

IOSUD – „DUNĂREA DE JOS” UNIVERSITY OF GALAȚI

Doctoral School of Socio-Human Sciences



DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

GABRIELA MELINESCU'S PROSE – LITERATURE AND EXILE

PhD Student, Maria DOBRINOIU

PhD Coordinator,

Professor, Eugenia-Simona ANTOFI

Seria U 2: Filologie – Română nr. 41

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Gabriela Melinescu's Prose - Literature and exile

Abstract

Key words: Gabriela Melinescu, literature, prose, exile, trauma, identity, Gaston Bachelard, imagined image, psyche, aquatic metaphor, reverie, water, fire, earth, space.

Our research paper advances a re-reading of a corpus made up of the literary writings of Gabriela Melinescu, from a double perspective - on the one hand, we are interested in the relevance of the reading grid proposed and exemplified by Gaston Bachelard on literature in general, and on the other hand, the elements that generally characterize exile writing. In the particular case of Gabriela Melinescu, the elements of novelty on which such an analytical approach is based reside in the association of this reading grid with the literary prose of the above mentioned writer, starting from the premise of the intrinsic poetics of this writing and from the option of Bachelard himself, in text analysis demonstrations, for poetic discourse. We have assumed the risks of such an approach - for example, the opinion that returning to the Bachelard reading grid, in the context of post(post)modernism, is proof of a (too) conservative attitude, especially because there is no such approach to Gabriela Melinescu's literary prose today. The hermeneutic reading will be completed with the analysis of the particularities of the writing, resulting as a consequence of the exile perceived through the eyes of a writer who has been intensely tested by life hardships, but capable of projecting in her imagination, under the sign of recurring archetypal symbols, compensatory and exorcising universes in relation to the marked reality the pressure of the dictatorship, the anguish of exile and the need to adapt to the new conditions of existence.

Gabriela Melinescu is a writer who does not distinguish between novel and diary, between poetry and prose, brands of these two types of discourse circulating and interfering in the very substance of her writing. Taking into account this fact, the approach proposed by us allows not only a coherent recovery and systematization of literary works and the capture of the inner dynamics of the writing, but also the identity mutations that it generates and that are projected in the text - that are predominantly confessional, or in novels – through a network of representations subsumed by the archetypal elements to which the Bachelard reading grid refers.

We propose to investigate in detail the polymorphism and complexity of this phenomenon represented by exile, focusing our analytical approach on the definition and typology of the

concept, but also on following a periodization of the Romanian literary migration. From this perspective, Gabriela Melinescu's confessional literature outlines a novel investigation process in the context of contemporary Romanian culture, which invites to a careful analysis.

Eva Behring, a leading researcher of the Romanian exile phenomenon, considers that "exile produces a paradigm shift, first at the ontological level, then at the level of the manner of creation,"¹ the exiled individual being like a prisoner, not having an interlocutor and not being able to express his beliefs other than by condensing his message and launching it on the territory of literature, where discrimination, trauma, suffering submit to the imperative of being expressed and thus healed.

In this attempt to decode the depth of the symbolism of Gabriela Melinescu's writing, we associated the studies on literature, especially those related to the literature of exile, with the Bachelard reading grid of the studied texts, from the perspective of the fact that this is a type of writing intensely marked by the effects of exile, the writer assuming exile as the overarching theme of his entire work; within this scriptural paradigm, the four fundamental elements - especially water and fire, in direct correlation with the Bachelardian method of interpreting the literary text, trace the symbolic outline of Gabriela Melinescu's own imaginary.

The research paper is organized into six chapters that bring together, from a perspective that we want to converge, the theoretical-methodological elements necessary for a mandatory framework related to the concept of literature, more precisely, exile literature, a re-updation of the main data of the Bachelardian reading grid of the literary text and an application of all of them, corroborated, on the selected literary corpus.

Throughout the first chapter, entitled *Literature as an exercise in (re)configuration of existence and as (re)construction of meanings*, trying to define literature from an axiological perspective, we start from the simple consideration that it represents the art of the word, a very particular form of creation, and its meaning is realized and received from the perspective of the concept of value, which belongs to philosophy. The correct and objective understanding of a literary work entails that it can be interpreted from the perspective of an axiology of literature in particular and art in general, which in turn entails aesthetic, psychological, philosophical, stylistic concepts. Perhaps a first objective of literature is to sculpt out the personality of the individual, to probe the way he/she

¹ Eva, Behring, *Romanian Writers in exile: 1945 -1989*, Bucureşti, Editura Fundației Culturale Românești, 2001, pp. 70-71.

thinks and how they express themselves through words and emotionally marked images, which involve the reader in an approach whose constant elements we have tried to also synthesize.

The second chapter, entitled *Gaston Bachelard's Poetics - preliminaries to a (possible) (re)updation of the method*, provides a brief introduction to Bachelard's philosophy and the phenomenological tools of *the imagined image*². The reason for associating studies on literature, especially the literature of exile, with the Bachelardian reading grid of Gabriela Melinescu's texts lies in the fact that this is a writing intensely marked by the traumatic effects of exile, which assumes exile as a dominant theme and which subsequently reveals a sort of „broken identity” or „identity in rupture” - in Sorin Alexandrescu's terms³; this type of writing is built in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the Bachelardian method of interpreting the literary text, under the auspices of the four fundamental elements that draw the symbolic outline of a writer's own imaginary. It is, therefore, also about the problem of identity construction through literary writing, but through the primordial elements that function, in Bachelard, as the pillars of a fundamentally poetic vision of the world. Perhaps that is why the writings of Gabriela Melinescu, herself a poet, resonate strongly with Gaston Bachelard's ideas on the literary work.

In Bachelard's vision, the writer puts the reader's thoughts on the path of dreams, making their dream, potentiating their thoughts: "We believe that the psychology of aesthetic emotions would only have something to gain if it studied the area of material reveries, which precedes contemplation. Before we contemplate, we dream. Before being a conscious spectacle, any landscape is a dreamlike or „identity inexperience. We only look with aesthetic passion at the landscapes we first saw in a dream."⁴

² "...the perceived image and the created image are two very different psychic instances and we would need a special word to designate the imagined image. Everything that is said in textbooks about reproductive imagination must be attributed to perception and memory. The creative imagination has completely different functions than the reproductive imagination. It belongs to that function of the unreal which is psychically as useful as the function of the real, so often evoked by psychologists to characterize the adaptation of a spirit to a reality marked by social values.(...) Since reverie is always seen as relaxation, those dreams with precise action that we will designate as reveries of the will are ignored. And when the real is here, in its full force, in its full earthly matter, we can easily believe that the function of the real removes the function of the unreal. Then we forget the unconscious drives, the dream forces that spread together in the conscious life. We will therefore have to increase our attention, if we want to discover the prospective activity of images, if we want to place the image even before perception, as an adventure of perception." (Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and reveries of the will*, translated by Irina Mavrodin, Ed. Univers, 1998, p. 6.)

³ V. Sorin Alexandrescu, *Broken Identity*, Bucureti, Ed. Univers, 2000.

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *Water and dreams. Essay on the imagination of matter*, Ed. Univers, Bucuresti, 1995, p. 9.

Bachelard combines psychoanalysis with phenomenology and advances an approach in which the hermeneutics applied to the literary text does not investigate the dreams of scholars or the complexes of writers, but believes that animus or anima, combined with a scientific notion or a poetic image, can represent the object of analysis, as he also emphasizes Romul Munteanu in the preface to *Psychoanalysis of fire*, on the sidelines of the Poetics of reverie: "The ontology of reverie is based on the state of tranquility. Gaston Bachelard distinguishes reverie in the posture of anima and that which is found under the sign of animus. The first is sweet, Apollonian, quiet, the second, although approaching some forms of Dionysian ecstasy, is vigilant and critical. The anima acts in a state of tenderness, reads little, the animus drives the composition of a work, critical reading, the anima facilitates identification reading, typical of the happy reader."⁵

Chapter 3, called *Exile and (identity through) literature – observations about the dynamics of a binomial*, offers a series of theoretical-methodological basic aspects of Romanian exile literature, through examples of the works and aesthetic conceptions of some representative writers for this historical period.

It is a well known fact that exile is generated by discrimination or autocratic, totalitarian regimes, dictatorship being the main element that leads to exile, and exiled people are, in general, undesirable for the authorities in the country of origin, the most numerous undesirables being forced to leave their the country, some for reasons of a political, ideological or religious nature, others for purely personal reasons: "Oppression, political persecution, discrimination, imprisonment and threat of imprisonment, publication ban and censorship, in other words political and cultural political reasons for expulsion or to make one's own decision to leave the country, all of these seem to us to be indispensable determinants for the definition of exile."⁶

In his work, *West of Eden*, Cornel Ungureanu emphasizes precisely this destructive-reconstructive aspect that exile can manifest on the human being: "Exile is the first and most important of the punishments that have fallen on man. More than a punishment, it is the process by which it comes into being. Man exists only after he has been expelled from Paradise. Man as we know him, man-like-us, is the one set in a time and a space, both constraining. East of Eden, man must earn, every day, his right to life."⁷

⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *Psychoanalisis of Fire*, Ed. Univers, Bucureşti, 1989, în prefaţă lui Romul Muntean, pp. XXII-XXIII.

⁶ Eva Behring, *Romanian Writers n exile: 1945 -1989*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁷ Cornel Ungureanu, *West of Eden. O introducere în literatură exilului*, Ed. Amarcord, Timișoara, 1995, p. 5.

In the same context, in issue no. 3 (383) of 2022 of Apostrof magazine, Iulian Boldea, in the article-review of the book *Exiled Shadow*, by Norman Manea, entitled, Exile and the ethics of memory, which Monica Lovinescu called *the ethics of not forgetting*, starts from her own definition of exile : "Felt as a geographical and inner duality, exile questions the condition of the self under the spectrum of the marginal, as an expression of a fractured identity."⁸

We add, here, the statement of the same Iulian Boldea, according to which "...the Romanian writers of the exile are, without any doubt, part of the circuit of values of the Romanian spirituality. They are the product of the mioritic spiritual matrix, which they carried in their deepest selves, wherever they were forced to stop, willingly, or, above all, unwillingly, in their peregrinations. That's why Romanian literature cannot be complete without their works, in which local realities shine through with the passionate insistence of some obsessions"⁹, by virtue of which we consider our approach to attempt a decoding of exile and the transfiguration of reality through its prism to be particularly opportune, in the writings of Gabriela Melinescu, in direct relation with both an ontological and an artistic paradigm, both linked to a terrible and implacable longing, through which the individual remains bound to the space in which he was born and to which he continues to return, through painful memories , through stirring convulsions of the exiled self, which, then, the writer invites us to take part in as a purifying exercise "not only through its geographical uprooting, but also through the tragic breaking of the being from its spiritual matrix space."¹⁰

This chapter of our analytical approach also contains a subchapter entitled: *Gabriela Melinescu - A song of a Romanian girl among the Vikings*. On the one hand, this song is the metaphor of the exile of a Romanian writer, on the other hand, it is the metaphor of an Adamic language, in which the perception of reality is total, a language that Gabriela Melinescu almost transforms into a chimerical character throughout all her works: "Language is a first tone, song, an invocation and then words, therefore only a vital community can give me the authentic tone, so that I can then, with ease, sing my aria: the mother tongue."¹¹

The writer makes the theory of the language located close to the song, a language that carries in it all the humanity of the world and everything it needs to come to life in the format of a book. In an

⁸ Iulian Boldea, *Exilul și etica memoriei*, în Revista Apostrof, din 2022, anul XXXIII, nr. 3 (382), disponibil la adresa: <https://www.revista-apostrof.ro/arhiva/an2022/n3/a11/>, accesat la 29.02.2024.

⁹ Iulian Boldea, *Exilul literar românesc, între traumă și luciditate*, în Revista Vatra, din 12 iulie, 2016, disponibil la adresa: <https://revistavatra.org/tag/literatura-exilului>, accesat la 08.01.2024.

¹⁰ Iulian Boldea, art. cit.

¹¹ Gabriela, Melinescu, *Swedish Journal I, 1976-1983*, Ed. Univers, București, 2000, p. 9.

effort not to forget her mother tongue, while she is forced to learn Swedish, she confesses: "I write... for fear of losing that verbal gift of entering the language like a huge river and letting myself carried away by its gigantic waves."¹²

Throughout chapter 4, called *Gabriela Melinescu's Literary Prose - from public success to specialized critical reception*, we undertake a review of how Gabriela Melinescu's literary writings were received both in the country and abroad.

Mircea A. Diaconu is the one who emphasises the dreamlike dimension of Gabriela Melinescu's writings, the dream representing another important Melinescu theme, her prose deeply rooted in the dream world, becoming a prose that acquires both epistemological and phantasmatic accents: "Gabriela Melinescu assumes more and more a mystical understanding of the world, knowing that the great analogies are revealed only in dreams, and the lesson that the dream imposes is that of the identity of opposites. From this position, the visionaryism expected this time by literary criticism is replaced by a primary energy that transposes the being outside of its corporeality, on the ideal ground of essences. It is not visionaryism itself (so visible in the drawings) that feeds Gabriela Melinescu's poetry. Not the gratuitous visionaryism, drunk by the obsessions of the visceral nocturnal and the phantasmatic. But the one that becomes knowledge, truth, even an existential norm, a survival manual. So that the evolution of Gabriela Melinescu is visible both in her choices and in her expression, and her voice, unmistakable, similar to that of the great initiates, affirms above all a way of being in the world, one that, far from Christian humility, although with its roots in it means the discovery of the self under the lead sheets of the real."¹³

In the article *Casa de fum/The Smoke House*, issue no. 38, year XXIII, dated September 20, 1990, of the literary Romania magazine, Gabriel Dimisianu emphasizes the need to recognize the literary value of Gabriela Melinescu and include her among the writers whose work not only belongs to the national culture, but it also needs to be honoured: "Regardless of how it is in its entirety, the literature of this important contemporary writer must be reintegrated into the literary space to which it belongs and from which the hardships of the times snatched it."¹⁴

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹³ Mircea Diaconu, „*Stări de suflet*” de *Gabriela Melinescu*”, din 11.ianuarie, 2011, disponibil la adresa: <https://www.agentiadearte.ro/2011/01/eveniment-editorial-serie-dedicata-poetilor-laureati-ai-premiului-national-de-poezie-%E2%80%9Cmihai-eminescu%E2%80%9D-opera-omnia.html>, accesat la 20.01.2024.

¹⁴ Gabriel Dimisianu, *Gabriela Melinescu – Smoke House*, România literară, XXIII, nr. 38, din 20 septembrie, 1990.

We considered it natural that in chapter number five, dedicated to the (*auto*)biography of *Gabriela Melinescu*, we should sketch a portrait of this writer, reinforced by a brief analysis of the interviews which, in turn, draw the contours of a profile of a unique intellectual and creator in the Romanian and even European cultural space.

Specialized critical support is provided by a series of studies and documents available in printed and online volumes, among which we mention: Florin Manolescu's *Enciclopedia exilului literar romanesesc 1945-1989*; Gheorghe Glodeanu's *Incursions in the literature of diaspora and dissidence*; Aurel Sasu's *Biographical Dictionary of Romanian Literature*; Cornel Ungureanu's *West of Eden. An introduction to the literature of exile*; Liana Cozea's *The second self*; Mihaela Cristea's *The initiatory experience of exile*; Mihaela Ursă's *The Writer's Sofa, Gabriela Melinescu, The concept of "feminine poetry" is the discriminatory invention of men*; Gaston Bachelard's *Water and dreams. Essay on the Imagination of Matter*; Gaston Bachelard's *Psychoanalysis of Fire*; Gaston Bachelard's *The Earth and the Reveries of the Will*, critical studies of utmost importance for our analytical approach. The processing and synthesis of the biographical information was done in accordance with the need to create an image - even if it is a one - of the personal and wider, socio-cultural and even political context which determined, to a good extent, the trajectory of Gabriela Melinescu's existence, her writing and which it was reflected, in a very particular way, in her texts. Especially in relation to the selection of literary texts that is the object of our approach, and in direct correlation with the Bachelardian reading grid, such a contextualization serves our research, as a series of external events, with deep reverberations in the individuality of Gabriela Melinescu, have passed in writing and will be analyzed as such.

As a conclusion, we can say that at the center of the aesthetic conception of her work, Gabriela Melinescu lies the dream and the force of the imagined image. That is why, during the sixth chapter, entitled *Reconstruction of reality between the dream and the projections of fundamental symbols – exercises in Bachelardian hermeneutics*, we dedicated several subchapters to this hermeneutic method. The psychoanalysis of water and fire seemed very productive to us in the reading of this writer, who considers the dream a sort of *a secret treasure*¹⁵, which we set out - symbolically and hermeneutically - to discover.

¹⁵ "Usually the unloved child invents a treasure. The secret treasure becomes a dream. The child dreams of becoming an adult as quickly as possible, so adult that he is able to realize his world, "his private myth, outside of time" Gabriela Melinescu would write in "33 revelations" (see G.M., 33 de revelații, Romania Press Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 8).

As we said before, our analysis follows two axes of work - the baccalaureate reading grid, which has not been applied to Gabriela Melinescu's prose before, there is only one study, in this sense, applied only to a few samples of poetry, entitled „*The Poetics of the Aquatic in Contemporary Feminine Lyric (in six guises)*¹⁶ . The novelty of our approach lies in the fact that it will be grafted on the specificity of exile literature.

Gabriela Melinescu's talent to create memorable aquatic metaphors and a certain density of these images, which in fact creates the materiality of the work, seems like a bizarre plant nourished by two psychic organisms, two original systems of association of ideas - one is Ophelia's complex¹⁷, and the other is Caron's complex¹⁸, exactly the major themes of Gaston Bachelard.

Our analysis will focus on a preliminary hermeneutic exercise of water and its dream movements - in the sub-chapter entitled *Dream movements of water - preliminary hermeneutic exercise*, starting from the "imagined images" of water and reaching the (re)configuration of identity through writing, as reflected in the novel *Home among Strangers* - in the subsection *Home among Strangers - from the "imagined images" of water to the (re)configuration of identity through writing*. The research approach continues with the analysis of the novel *Children of Patience* - in the sub-chapter *Children of Patience - symbols of dissolution* we will identify a series of symbols

¹⁶ 1 Decembrie 1918" din Alba-Iulia, Facultatea de istorie și filologie, Școala doctorală de filologie, Conducător științific: Prof. univ. dr. Mircea Braga, disponibil la adresa: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgklefndmkaj/http://doctorate.uab.ro/upload/64_1860_rezumat_romana_poetica_a_cvaticului_in_lirica_romaneasca_actuala(in_sase_ipostazieri).pdf, accesat la 08.02.2024.

¹⁷ "Psychoanalysis showed us that we must give the accident its psychological role. He who plays with fire burns himself, wants to burn himself, wants to burn others. He who plays with treacherous water drowns, wants to drown. On the other hand, madmen in literature retain enough wisdom—enough determination—to associate themselves with drama, to follow the law of drama. They respect, in the margin of action, the unity of action. Ophelia can therefore be for us the symbol of female suicide. She is truly a being born to die in water, where she finds, as Shakespeare says, "her own element." Water is the element of young and beautiful death, of death in bloom and, in the dramas of life and literature, it is the element of death that knows no pride or revenge, of masochistic suicide. Water is the deep, organic symbol of the woman who knows nothing but to mourn her unhappiness and whose eyes fill so easily with tears." (Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams. Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, translation and bibliography by Irina Mavrodi, Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 1995, p. 95).

¹⁸ "Having traversed the earth, having traversed the fire, the soul will reach the water's edge. The deep imagination, the material imagination, wants water to participate in death; she needs water to preserve the traveling sense of death. We therefore understand that, for such infinite dreams, all souls, whatever the kind of funeral, must climb into Charon's boat. (...) We can therefore formulate a Caron complex. Caron's complex is not very strong; his image is today very faded. In many cultured minds it suffers the fate of too many references to a dead literature, becoming merely a symbol. But its weakness and lack of color make us feel even better that in fact culture and nature can still coincide." (Gaston Bachelard, *Water and dreams. Essay on the imagination of matter*, translation and bibliography by Irina Mavrodi, Bucharest, Publishing Univers, 1995, p. 88).

of dissolution, so that in the novels *Wolves Ascend to Heaven* and *Queen of the Street* we can perform a psychoanalysis of water and fire from the same Bachelardian perspective – in the subchapter entitled Symbolic poses of fire in the novels *Wolves ascend to Heaven* and *Queen of the Street*. The novel *Queen of the Street* also proposes, in our opinion, an interpretation of the hypostases of light - something that we will demonstrate in the subchapter *Daughters of General Algon and hypostases of light*, so that in the last subchapter of the work we propose *a symbolic equation of phantasmal characters as a tool of (re)constitution of the real*. The actual analysis will be based on situating in the proximity of Gabriela Melinescu's text, starting from the conviction that two substances are predominant in the diegetic space of her work - *water and fire*.

Water and fire are the fundamental symbols of the scriptural imaginary of this rare writer. The metaphors of water and metaphors of fire fully nourish the substance of Gabriela Melinescu's novels, they are central, spherical motifs, the two elements often enhancing each other, interfering and changing their properties. In her novels with a strong anti-totalitarian character – water can, paradoxically, bring thirst, it can burn like some cursed water from the world of death, and fire can offer deliverance, purify and cool the space.

The characters of these novels are attracted to the aquatic world, such as the Italian typographer Beppo, who will die from longing for the ocean, but there are also characters fascinated by fire, such as Luca Onu, who, for no apparent reason, burns down olhis d man's house and goes out into the world .

Not only can the characters be interpreted through the psychoanalysis of water, but also the entire narrative technique. If the writing of this prose writer were a wave, the whole novel could be conceived as a wave bordered by shocks, fractured by moments of crisis, of heavy balance, but nevertheless, keeping its kinetic energy and the power to recompose itself, just like water. There is no guarantee that love will survive till tomorrow¹⁹, but it will always recompose itself. In the same way, the volutes of this writing - like the characters it builds, and in which episodes, sequences, emotions reverberate, bursting from the writer's memories, are composed and (are)

¹⁹ "Since childhood I noticed that it was almost impossible for people to live happily together. According to the laws of society, one could live in a family, with parents, brothers and sisters. But in reality we each lived apart, alone. And even if we lived together, it was never certain that we would live like this for long. This eternal insecurity intensified my romanticism when it came to the condition of love. There is no guarantee that love will survive until tomorrow. To be loved even for a moment, that seemed extraordinary to me. The moment of love equaled a separate eternity. Like seaweed on the waves of the ocean, sticking together for a while, so it was with people—meeting, living together for a while, only to part, disappearing forever, extinction being the surest thing in this world." (Gabriela Melinescu, Ghetele fericirii, Ed. Polirom, Iasi, 2006, p. 10).

recomposed as hypostases of the primordial elements by virtue of which Gaston Bachelard establishes his hermeneutic approach, and Gabriela Melinescu, her literary one.

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