function as *spaces of initiation*, catalysing the determining processes of personality development. The rightful emotions against the schoolmaster from Gargalău lead him to a realisation which will radically transform his personality:

He raised his look above the school, up at the sky, which spread like a clean linen coat onto the infinite. In his thoughts he walked all over the village as on a huge map laid-out. He entered the beautiful, rich, well-kept houses, the ornate dwellings of the minions of destiny, there he was roaming in the spacious courtyards, he met proud Hungarian peasants with twirled moustaches, who were wearing such baggy pants as skirts and were talking loudly... Then his thoughts, as the magic steeds of fairy tales, quickly and easily walked around the village and stopped at filthy huts, among other kinds of peasants, living in privation, oppressed by both God and man, dried up by hard work and poverty. 'And still the future is ours – Titu's soul cheered up – their fortress is besieged by a barefoot army! In vain does the threatening school defy us, in vain does the cock crow on their church tower... Our pressure never loosens! Our multitude constantly advances... Their well-built villages shake and decline, once the breath of our lives in chains touches them... The farmers fear their servants! And the servants – we are them! Theirs is the past, but ours is the future!...' (208)

The allusion to the baggy pants makes it clear that Gargalău is a village in Țara Călatei, as in Transylvania this traditional costume can be found exclusively in this

region. However, in this period Țara Călatei is still such a homogeneous Hungarian enclave as Szeklerland. Thus the model author of the novel would have the opportunity to present, at least briefly, a non-Romanian ethnic community (what is more, a whole region) which is homogeneous, similarly to Pripas. But he does not do it. In other words, his allusions to the Romanian-Hungarian (hierarchical) relationship can be accepted as objective only with serious reservations. And as the narrator does not comment on Titu's untrue statements (and he cannot comment on those of the model author), he does not only manifest as an *unreliable narrator* (becoming fashionable in late- and postmodern narrative), whose assertions have to be corrected by the reader – also based on fiction signals –, but to a certain degree the model author creating the narrator also proves to be *biased*. This partiality-unreliability is moderated to some extent by the fact that the text part under discussion – differently from the preceding consciousness representation formulated in free indirect discourse – already appears in quotation marks (which can be valued in itself as a fiction signal). That is, although the narratorial discourse is built on the elements of the hero's interior monologue also in Titu's case, the narrative text renders certain parts of the text systematically in quotation marks. (As I have already referred to this several times.) In a nationalist reading this procedure may indicate the narrator's authenticating intention, whereas in a non-nationalist reading it can rather be interpreted as the sign of the narrator's distancing intention. In other words, it can direct our attention to Titu's sheer exaggerations – hardly acceptable also for an unbiased Romanian. So much the more that the narrator adds the following paragraph to the quoted passage (again in free indirect discourse and also in quotes):

A happy satisfaction was tingling in Titu. Self-confidence expelled from his soul the dilemmas and dark thoughts, he remembered that in Săscuța, about ten years before, when he had gone to Bistrița, only the herdsman had been Romanian, he had stayed in a hut at the end of the village, but then, without school and without church, half of the community was Romanian. 'There other farmers are gradually superseded by the oppressed but lively servants!' – Titu thought and he felt very happy that he belonged to the race of the oppressed. (208-209)

The subtle irony of the last sentence cannot be ignored by the unbiased reader. As the hero's self-scrutinizing comments ("What is with me? Am I delirious?") or the narrator's allusions in the scene ending the "reveries" from Lușca cannot either ("The moon laughed through the open window" [313]). However, there is an element which seems to function as evidence also for Rebreanu (the model author), but from our present viewpoint it could be accepted only as an ironical hint, and this is none other than biologization – occurring already in Zaharia Herdelea's thoughts –, according to which: "Life overcomes the old and the weak. Life

belongs to the young and strong. Selfishness is the basis of life" (328). This argument (not foreign to Marxism either) will be applied here by Titu as well, when he contrasts the "vitality" of the "young" *Romanian servants* to the "inability to life" of the "declining" *Hungarian farmers*, confirming in this way the "natural" *raison d'être* of the dictatorial endeavours of Romanian nationalism.

However, the *transitional spaces* experienced in Gargalău and Lușca cannot become places to live for Titu. These space segments are, with Marc Augé's term (1992, 79-115) non-places (*non-lieux*). They are the "places" of a man without a home, Foucauldian heterotopias, which cannot be nested into any kind of coherent space.

This lack of space and place is even more emphasized in the case of Ana. She can find her home neither beside her father nor at Ion. The warring men literally despise her, what is more, they channel their aggressive emotions towards each other through her, often with extreme brutality, characteristic of the lower social strata. She keeps moving between the two houses, carrying the messages as a stray dog, due to which both men maltreat her. The extent to which Ana means only the lands for Ion is indicated by one great passage of the novel. To the elder Herdelea girl Laura's question (tacitly also touching on Florica, Ion's love): "Tell me honestly, Ion, do you love Ana?," Ion hesitates, then answers with an embarrassed smile: "Well... I love her, miss... why shouldn't I love her?" But a few moments later, hearing the flute and the croaking of frogs from the direction of Gârla Popii, he "sighed deeply, passionately embracing the sleeping lands with his eyes, and conversing with himself he whispered: 'What should I do?... I must marry Ana!... I must!'" (76). Ana, regarded as a mere tool by both men, adrift between the *emotional spaces* of happy love and undisguised hatred, remains alone to such an extent that she will be able to find a shelter only in death, in the metaphysical space opened up by Avrum's suicide and by Moarcăși's death.

Titu cannot escape from the feeling of foreignness, homelessness either. Adrift between Pripas and the warmth of the family home and, respectively, the humdrum world of notary offices, he does not see any other solution to his problems than stepping out (in his hopes only temporarily) from the Transylvanian world. But this does not seem to be the real solution either. The passages of his letter written from Bucharest, the "great foreignness," especially if we also consider the elated expectations, speak for themselves:

But my sanguine hopes are slowly evaporating. Life is only life everywhere, with the same vanities, with the same illusions and mostly with the same scary countenance which breaks the momentum. The dreams are just as priceless here as on the other side. Only that one is happy who does not have dreams, as he is the only one who can enjoy all the pleasures of life.

But it is not excluded either that I am the only one to blame for this bitterness which gnaws my soul. No heaven can be so beautiful as the one that we have created in our souls. One's heaven can be the other's hell. Happiness is built on everybody's imagination, and fitted to everybody like a dress. It appears that I am a clumsy tailor, this is why I will never be able to make the desired dress... But in the place of dashed hopes there always grow new ones: even more rosy, even more angelic hopes, which open up new perspectives for us, and plant new desires into our hearts. The unknown future is the only serious motivation in this world, as it conceals all those secrets that give meaning to life [...]

So, while I am expecting the future – I console myself with the past. This big turmoil I happen to find myself in turns my thoughts backwards ever more frequently. Until I find a modest little place for myself in the new world, I long for the old one which I left behind. Please, write to me often and much about everything that happens at home, as now every trifle is more important for me than when I lived among them. My soul strays here in a desert without a place to rest, like a bird which has lost its nest... (471-472)

These paragraphs remain highly ambiguous. The Romanian nationalist-minded reader, who already knows the future and those “secrets” which “give meaning to life,” will tend to play down Titu's state of mind as it is only “temporary.” After the realization of national unity the hero can surely, and in all respects, *find his home*. The euphoria of unification washes away the bad feelings. However, the objective reader (whether he is Romanian or not) also has to know in the back of his mind that the victory over the Hungarians is in itself not enough for the Transylvanian spirit to “find its nest” in the great foreignness. Inevitably the notary Friedmann's (coming from Romania and settling down in Transylvania) words will come to his mind:

Well then, I would like to meet you after you have known Romania better!... You will surely find freedom and happiness there, you, who are constantly criticising and rebelling here. I will even ask you to send me a small postcard... Do you promise? [...] Do you happen to know that in your Romania nobody and nothing is stable? If by any chance the boyar doesn't like your eyes, the next day you will be laid off... There is no law, no administration there as in this blessed country, which you are defaming everywhere. No, sir! There the whims of the *ciocoi* rule over millions of ragged slaves... Please don't talk to me about Romania, because I know it better than you! I spent there three years when I was young, but as long as I live I won't forget how much I suffered during this time. (209-210)

And if the reader did not trust Friedmann's words, he had better open the author's other novel with a peasant topic, entitled *The Uprising [Răscoala]*, in order to consider the notary's words more seriously. It is obvious that Rebreanu's (who regards peasantry, as we will see, as the pledge of national conservation in his academic inaugural speech) alter ego cannot feel at home indeed in the country in which the 1907 peasant uprising (Europe's last large-scale peasant uprising) was suppressed with an almost medieval brutality.

With respect to the feeling of foreignness of the Transylvanians in the Greater Romania, Béla Borsi-Kálmán, in analysing the recollections of the members of the great generation creating the Romanian nation-state, also sets out a number of evidence (2012, 39-63), nevertheless we also have immediate evidence. We can read in Rebreanu's work entitled *Confessions*:

I came to the country after the peasant uprisings, where the Romanian horizon was stained red by the flames of manor houses put on fire and by the hotly bubbling blood... The cries have just died away. From the train window I saw heaps of ruins in the places of the former boyar farms or peasant villages. In some places, at the edge of villages fresh graves with white crosses aligned. Traces of a national tragedy.

In literature peasant romanticism prevailed, in the spirit of elections. The leading motifs were greedy tenants, melancholic boyars, idyllic peasants. The uprising gave birth only to a few anecdotes with doubtful humour. The horror [...] passed unnoticed. There remained the legend and an increased contempt and hatred against the peasants. I came to write about this specifically Romanian tragedy. (1987, 651)

Titu, enthusiastic about the Romanian peasant, just like Ana, in love with Ion, cannot feel at home in either "Romanian world." Nevertheless, the parallel between Ana's and Titu's situations also urges us to think further.

Narrative spaces

Structurally the novel is divided into two main parts. The first part is entitled *The Voice of Land*, the second one's title is *The Voice of Love*. The titles primarily allude to Ion's tragedy. In both cases the "voice" can be interpreted as a kind of a siren's voice, which irresistibly overcomes the hero and ultimately causes his destruction. The hypothesis of enchantment is also reinforced by the basically sensual relationship which binds Ion to the land. Earlier I quoted a passage which reveals that even Ana's femininity appears for Ion as the sensual attraction of the lands. However, in his referenced volume Alexandru Săndulescu also offers a whole series of other examples of this peculiar sensuality:

Rebreanu depicts the mad desire of becoming one with the land with a thick chalk, almost materially: “He wanted to feel the black earth under his feet, to see as it stuck to his spats, to breathe its narcotic scent, to absorb its colour...” The “naked” land which got rid of the snow cover seems for the hero’s visionary eyes as “a beautiful girl who strips off her shirt and lets her seducing naked body be seen.” The attraction is not only physical, but also profoundly emotional: “The black, sticky earth fettered his feet, and got stuck to them as the fiery woman to her lover,” the “fresh, soury and fertile scent inflamed his blood,” hence the inducement of embracement. The metaphor unifies the elements of dread, cold shudder, dark presentiment (“The sticky, black soil stuck to his hand as gloves”) and the pleasure pervaded by an invisible, mysterious light: “Then with a pious, slow motion, almost unconsciously, he leant down to the ground and pressed his lips to the wet ground with a lusty desire. And from the kiss dizzying, cold chills ran down his back ...” (1985, 25-26)

Ion’s passion towards the land occurs in front of the reader’s eyes already in its mature state. However, Titu’s passion towards the Romanian Transylvania and towards its poor, politically underprivileged people turns into an emotion almost similar to the passion of love before our very eyes.

In the evenings he was lying in the darkness on the sofa used as a bed and made dozens of plans for the future – one was more magniloquent than the other. Sometimes he saw himself with a torch in his hand, as he was leading a huge mass of peasants in the liberation war, other times he was wandering from village to village, carrying balm to the wounds of the tortured ones, teaching them how to make their fate easier and stirring in them the flame of good hope; sometimes he was leading a group of soldiers, under the three-coloured flag fluttering in the wind... He imagined the tortures that he would heroically endure for his people, and he often dreamt that he was staying at the bottom of a cellar, tied in chains and, still, happy in his heart, feeling like a martyr, who had to acquire the victory of the great masses by sacrifice. And these imaginations filled his soul with unprecedented pleasures. (227)

The two stories are related to each other only metonymically. At least apparently. However, in the universe of Rebreanu’s novel things are always related. The interwovenness of the threads of the plot is based on the *issue of land* and, implicitly, on the *analogy of the individual and community egoism*. We know that from the viewpoint of the novel’s genesis it is Ion’s story that is of primary importance. This is clearly indicated also by the chapter titles of the novel’s two

books, *The Voice of Land* and *The Voice of Love* respectively. There is almost no allusion to the story of the Herdelea family either. The intellectual story, whose main character is Titu – and the conflict between Belciug and Herdelea is only its tension creating element – is built into the basic story only later, as it can be deduced from information deriving from the author, and, in this way, it has a specific, in a certain sense subordinated function in the complex structure. It offers guidance of crucial importance for the reader in the interpretation of the national novel remaining open from a narrative aspect. It is transformed into an embedded story, into a kind of *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach 1980).

The basic difference between the peasant novel and the intellectual novel is that while in the peasant novel the drama of the land explicitly leads to the drama of private life, in the intellectual (national) novel the *dénouement* of “the drama of the land” (that is, the unification of Transylvania with Romania) can acquire completeness only through the reader’s historical knowledge. The novel structure appeals to the reader’s imagination even more in finding the national analogy of the drama of private life, even its incipits are suggested at the level of obscure (though hardly misunderstandable) presentiments and anxieties, in the form of worries whose *raison d’être* can be grounded by the very analogies with Ion’s story.

The question may rise even in the unbiased Romanian reader: If the great unification takes place in the same way as Ion’s unification with Baciú’s lands, can’t it have similar consequences as in Ion’s case? If the Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania and from Old Romania proceed in the same way as Ion, characterised as a “reduced personality” by literary criticism, that is, national egoism is be their major cause, can the tragic consequences be avoided? Won’t the Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania, whose main representative in the novel is Titu, put themselves in peril when in exchange for the land they become unfaithful to those whom they wish to represent, to the Transylvanians? As by assisting in not *fitting* Transylvania as an autonomous unity, but simply *assimilating* it into the rest of Romania, in terms of an idea of homogenisation taken over from the Hungarians, the Romanians from Transylvania will also lose not only their identity, but also their sovereignty in a political sense. While they do with their former masters the same as these did with them formerly, don’t they expose themselves to “foreign” powers? Will they manage, under such circumstances, to reduce the many-colouredness of their Transylvanian Romanian identity to a unique and exclusive “Romanian” identity without distorting the latter, in moral and spiritual terms, into self-dangerous nationalism (with the novel’s terminology, chauvinism)?

These questions, however, cannot be formulated in the Romanian readers of the time, stupefied by the exclusivity of the national idea. And I am afraid that they cannot be formulated in the overwhelming majority of today’s Romanian readers either. So much the more that the Rebreanu text, at least apparently, makes possible

also an approach that reduces the narrative complexity of the novel to a nationalist reading. If we regard Titu as Rebreanu's spokesman, and we disregard the ironical overtones of the narratorial voice and the satirical components of character formation (similarly to the traditional Romanian literary criticism and literary history writing),⁷ this reading may even seem authentic. But if we regard the text in its complexity and we follow the hidden but well explorable fiction signals, this reading, almost exclusive in school education (Bíró 2008, 60) can hardly satisfy the initiated reader.

Inside-outside

This hypothesis also seems to be supported by another aspect of the spaces thematised by the novel. One key term of narrative space construction is, according to Bachelard (1994), then Van Baak (1983, 50-55) and also Lutwack (1984, 37-47), the opposition between the *inside* and the *outside*.

This specific space orientation, characteristic only of central (that is, in their ultimate consequences, circular) spaces, is also an essence-determining feature of the space structures of *Ion*. The Romanians from Transylvania feel (rightfully) that they cannot have access to the political, cultural and economic spaces operated by the Hungarian state without giving up their identity. These spaces are thus foreign to them. With Van Baak's words, the "warm, safe and educated intimacy" of the spaces of the own community is opposed to a world that is "cold, insecure and out of law," to a world which threatens the *spaces of intimacy* with collapse. Thus, the experience of discriminatedness is accompanied by that of *threatenedness*.

Ion feels discriminated for other reasons. He had to experience the gradual lowering from the well-to-do peasant status to poverty, the trauma of losing the land providing security. It is his obsession-like dream to get back to the lost intimacy. But for this he does not only have to manipulate Ana, that is, to intrude (unauthorised) into the girl's feelings and thoughts, but he also has to get into Baciú's house. It is of symbolic significance that he makes Ana pregnant at arm's length from the drunken father.

For Ana, who has lost her mother as a child, and who is disregarded by men for her ugliness, Ion represents that world of intimacy and love which she longs for with all her being and with such an intensity that she is not willing to take notice of the most apparent facts; and when she cannot help facing them, then there is no other escape but suicide.

In Titu's case the situation is even more complex. He is raised by his parents to adapt to the situation. We can learn from the narrator's chance hints that he

⁷ The statement should be applied not only to *Ion*; the author's oeuvre also contains a satirical series of works (already starting with those written in Hungarian), with which criticism again does not know what to do.

disposes of the language knowledge, education and *feeling of being at home*, which would apparently make possible for him to find his feet in the foreign world. Still, he has to realise that this is impossible anyway. We can even know why from the biography of his real alter ego, Rebreanu. The successful assimilation also presupposes a proper economic background, which the peasant environment cannot guarantee for him, not even the status of schoolmaster of his father (Bíró 2011a, 79-89). Or if it can, then only in exceptional cases.⁸

Zaharia Herdelea, in spite of the fact that he speaks only broken Hungarian, is *simultaneously both inside and outside*. This fact, as I have already mentioned several times, arises from the characteristics of his constitution, from his inborn empathy and tact. He is the only figure of the novel who is honest from tip to toe, in the case of whom even the narrator allows himself only mild irony at most (see the innocent assumption of the role of a martyr, or the not less innocent boastings with the “ministerial” letter!). His sense of reality and his impressively benevolent character are the bases of the moral measure of the narrative.

This is not accidental at all, as Rebreanu, implicitly the model author creating the narrator, similarly to the old schoolmaster, is himself simultaneously inside and outside. It is this specificity of his personality that is the source of the exceptional complexity and nuancedness of the novel's language and narrative structure. This nuancedness is clearly indicated not only by the depiction of the moral constraints of the heroes labelled as nationalists, but also by the above mentioned nuancedness of the narrative function of the free indirect discourse and of the marked quotation. It is also indisputable that in Titu the model author sees and has the narrator depict his former self. But already from *the outside*. It is this simultaneous existence of the inner and outer points of view that raises the novel to the level of an aesthetic achievement of universal value.

We can only regret that Rebreanu is compelled to become a writer in the age of mutual unilateralism. In a more balanced period the specificities of his built, also suggested by *Ion*, *Forest of the Hanged* and *Ițic Strull as a Deserter*, could have made him capable of achievements to be paralleled to the works of the greatest authors of world literature.

All the more because Rebreanu does not give up his Transylvanian identity even when he settles down in Old Romania. He does not see Transylvania only with the eyes of the Romanians from Transylvania, but also with those from Old Romania, what is more, with those of the Hungarians. Just as in the explicit or implicit evaluation of the conditions in Old Romania or Hungary, he always has an *outer* point of view in store. However, the unilaterally nationalist world of the beginning of the twentieth century makes it impossible for him – as a member of

⁸ Rebreanu's brother manages to become a military officer, his fate and inner drama becomes the theme of another masterpiece by Rebreanu, the novel entitled *The Forest of the Hanged*.

the “Romanian national community” constructed by the Romanian intellectuals during the nineteenth century – to create any form of *completeness* unveiling the opposing truths. Still, this completeness is implicitly discernible in his whole life work and in *Ion* to the most extent. In objectivity, the Rebreanu of the novel *Ion* goes to the outermost boundaries imaginable in those days. It is often obvious that he regards even himself, his former (or later) ideas, with irony.

This explains why the novel *Ion* can become for us, Hungarian readers, of determining significance. As the most objective and the most thought provoking depiction of the Transylvanian reality of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, it can create a unique possibility for us to face a shockingly precise image of the Romanians, and in this way, to form a much more exact and objective image of ourselves, too.

The chronotopes of transition

I have already mentioned that the spaces created in the novel are transitional in all respects; in other words, in line with the fourth principle of Foucault’s definition of heterotopia, they also dispose of a significant temporal component (1986).

In Ion’s passion towards the land we can also meet the heterogeneous mixture of the ancient instincts and modern individualism, which, due to its contradictory character, threatens the order of the community – still archaic in several respects – with collapse. When it comes to lands, Baciú and Ion tread underfoot the most elementary requirements of humanity. The scenes of Ana’s mistreatment, depicted with Zola’s naturalism, illuminate the depths, unparalleled in literature, of inhumanization, of the impassivity towards the sufferings of the other.

In a certain respect Ion surpasses even his father-in-law. To repeat the statements of my earlier study: at that time Baciú got married out of interest too, but later he passionately fell in love with his wife, as he could not forget that he owed everything that he had and that he could become, to his wife. His love towards his wife became so strong that Baciú simply could not bear her absence, in his suffering and pain about the loss he started drinking. Ion is no longer capable of such love with an archaic aura. He is already a modern individual, an ego pushed as far as paroxysm... As Herdelea’s best pupil and a transitional secondary school learner he has already tasted the culture whose basic value is the individual. And he also understands that the actual soil of this individualism is economic power, and ultimately, money. This is why he returns to the land, to the only thing he has good knowledge of.

Rebreanu accurately detects that at the end of the century Transylvanian society, just like European society, passes through profound changes. The relationships between production and consumption, majority and minority, men and women, peasants and intellectuals change. The peasants become more and

more the tools in the hand of the nationalist intellectuals, thirsty for power, more precisely, unrestrainedly egoistic. The intellectuals want to reinforce and extend their political influence by raising the so-called national sentiment, the cultural egotism converted into political doctrine. Csernátóyi still understands the Romanians very well and does not believe that it would be the interest of the Hungarian state to expect a native level of Hungarian knowledge from the children of the Romanians living in compact communities. Horváth, the “ardent” Hungarian nationalist, however, is unable even to try to consider things reasonably. And it is in this way that he betrays the interests of the nation. Just like his Romanian comrades. Since, as an aftermath of the trends in the novel, it is not only the Hungarian Kingdom that falls apart, but – in terms of the national exclusiveness (also) “sanctified” by the traditional interpretations of the novel *Ion* – Transylvania will also be lowered to the level of the Balkans. Instead of the old Romanian Kingdom (the so-called *Regat*) rising to the cultural, economic and political level of the Transylvania from the Monarchy.

However, serious biographical arguments and written documents can be set against the above presented possibility of interpretation. Based on these, it could be easily proven that Rebreanu, the physical person in a narratological sense (the “empirical author”) is undoubtedly nationalist (in today’s pejorative sense of the term), that is, supporter of the Romanian national exclusivity. But in the respective period practically every Romanian is nationalist. There could be not even one person in the public sphere who would raise his voice against the Anghelescu-type of laws of the beginning of the 1920s which label Szeklerland as a “culture zone,” fill it with Romanian primary school teachers, subject the Hungarian state employees to degrading language examinations, in other words, reproduce in all respects (and what is more, even more intolerantly) the national oppression from Pripas, Gargalău and Lușca.

What is more, by the 1940s Rebreanu, as a significant part of his Hungarian contemporaries, assimilates the category system of the German national socialism (*Blut und Boden, Lebensraum*). Publicly he never becomes a fascist; he remains devoted to the citizen nationalism of liberalism until his death. Still, he writes in this manner: “The Romanian living space enclosed by our boundaries is not the result of arbitrary conquests; on the contrary, it is the clear expression of the Romanian national essence... We are created by this land, in its own image and likeness” (Rebreanu 1984, 305).

For today’s ear several other statements of Rebreanu’s sound rather awkward: “Our cities are not the expressions of national essence – he said. – The city, which was most often created and developed by needs different from the Romanian ones, has not adapted to these needs yet, to be able to become the source of clear Romanianness...” (Rebreanu 1984, 313).

In his laudation of Rebreanu's academic inaugural speech the academic I. Petrovici states with good reason: "the substance of the conclusion of the discourse that we heard is not very new, on the contrary, we could say that it is widely spread nowadays, sometimes even on the verge of sliding into dangerous exaggerations," that is, Rebreanu is inclined to "crumbling the unity and universality of truth into distinct national compartments" (1984, 332). Of course, those national truths that Petrovici refers to are, according to the mentality of the time, *not universalities completing each other* (as we regard them today), but *mutually exclusive particularities*.

As if he had wanted to confirm his opponent, in an article from *Familia*, entitled *Transilvania 1940*, Rebreanu wrote: "Romanian justice is so evident that we did not consider it necessary to prove it or we were not capable of proving it. Only those who are not right have to struggle, to lie and to cheat in order to create appearances as opposed to evidence" (1984, 331-333). It is obvious that, similarly to the Hungarian nationalists, he is not capable of getting out of the vicious circle of the obsession of the nation-state ideology and implicitly that of moving the frontiers either, since he is utterly unable to see – also as a twin brother of the Hungarian nationalists – the part of truth of the other party.

However, in his quality of the model author, and especially as the authorial narrator of the novel, he cannot exempt himself from the writerly constraint of at least implicitly acknowledging the alternative truths of the other party. Even in the absence of explicit confessions the supposition is imposed that Rebreanu, starting his career as a Hungarian writer, will take into account also later the valuable opinions of his possible Hungarian or German readers. Not to mention the conscious or unconscious considerations stemming from his ambitions to world literature. He writes about the *Forest of the Hanged*:

My hero is not a hero in the common sense of the term, as in the *Forest of the Hanged* I depict the origin and increase of the disruption of moral equilibrium. He is basically weak as everyone, he is thirsty for love, which he finds with a Hungarian girl – though this may seem improbable for a specialist in literature –, and under the gallows he is mourned also by a Hungarian man, Ilona's father. I think all this is more human in this way, and a novel which does not throb with life full of terrible things and contradictions – even if it is successful – has no chance of survival. (qtd. in Săndulescu 1985, 146-147)

The embedded sentence ("though this may seem improbable for a specialist in literature") betrays a lot. It indicates the distortions of the literary conscience that the writer of the time had to confront with. These distortions may simultaneously indicate the *concealment* of the model author and the narrator, but also the systematic

ambiguities of the narratorial discourse, the sustenance of a (presumable) alternative of interpretation – more acceptable for the non-Romanian reader.

Not to mention the fact that Rebreanu's narrator has to comply with the democratic rules of the game well known also by Rebreanu himself. Literature is the space of the *completeness* of truth (unattainable in real life), the space in which artistic truth, thanks to its very mediality, can never be unilateral (as in the "national" historical sciences) or "absolutely" objective (as in natural sciences), it rather has to be formed as the complex and often contradictory unity of the more important points of view.

The more profoundly a writer understands the criterion-character of this complexity and contradictoriness, the better chances he has to create a really lasting work. As also testified by his great works, Rebreanu is aware of the importance of this criterion. Even if irreconcilable oppositions stand between the empirical author and the model author.

In the author's literary legacy we can find a whole series of dramas, short stories, drama and novel fragments written in flawless, sophisticated Hungarian. These texts undoubtedly prove that in a certain period of his life their author considers the possibility of a career in the Hungarian literary publicity not only attractive, but also feasible. (Implicitly certain forms of assimilation are not unimaginable for him either.) It is hardly believable that this could have disappeared also from the subconscious of the reading public only within a few years. For a person belonging to the "minority," the success obtained as a minority in the "majority" publicity constitutes a social-psychological instinct that is hard to easily surpass anyway. Even if in the meantime he does not only turn away from, but also turns against any form of assimilation.

Temporality, however, has another aspect of crucial importance in the novel. The novel is basically *realist*, what is more, its spaces, *naturalistic* in several respects, are transformed into unambiguously *idyllic* ones in the closure of the novel, into the specific *space* of national *mythologies*, where all conflicts, misunderstandings, moreover, all contradictions cease to exist and the fellow nations, similarly to the lovers of fairy tales, live happily ever after. The novel ends with a so-called "story ending prediction" (Lämmert 1955, 312-321). Ion, breaking the norms of co-existence of the community, dies tragically (not to say that he obtains his "deserved" punishment). Belciug, who has built the church representing the togetherness in God of the community, will mend his ways; what is more, he will almost become the saint of the national idea. The excellent lawyer, Grofșoru, assumes the defense of George, who has killed Ion. The Herdelea couple will find a new place in Armadia and the younger daughter, Ghighi, and Zăgreanu will move to their house from Pripas. And also, Zăgreanu himself, inspector Horváth's fellow, seems as if he "took a vow" when parting from the Herdelea couple. Obviously, he

will also devote his pedagogical career to educating the pupils in the Romanian national spirit.

That's all, folks! – Rebreanu could have written at the end of his novel. Still, he did not do that. The novel ends with an unusual dedication: "To the many humiliated ones!" Dedications are usually placed at the beginning of the work, as ulterior dedications do not make much sense. It can hardly be accidental that Rebreanu (or the editor?) puts it to the end of the novel. We could also say: the dedication had to appear at the end of the novel in order "to avoid misunderstandings." To ground, so to say, the improbable perfectness of the idyll. For in the final rounding the reader may have the impression that it is the irony of the ending of novels like *Tom Jones* that (repeatedly) permeates the story ... The characters like Belciug do not usually mend their ways in real life... Rebreanu's narrator as well as the first readers of the novel are obviously also aware of this. The dedication has to counterbalance this *heterotopical* sense of reality in Foucault's sense of the term (*de facto* opposing the *utopical* one), having the only function, by asserting the motif of national humiliation, of draining away the sensitivity towards the ironical overtone aroused by the improbability of the idyll, in other words, of putting out the sense of humour. In the case of the reader of the time, powerfully socialised to nationalism, this can easily be obtained. As nationalism in itself is nothing else but the chronic absence of the sense of humour. At least in a national sense. (The Caragiale-phenomenon could also be compensation, at the rank of world literature, of this absence.)

Irony, however, as proved by Compagnon (1998, 74-105), presupposes some kind of authorial intention in any case. In Rebreanu's case this "intention" seems to be instinctive rather than conscious. It may arise from Rebreanu's writer self, from his narrative subconscious.

Translated by Judit Pieldner

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