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VARIATIONS OF ROMANTIC IRONY IN THE WRITINGS OF THE MOLDOVAN FORTY-EIGHTERS

The destiny of romanticism is undoubtedly linked to irony as to a turntable of the circumstances under which the evolution of a Western consciousness of modernity takes place with increasingly clear signs. A specific type of irony meant to activate “the true depth”¹ of Romanticism is at stake, without which the Romantic movement would be reduced to a form of precarious sentimental spiritualism. This paper aims to investigate the discursive nuances of elitist irony in the prose of the Forty-Eighters in the Principality of Moldova and in their entire approach to radiographing their national identity and the space between two distinct mental boundaries. Romanian Forty-Eighters generously employ the traditional rhetorical figure of antiphrasis, defined as highlighting an image by its contrast. This method also involves a formative dimension based on the evaluation and training of human morals and types targeted by the ironic gaze of the narrative voice. Simultaneously, while looking at the ideation substrata of the discourse, the detachment and critical distancing from the artificiality of the represented space are perceived, through irony, as premises for a new vision on the world.

If in the mechanisms of rhetorical irony logical function and the prevalence of opposites work as operating principles, the educational and evaluative character of irony is constituted as an axiological function under the dominance of persiflage². Classical rhetorical irony, still present in France at the beginning of the 19th century (and by extension, in the Romanian Principalities, given their Francophile sympathies), is increasingly fading. Its presence is almost completely erased in Germany, where the Romantics of the Jena school (Tieck, Solger, Novalis and the Schlegel brothers) lay the foundations for a philosophical reinterpretation of the concept of irony³. Romantic irony is theorized by Friedrich Schlegel in a series of publications in the Berlin magazine *Lyceum der schönen Künste* (1797) and in *Athenäum*, a magazine founded together with his brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel⁴. Schlegelian idealism emerges in response to Cartesian rationalism and “assimilates irony with paradox, transforming it into the expression of a

¹ Alain Vaillant, *Dictionnaire du Romantisme*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2012, pp. 84-85: “la vrai profondeur”. Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

² Corina Croitoru, *Politica ironiei în poezia românească sub comunism [The Politics of Irony in the Romanian Poetry under the Communist Regime]*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2014, p. 29.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁴ Ernst Behler, *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity*, Seattle & London, University of Washington Press, 1990, pp. 73-75.

fundamental freedom: that of simultaneously affirming one thing and its opposite”⁵. In the Romantic ideology, irony manifests itself as an attitude inherent in self-consciousness. It revolves around the Christian idea of duality that characterizes humanity – physicality and spirituality, body and spirit, depth and surface⁶. In this framework, the innovation lies in the oscillation of the two components that compete out of inertia to obtain an equal share of the value and dignity inherent in each element. This pendulum also involves the category of the grotesque as “the aesthetic consequence of this principle of equality”⁷. Another invention of the Romantic century is the caricature, a component of “an aesthetic of laughter”⁸ with the same origins in the metaphysics of duality that positions man outside nature, unable to integrate into universal harmony. In the terms of Alain Vaillant,

So man laughs at knowing himself superior to nature, which is simple. Or rather, man does not laugh at knowing, but at believing himself superior. Since he is dualistic, he is aware that while one part of him (the bodily) is weak and miserable, the other (the spiritual) nevertheless gives him a strength of his own. The psychological process of laughter comes from the conflict between these two intimate beliefs. The moment he regrets his weakness, he experiences a sudden relief to feel endowed, in spite of everything, with a singular strength, and then he bursts out laughing⁹.

Regarding the philosophical dimension of irony, Hegel (from a position of deeply teleological thinking) rivals Schlegel’s perspective on irony, appearing relativistic and extremely modern. For Hegel, irony has the status of “absolute infinite negativity”, a definition adopted by Kierkegaard in his doctoral thesis defended at the University of Copenhagen in 1841. He asserted irony’s quality in the very non-dialectical nature of negativity – “rejecting synthesis, irony ultimately rejects the closure in the system”¹⁰. Kierkegaard’s concept of irony as subjective freedom resonates, despite its Hegelian paternity, with Schlegel’s perception of irony as fundamental freedom, so that “irony continues to be valued by the

⁵ Corina Croitoru, *Politica ironiei*, p. 30: “asimilează ironia cu paradoxul, transformând-o în expresia unei libertăți fundamentale: aceea de a afirma simultan un lucru și contrariul său”.

⁶ Alain Vaillant, *Dictionnaire*, p. 86, 95.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 86: “la conséquence esthétique de ce principe d’égalité”.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 95: “une esthétique du rire”.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 95: “L’homme rit donc de se savoir supérieur à la nature, qui est simple. Ou plutôt, l’homme ne rit pas de se savoir, mais de se croire supérieur. Comme il est duel, il est conscient que, si une partie de lui (la corporelle) est faible et misérable, l’autre (la spirituelle) lui confère cependant une force qui lui est propre. Le processus psychologique du rire vient de la conflagration entre ces deux intimes convictions. Au moment où il se désole de sa faiblesse, il éprouve un brusque soulagement à se sentir, malgré tout, doué d’une force singulière, et il éclate alors de rire”.

¹⁰ Corina Croitoru, *Politica ironiei*, p. 31: “respingând sinteza, ironia refuză, în fond, închiderea în sistem”.

romantic descent for its relativistic and anti-systemic spirit”¹¹.

The innovation consists, therefore, in resizing irony through the philosophical lens, turning it from a simple discursive rhetorical figure into a complex vision of the world. In the writings of the Forty-Eighters from Moldova, the irony draws a line of adjustment to a changing world, in the midst of some confrontations of values between generations and a fascinating game of power out of which Romanian modernity is built. Alain Vaillant’s perception of irony as “the salt of social or cultural life, bringing a flavour supplement to all forms of exchange”¹² is all the more relevant for the Romanian society of the early 19th century.

Literary texts encompass three dimensions – the social, the ideological and the philosophical – in which we find manifestations meant to order the world of a century, in this instance the 19th century. The same dimensions embrace manifestations that equally construct and structure the creative process integrating in it the necessary tools for the reception of the text. Besides providing a famous hyper-protection to the text, irony is a literary practice increasingly found in the Forty-Eighters’ texts. The rationale for this toolkit is to orient the reader’s gaze to articulating the reading act with the intention of reshaping the receptor’s vision against the values of an Eastern pattern rooted in the long Phanariot domination. In opposition to it, the latest Romanian cultural ideal is mirrored by Western liberal-progressive principles brought to the Principality by young generations formed in Western Europe, by foreign or Romanian diplomats, or by the Organic Regulations (1831–1832) and the Russian administration.

This new vision of the world showcased in the writings of the Moldovan Forty-Eighters outlines not only an ethos of change, of an intention to overcome the backwardness attributed by intellectuals to the Ottoman influence, but also a cultural memory. This memory is vibrant, creative and fertile precisely through the unfaithfulness and the incongruities of the revealed recollections, but also because of the innovative dynamics and rhythm by which places of memory as perpetuation or renewal contribute to the crystallization of consciousness and identity. The shaping of cultural identity as a component of national consciousness takes place by bringing the past closer and orienting the present in the direction and in support of a synchronization with the prosperity of European culture. The West is constituted as an integrating horizon for the Romanian cultural specificities, highlighted in accordance with the values of Europe. From a Forty-Eighter point of view, these are the values Romanians programmatically identify with and also the principles they share through origin, ethnicity, the historical past the purity of language. The obstacle encountered in fulfilling their mission consists in the traces

¹¹ *Ibidem*: “ironia continuă să fie valorizată în descendență romantică pentru spiritul său relativist și antisistemic”.

¹² Alain Vaillant, *La civilisation du rire*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2016, p. 154: “le sel de la vie sociale ou culturelle, donnant un supplément de goût à toutes les formes d'échange”.

of a specific oriental society that threatens to take over the image of the Romanian identity and thus to mislead the Western view of the Principalities, but also to undermine the cultural mediation process undertaken by Romanian intellectuals.

Together with an imperious need for rapprochement with the Western culture, the literary landscape depicts the habit of chastising the moral and ethical shortcomings resulted from a civilization based on progress and emancipation. Such commonplaces are found in sketches of morals, in the descriptions of “dancing evenings”, in physiognomies and even in paintings of nature, the sanctioned customs being isolated, through the practice of irony, as examples of superficiality. Iași, the capital of the Principality, is *par excellence* the setting, the literary place where all the phenomena inherent in the modernization process are found, combined in a mosaic of contrasts that offers an authentic picture of the time. The most relevant examples, in this respect, can be found in Vasile Alecsandri (1818–1890)’s *Iași in 1844* (1845) and *Un salon din Iași* [*A Parlour in Iași*] (1855), in Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891)’s *Fiziologia provincialului în Iași* [*The Physiology of the Provincial in Iași*] (1844), *Soirées dansantes (Adunări dănțuitoare)* [*Dancing Soirees*] (1839), *Nou chip de a face curte* [*The New Way of Courting*] (1840), in Costache Negruzzi (1808–1868)’s *Fiziologia provințialului* [*Physiology of the Provincial*] (1840), in Dimitrie Ralet (1817–1858)’s *Provinciarii și ieșenii* [*The Provincials and the People of Iași*] (1844), in Alecu Russo (1819–1859)’s *Iașii și locuitorii lui în 1840* [*Iași and its Inhabitants in 1840*] (1840).

In accordance with his nature, Vasile Alecsandri’s irony is kind and friendly. He possesses a refined ironic stroke manifested as sympathy specific to the gesture of patting someone on the shoulder, rather than to the moralizing intention of correcting social morals. His sketch *Iași in 1844*, addressed to Kogălniceanu and published in the periodical *Calendarul Foaiei satești* in 1845, intends to illustrate a walk through the city. The piece begins by theorizing the wish to travel. He ironically detaches himself from the model of the traveller with a map or a plan, devoid of fantasy and similar to a courier who wears himself as a package or even as a “mail envelope”¹³. Bringing into question the slightly caustic observation of an “honourable old man” on the pliable nature of Romanians, who “become Turks with Turks, French with Frenchmen, Englishmen with Englishmen. [...] Who knows, if the Hindus would come to the country, perhaps they would become mandarins and they would be called Cing-ching-tung-fo?”¹⁴, Alecsandri detaches himself from this comment by an argument about tradition, referring to the structure of the Romanian society, made up by a majority of peasants, the

¹³ V. Alecsandri, *Opere IV: Proză* [*Writings IV. Prose*]. Edited by Georgeta Rădulescu-Dulgheru, București, Minerva, 1974, p. 76: “plic de poștă”.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 78-79: “se fac turci cu turcii, francezi cu francezii, englezi cu englezii. [...] Cine știe, de-or veni hinezii în țară, dacă ei nu s-or face mandarini și dacă nu s-or numi Cing-ching-tung-fo?”.

custodians of the authentic national character illustrated by their folk costumes, language and customs, whose world is an incorruptible stronghold but who are also exposed to the influences to which townspeople are prone. In fact, the highlighted contrasts in the description of the city generously allow the practice of a rhetorical form of irony. Equally, in order to render idyllic nature in opposition to a derisive urban landscape, Alecsandri uses the rhetorical figure of hyperbole; the original view of the surroundings accelerates the ritual of description without allowing for any stopover at all – “We start: the trees on all sides stretch out their branches laden with fruit, but my running quill does not allow me to obey the impulse I urge myself to. He grabbed the valley and fled like lightning, because the Răpidea [Fast] hill does not bear such an appropriate name for nothing”¹⁵. The princely park of Socola has the disadvantage of positioning itself in front of the seminary, the “holy priests factory”¹⁶, a local religious institution treated with an irony caused by the tendency to discredit any notion associated with the Phanariot period, therefore also the Eastern Orthodox ethos.

Another excerpt of particular expressiveness is the representation of the city through the image of a barefoot boyar with a crown on his head; “Iași is very similar” to him, as “its centre, located on the hillside, is made up of large and beautiful houses where luxury reigns, whereas the slums scattered on the slopes of that hill are made up predominantly of huts covered with reeds, where poverty lies. The head wears a crown, and the legs are bare!”¹⁷. An emblematic image for the stage of the ongoing urbanization process is that of mud, *glodul, tina*, “which always adorns the streets of our capital”¹⁸. Its expressiveness is rendered by practising elitist irony. In particular, the latter consists in establishing comforting, elevated cultural frameworks that sweeten the inconveniences of reality. The main culture that establishes these frameworks is, of course, the European one:

...the mud [...] deserves to be known in the world, just like the mists of London, like the dust of Odessa, like the dampness of Paris, like the fiery wind of Naples (Sirocco) and so on. Iași often has a Venetian look, its narrow streets turned into swampy canals. Wherefrom we get the following conclusion: that the Iași dweller is an amphibian that lives half of its life on land and swims in the mud the other half. A

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 80: “Ne pornim: copacii din toate părțile îmi întind crengile lor încărcate de poame, dar fugariul meu, condeiul, nu mă lasă să mă supun îndemnului ce-mi fac. El au apucat la vale și fuge ca un fulger, căci dealul Răpidea nu poartă în zădar un nume atât de potrivit”.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 80: “fabrică sfântă de popi”.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 82: “Iașii samănă foarte mult”, căci „centrul său așezat pe zarea unui deal este compus de case mari și frumoase în care domnește luxul, când dinprotivă mahalalele lui împrăștiute pe coastele acelu deal sînt alcătuite mai mult din bordeie acoperite cu stuh, unde zace sărăcia. Capul poartă coroană și picioarele sînt goale!”.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 85: “ce împodobește mai totdeauna ulițele capitaliei noastre”.

pleasant and desirable life! We recommend it to all lovers of soft life¹⁹.

What is noteworthy in this fragment is the delight that elitist irony cultivates in the discourse through a logic of the imprecision of conventions: on the one hand, submitting the Moldovan urban space to a European affiliation, on the other, tarnishing the inhabitants' reputation by association with amphibians; either perceived through the filter of a "Venetian look" or "comfortable and comfort-loving", they remain captive, even by only half of their dual nature, to a dishonourable space belonging to the backward Orient. In the postscript, Alecsandri writes to Kogălniceanu that, despite the beneficial changes that have taken place, "the Iași mud has not dried up" – but "Patience; soon the merciful fate will un-muddle our country and capital city. Until then, *vale* [be well]!"²⁰. The phenomena of "entanglement" and "disentanglement" are extrapolated by the author from the social sphere of the country and the capital to the discursive register of the creative act. The clogging of Alecsandri's carriage in the mud also causes his speech to stumble – "But I see that I have delved so deeply into this subject that it is impossible for me to stir and step forward. [...] Please, my friend, have patience for a few days, until the city dries up a little, and then I will gladly follow my walk through Iași"²¹. A Romantic predilection²², the stroll becomes, in this case, an indispensable condition for speech.

Un salon din Iași [A Parlour in Iași], published in *România literară*, focuses on the connections between men and women, between comrades, the way they compete, the ceremony of courting, the frivolity and superficiality of salon meetings in general. A dramatically conceived moral sketch, developed, therefore, as a performance, Alecsandri's text includes human representations rendered in the impersonal tones of some ridiculous preoccupations. For example, the reference to the ladies and their naming is mediated either by a clothing item: "Velvet dress", "Crepe dress", "Lady with a diadem", "Lady with a garland", or by a piece of furniture in the room – "Lady from the clavichord", "Lady on the Couch", "Lady on the Chair" (potentially a Romanian comedy of names *avant la lettre*), while the male characters are given either relatively neutral names: "The Man", "The Glabrous Knight", "Gentlemen X, C, V", or functional names: "a Boyar in a

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 85: "tina [...] merită a fi cunoscută în lume, întocmai ca negurile Londrii, ca colbul Odesii, ca umezala Parisului, ca vântul înfocat a Neapolii (Sirocco) ș.c.l. Adeseori Iașii are o privire venețiană prin ulițele lui prifăcute în canale mlăștinoase. De unde tragem următoarea închiere: că iașanul este o ființă amfibie care trăiește giumătate din viața lui pe uscat și care înoată în tină cealaltă giumătate. Viață plăcută și vrednică de dorit! Noi o recomandăm tuturor iubitorilor de trai molatic".

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 85: "glodul Iașilor nu s-au mai uscat" – dar „Răbdare; în curând soarta îndurătoare ne va dizgloda și țara și capitalia. Păn-atunci însă, *vale!*".

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 85: "Dar văd că m-am adâncit atât de mult în subiectul acesta, încât îmi este cu neputință a mă urni din loc spre a păși mai înainte. [...] Te rog dar, prietine, ca să ai răbdare vro câteva zile, până ce se va mai usca puțin orașul, și atunci voi urma cu mulțămire primblarea mea prin Iași".

²² Alain Vaillant, *Dictionnaire*, p. 116.

surplice”, “The Journalist”, “a Former Minister”, “The Equerry”²³. The derisory nature of their discussions about the French and British battles with the Russians in the Crimean War, the scene in which the equerry is ridiculed by others (he loses his composure and begins to cry, extremely concerned about his country’s fate), or the frame in which the boyar in a surplice leaves the room, offended by some disparaging remarks about his clothes²⁴, all of these subtextually indicate Alecsandri’s slight reservation towards the import of unseemly western elements of civilization. The author’s alter-ego, Mr. X, the “eternal traveller”²⁵ and the skilful storyteller of the parties, always “in love with a flower”²⁶ (an allusion to the loss of his beloved Elena Negri), ends the sketch with a tragic account of the sinking of the ship he had travelled on. The hostess strategically intervenes, right at the end of the story, accusing the men of retiring and ordering them to resume their roles as gentlemen and invite the ladies to dance.

This gesture is also found in Mihail Kogălniceanu’s sketch *Soirées dansantes*²⁷ and it illustrates a main principle that supports the good deployment of the soiree, but also frustrates male guests. In its discursive construction, Kogălniceanu ironically uses the register of ecclesiastical language:

But above all let the holy angel protect you from the hosts who come to grab you even from the book room [the library of the household] [...] Oh! Oh! May God protect you from the ladies in red dresses, to whom you must give a counter-dance as alms. ‘From fire, the sword, red dresses, from enemy invasion, from white turbans, from pestilence, from Ali Tebeli the pasha of Ianina’. I was saying these pious words²⁸ under my breath when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the hostess of the house coming towards me²⁹.

²³ „Rochia de catifea”, „Rochia de crep”, „Dama cu diadem”, „Dama cu ghirlandă”, „Dama de la clavir”, „Dama de pe canape”, „Dama de pe jilț”, „Bărbatul”, „Cavalerul spân”, „Domnii X, C, V”, „un Boier cu anterieu”, „Jurnalistul”, „un Fost-ministru”, „Aghiotantul”.

²⁴ V. Alecsandri, *Opere IV*, pp. 99-100.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 101: “vecinicul călător”.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 91: “înamorat de o floare”.

²⁷ Published in *Albina românească*, in 1839; it consists of an adaptation to the Moldovan realities of a sketch with the same title written by the French author J. Rafael in vol. XIII of the collection *Paris ou le Livre des cent et un*, published in Paris between 1831–1834 in fifteen volumes.

²⁸ Kogălniceanu refers to the following prayer of the Orthodox service: “Again we pray for the safekeeping of this holy church and this city, and of all cities and towns from pestilence, famine, earthquake, flood, fire and the sword, from invasion of enemies, civil war, and unforeseen death”.

²⁹ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere I. Beletistica, studii literare, culturale și sociale* [*Works I. Fiction, Literary, Cultural and Social Studies*]. Edited by Dan Simonescu, București, Editura Academiei RSR, 1974, pp. 39-40: “mai ales să te ferească sfântul înger de gazdele care vin de te apucă pân’ și din odaia cărților [...] Of! Of! Să te ferească Dumnezeu de damele cu rochii roșii, cărora trebuie să le faci pomană o contredansă. ‘De foc, de sabie, de rochii roșii, de războiul dintre noi, de turbane albe, de ciumă, de Ali Tebeli pașă de Ianina’. Ziceam încet aceste cucernice cuvinte, când, cu colțul ochiului, zării pe gazda casei ce venea spre mine”.

Throughout the literary sketch, the author adopts a voice steeped in acid and caustic irony, but also the gaze of a fine and unforgiving observer. The practice of analogy extends to the culinary register – the vinaigrette is the specialty that mirrors the heterogeneous character of the participants at the soiree. The successful moment of the narrator in Alecsandri's salon (i.e., Mr. X) takes a different path in Kogălniceanu's writing: it acquires other features, such as the flatness and derision of men's preoccupations: "Men constantly talk about jobs, lawsuits, extracted teeth and horseshoes of dead horses³⁰. From one end of the room to the other you hear their cries, which is very interesting, I promise you"³¹. Ironizing the rhetorical principle of "obtaining a contrast without failure, because you need contrasts in everything"³² and its commonplace character, Kogălniceanu still takes account of it in the construction of his descriptive micro-medallions dedicated to women. Those passages abound in delightful inflections of the narrative voice: the solemn tone about Celestine's angelic beauty, a "celestial" suggestive name, turns into a persiflage attitude, and the rhetorical artifice "let me not speak to you about" introduces on the one hand the type of the badly shod erudite with ink-stained fingers and of the lover who admires knights, reads novels and is enchanted with love, on the other, "thousands of other female specialties [in a culinary meaning], which are found in all dancing soirees"³³.

In effect, the interchangeable dynamics of the tone of speech can be noticed from the very first pages. Kogălniceanu opens his work with reflections on the delightful occupation of attending these soirees. The day after the ball involves a whole ceremony of remembrance, of reliving the event – "with a delightful memory of thoughts", by reconstructing objects and clothing in the room – "the pieces of my bright attire from the previous day", "scattered in the middle of the room"³⁴. Personified, they are invested with the convalescent state of the narrator after the party – "yellow slippers, sleeping on the hearth like a warming cat", "the high collar rolled under the bed", "the red britches dropped on the carpet"³⁵. Through *captatio benevolentiae*, Kogălniceanu relies on self-irony in relation to the different postures he adopts at these soirees over time: "I say nothing, but still I

³⁰ The equivalent of the English idiom *flogging a dead horse*; in Romanian, *a umbla după potcoave de cai morți* [*ad litteram*: looking for the horseshoes of dead horses].

³¹ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere I*, p. 37: "Bărbații vorbesc neconținut trebi, procesuri, dinți scoși și potcoave găsite la cai morți. De la un capăt al odăiei la celălalt auzi strigătele lor, lucru foarte interesant, te încredințez".

³² *Ibidem*, p. 38: "a face contrast negreșit, pentru că în toate trebuie contrasturi".

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 38-40: "mii alte specialități [termen culinar, my note L.T.S.] femeiești, ce se găsesc mai în toate suarelele dansante".

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 34: "cu o suvenire desfătăcioasă de gânduri", "rămășițele strălucitei mele tuatele din ziua trecută", "împrăștiată în mijlocul odăii".

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 34: "galbenii papuci, dormind pe vatră, ca o mătă ce se încălzește", "cilicul cel globos rostogolit sub pat", "șacșării cei roșii aruncați pe covor".

want to tell you” about the memory of youth, when “I was never only half delighted; the closeness of a ball emptied my heart of all the small annoyances I had”, in contrast to the self-control that maturity claims: “Now I go to the ball only to play the suffering role of a hanger-on” or to the lack of mobility specific to old age, when “My feet rest in a dark corner of the room and like an old soldier, disabled, his rusty sword hanged up at the bed head, I also hang my cotton thighs on the sash of a window”³⁶. Self-irony is also outlined in the remarks on the newly adopted dress code: “Because I also discarded the stiff collar in favour of the hat and the purple britches in favour of the tight pants”³⁷. The speech then turns into a storm of mordant irony on evoking the physiology of the very pleasant man³⁸ who always dances and never rests when he goes into society, who is courteous and jovial, who has humour and masters the art of anecdotes³⁹. Kogălniceanu presents, in effect, the concessions to be made in order to be accepted by exquisite society. The extremely acid descriptive passage also denotes the self-ironic consciousness of the author who is himself a subject to his own radiography.

The terms of these compromises are also found in the text of Alecu Russo, *Iași and its inhabitants in 1840*. In a society dominated by “aristocratic arrogance”, young people from Iași face boredom (“There is no life in Iași”, “There is no city in the world to which the word could apply better: *seeking to kill time*. [...] We don't have a public life”⁴⁰), so they “sit methodically around a game table and follow in the footsteps of the old men, or yawn, cursing the harmless Iași who cannot provide them any party”⁴¹. “The ridiculousness of our men’s spirits”, the society of every house as a “fortress armed with thorns”, “the sharp tongues of all the partisans”, “the ease and bad words” of women and the laziness of men require amendments by which, if you dare to formulate them, “you get on the wrong site of the good world”, of the “great nobility”, especially “in a petty society full of

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 34: “nu zic nimic, dar totuși zic”, “niciodată nu mă desfățam pe jumătate; apropierea unui bal îmi deșerta inima de toate micile supărări ce aveam”, “acum mă duc la bal numai spre a juca rolul pătimitor de băgător de samă”, “Picioarele mi se odihnesc într-un ungher întunecat al sălii și ca un soldat bătrân, invalid, ce-și anină ruginita sabie la căpătâiul său, asemine îmi anin și eu pulpele de bumbac la cerceveaua unei ferești”.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 34: “Căci și eu am lepădat cilicul pentru pălărie și purpurii șacșări pentru strâmții pantalonii”.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 35: “În ce colț al spițăriei oare au învățat ei așa frumușele lucruri? Aceasta nu știu. Dar glumele lor mă băteau la ureche ca clopotul de la Barnovschi într-o zi de sărbătoare. Mai pune încă și acel râs lancaviu, ce samănă cu muzica broaștelor”.

⁴⁰ Alecu Russo, *Scrieri alese* [*Selected Works*]. Edited by Geo Șerban, București, ESPLA, 1970, pp. 321-322: “Nu este nici o viață în Iași”, „În nici un oraș din lume nu s-ar putea aplica mai bine vorba: *a căuta să-ți omori vremea*. [...] La noi nu este viață publică”.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 322: “se așază metodic în jurul unei mese de joc și merg pe urmele babacilor ori cască, blăstămând nevătmătorul Iași, care nu le poate da nici o petrecere”.

chatter like ours”⁴². Equally, directly naming these amendments would undermine the consideration due to the older generation, so that the conflict between the need for action and the requirement of diplomacy takes on the nuances of martyrdom⁴³. The existence of authentic salons of *bon ton*, as in the West, is undercut both by the passivity and duplicity of the young generation, and by the fundamentalism of the boyars. To illustrate this dynamic, Alecu Russo uses refined irony of a romantic nature – he constructs some literary frames and characters that fall precisely in with the ideas and images common at that time (the superiority of the generation who studies in the West, the oriental backwardness of the boyars), extremely edifying for the epoch’s atmosphere and for the chromatics of the collective mind of that period. Ultimately, Russo interrogate these frames without excluding himself (a young man who studied in the West and also the son of a boyar) from this approach:

And we, the sons of an age of civilization, who have warmed ourselves at the hearths of Europe, have not yet freed ourselves from our prejudices of rank, rights, interests, small vanity, forgotten abroad, but found with pleasure on return; we still find charm in the old abuses that strike both in justice and in judgment, and born with civilization, we find a wonderful escape in the customs and habits of the country against things that might hinder our own convenience. And all of us, pretentious Parisians, republicans, Swiss, terrible students from Heidelberg and Stuttgart, we are all great reformers with our lips, until the facts also follow to reply⁴⁴,

But a select salon like this cannot be forgiven by them [the boyars], especially because the smoke of the hookah is completely forbidden, which could darken the brightness of its gilded flowers, and because national swear words are not allowed at all; good Moldovans and good patriots, they are unable to say gently: ‘damn!’ or ‘*morbleu!*’ It’s not resounding enough and it’s not logical. In this regard, it is true, that is not very good, because swearing is as necessary for the Moldovan as water is to the fish, the air to the birds and bread to all people. Our ancestors left us the legacy of Moldova with its heroic energy and we, as rightful descendants, are very much forced to follow that tradition, especially when it comes to swearing⁴⁵.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 323: “Numeroasele ridicole ale oamenilor noștri de duh”, „cetățuie înarmată cu țepi”, „limbile ascuțite ale tuturor partizanilor”, „ușurătatea și vorbele rele”, „te pui rău cu lumea bună”, „boierimea mare”, „într-o societate meschină și plină de vorbării ca a noastră”.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 321.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 322: “iar noi, fii ai unei epoci de civilizație, care ne-am încălzit la focarele Europei, nu ne-am eliberat încă de prejudecățile noastre de rang, de drepturi, de interese, de mică vanitate, uitate în străinătate, pe care însă cu plăcere de găsim la întoarcere; noi mai găsim încă farmec în vechile abuzuri care lovesc și-n justiție și-n judecată, și născuți cu civilizația, noi avem o scăpare minunată în obiceiurile și deprinderile țării împotriva lucrurilor care ar putea să stânjenească bunul nostru plac. Și toți câți suntem, parizieni pretențioși, republicani, șvițereni, cumpliți studenți de la Heidelberg și Stuttgart, toți suntem mari reformatori cu gura, până ce vor veni și faptele să răspundă”.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 324: “Dar un salon ales ca acesta nu-l pot ei [boierii, my note, L.T.S.] ierta, mai cu samă pentru că e oprit cu desăvârșire fumul ciubucelor, care ar putea să întunece strălucirea înfloriturilor

In this aristocratic inflexible, selective and prissy atmosphere, with “too uptight and measured appearance”⁴⁶, the refined reputation of the salons lasts very little. Russo ironically uses the mythological image of the fairies that patronize the soirees, in contrast to the image of the opportunistic hostess interested in social ranks:

Too shy to create an autonomous status, not brave enough to rise above the banal ridiculousness and even more banal jokes, prostrate before the increasing victories and fragrant influences of the famous salon, the fairies of these half-temples saw their court slowly dissipating. [...] The mistress of the house seems to want to match her smiles and half-faces to the place occupied by the guests on the hierarchical ladder [...], due to the great lack of tact, which shows a defect of soul or education in those delicate procedures, in the gentle and natural attentions which we are accustomed to regard as the gift of womanhood. I think there will be a lot of bon-ton in Iași when the salons are salons and not genealogy offices or exchange houses⁴⁷.

In Russo’s text and, generally, in his entire memoir work, two worlds are arguing and the viewer, whether reader or narrator, is invited to decide his/ her side and to outline his / her own vision. A prominent liberal, Alecu Russo believes in the triumph of innovative ideas, but also remains a nostalgic of patriarchal Moldova⁴⁸. The evolution of these mutually disarming oppositions can be pursued at the discursive level even in the fragments seemingly tributary to only one of the opposite mental directions, such as the one from the beginning of the sketch:

The new Regulations governing Moldova, the contact with the Russian armies which ploughed the Principalities, the visits of several travellers, the swarm of young people who spent years in European cities, in the middle of a life and customs diametrically opposed to the quiet and settled customs and life of their homeland,

lui aurite, și pentru că nu sînt îngăduite de loc sudălmile naționale; ei, care sînt buni moldoveni și buni patrioți, otova și fără fașoane, sînt în neputință să zică cu gingășie: ‘drace!’ ori ‘morbleu!’ Nu-i destul de răsunător și nu-i nici logic. În privința asta, e drept, nu-i tocmai bine, căci sudalma e tot așa de trebuincioasă moldovanului, ca apa peștelui, aerul paserilor și pînea tuturor oamenilor. Străbunii ne-au lăsat moștenire Moldova cu energia ei eroică și noi, ca drepti urmași, ne silim foarte mult să împlinim diata, mai ales în ce privește sudălmile”.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 325: “înfățișarea prea țeapănă și măsurată”.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 325-326: “Prea sfioase spre a-și crea o stare neatârnată, neîndestul de cutezătoare pentru a se înălța deasupra ridicolelor banale și a glumelor și mai banale, căzute în fața izbânzilor crescînde și a influențelor parfumate ale faimosului salon, zînele acestor semitemple au văzut cum curtea lor se risipește încetul cu încetul. [...] stăpîna casei parcă ar vrea să-și potrivească zâmbetele și semigrimasele echivalente cu locul pe care-l ocupă oaspeții pe scara ierarhică [...], din lipsă mare de tact, care arată un defect al sufletului ori al educației în procedeele delicate, în atențiile acelea gingașe și firești pe care sîntem obișnuiți să le privim ca un dar al femeii. Cred că va fi mult *bon-ton* la Iași cînd saloanele vor fi saloane și nu birouri de genealogie, ori case de schimb”.

⁴⁸ Mihai Zamfir, *Scurtă istorie. Panorama alternativă a literaturii române* [A Short History. Alternative Panoramic View of the Romanian Literature], vol. I, București, Cartea Românească, Iași, Polirom, 2011, pp. 120-121.

changed the face of Iași, introducing other views, other ideas and a different way of looking at things. As in any country on the verge of regenerating, we have two principles caught in a struggle, a stifled but huge and incessant struggle between the elders and the young, between fallen worn-out habits and daring innovation full of power and life; a deadly battle between the old and the new, in which the hard-earned victory will belong to the latter⁴⁹.

The ironic remarks about the snobbery of the elite – for which life in the countryside is purely administrative, and the joy of long walks (a Western import)⁵⁰ can be achieved only in the urban Copou Park or in other public gardens – translate a “patriarchal flavour”⁵¹ which is so specific to the Forty-Eight and post-Forty-Eight prose.

In Kogălniceanu’s text, *Nou chip de a face curte* [*A New Way of Courting*] – a sketch that presents the contrast between marriage habits in the villages and the opportunistic family ties in the cities – the critical tone so specific to the author directly chastises the disinterest of the urban society in rural life and its inherent beauty:

Sometimes you may happen to go to the countryside; you don’t do this to marvel at the beauties of nature, to watch the great sunrise over the high peaks of the Carpathians, to breathe the fresh air on the plains of Moldova and the Siret, to hear the delightful song of the nightingale, to eventually recite with Văcărescu: I took my grief to the Carpathians,/ I wanted to give it to them;/ The echo, the leaf, the valley,/ The waters multiply it to me⁵².

A seemingly paradoxical aspect with Alecu Russo is the fact that his claiming of patriarchal tradition and his critique of “old patriarchalism”⁵³ can coexist, in a spirit of incongruity that Mihai Zamfir attributes to the Forty-Eighters’ generation who, although they declare themselves progressive, continue to be conformist and

⁴⁹ Alecu Russo, *Scrieri*, p. 306: “Regulamentele nouă care stăpâneau Moldova, atingerea cu armatele rusești, care au brăzdat Principatele, vizitele câtorva călători, roiul acela de tineri care au petrecut în orașele europene în mijlocul unei vieți și al unor obiceiuri diametral opuse obiceiurilor și vieții liniștite și așezate din patria lor au schimbat fața Iașilor, introducând alte vederi, alte idei și un fel de a privi lucrurile. Ca în orice țară pe cale de regenerare, sunt la noi două principii care stau în luptă, o luptă înăbușită, însă uriașă și neconținută, între bătrân și tânăr, între obiceiul căzut și vested și inovația cutezătoare, plină de putere și de viață; o luptă pe moarte între vechi și nou, în care biruința greu câștigată va fi a celui din urmă”.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 316.

⁵¹ Mihai Zamfir, *Din secolul romantic* [*From the Romantic Century*], București, Cartea Românească, 1989, p. 76: “savoare patriarhală”.

⁵² Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere I*, p. 44: “Câteodată ți se întâmplă poate să te duci la țeară; asta n-o faci ca să te miri de frumusețile naturei, ca să privești mărețul resărit a soarelui peste înaltele vârfuri a Carpaților, ca să resuflă curatul aer de pe șesurile Moldovei și a Siretului, ca să auzi desfătăcioasa cântare a filomelei, ca să zici în sfârșit cu Văcărescu: La Carpați mi-am dus jalea,/ Lor am vrut s-o hărăzesc;/ Răsunetul, frunza, valea,/ Apele mi-o înmulțesc”.

⁵³ Alecu Russo, *Scrieri*, p. 325: “a patriarhalismului bătrânicos”.

conservative in their lifestyle⁵⁴.

Transposed into the narrative discourse, this incongruity denotes an important feature of romanticism i.e., the idealization of patriarchal living, of the past as a *topos* of authenticity. In the radiography of the dancing evenings, Kogălniceanu nostalgically relies on the memory of recent history, the Phanariot time, an epoch generally blamed by the “first people”. The description of the Oriental balls of the past seems to be taken straight from the Arab mythological stories. In comparison with these, in which “wine and milk flowed, as the Scripture says”⁵⁵, “the dancing soiree”, which belongs “exclusively to our epoch”⁵⁶, is outlined as an example by which the civilization of the western world is indirectly criticized. For example, the hostess of the event is punished for the ridiculousness of her intention to synchronize her dance with that of her chosen partner. The evoked gesture is all the more ironic as its representation is immediately followed by the almost mystical description of the old hostess of the Phanariotes and her imposing and noble presence and composure⁵⁷.

Eventually, the lamentation of the Forty-Eighters for bygone times is part of a convention of modernity, as modernity expresses a longing for lost harmony and a lament for the loss of unity that belongs to the past. In Ernst Behler’s terms, this context illustrates, despite the seeming victory of the moderns over the ancients, a subtextual authority of the latter’s presence. In other terms, from a more theoretical perspective, it signals “a delay in the full manifestation of the modern consciousness or the consciousness of modernity”⁵⁸. From the Schlegelian perspective, there is a dialectical interdependence between classicism and romanticism. In this respect, the authenticity of modernism is upheld only if it closely interacts with the values of classicism, achieving their continuity through a dynamic competition in which the world of past historical time (Ancient Greece, for instance) is not faithfully rendered at present, but reinvented and updated in a creative process whose expressive function is of a transcendent nature. In this light, the Romantics seek to reinvent the archetype of beauty in the Platonic line belonging to Ancient Greece rather than in the direction of the “classical estuary”⁵⁹ of Italy, of the South, of the Roman antiquity. Being perceived as mythical, fascinating and redemptive by important figures such as Hölderlin, Keats or Novalis, Greece is represented by the moderns as one of the most authentic veins of romanticism. It is also found in the semantic fields built by the Forty-Eighters in their texts, through cultural allusions that indicate an impressive encyclopaedic

⁵⁴ Mihai Zamfir, *Din secolul*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere I*, p. 36: “vinul și laptele curgea, cum zice Scriptura”.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36: “suareta dansantă”, “numai și numai a epohăi noastre”.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁵⁸ Ernst Behler, *Irony*, p. 62.

⁵⁹ Mihai Zamfir, *Din secolul*, p. 21: “a limanului clasic”.

spirit of the generation.

Nostalgic for mythical patriarchy himself, Costache Negruzzi is sympathetic to the traditional Romanian space in various discursive instances. In *Letter XXV (The Country Man)*, for example, the townsman advises a peasant couple not to send their children to urban schools because that would suppress the wholesome manifestations of the authentic peasant identity. Subtextually, we also find the self-ironic tone so characteristic to Negruzzi's prose. In *Letter VIII (Why Gypsies are not Romanians)*, the description of Bogonos is extremely warm and full of consideration: "Imagine one of those old country boyars, primitive Moldavians with patriarchal skills, long clothes, cheerful and sun-drenched faces, who are always happy and content when the harvest was bountiful, who do not bother with politics"⁶⁰. Chastised for not reading the history of the gypsies in the lives of the saints, Negruzzi receives, in return, the neighbour's praise for publishing the poem *Aprodul Purice [The Chigger Page]*, which has a different effect on Bogonos than the expected one – it "made me laugh until my heart ached"⁶¹. What is noteworthy in this regard is the self-irony of the author, who concludes humorously: "The barbarian! he thought he was complimenting me, and he didn't know how humiliated I was! Can you believe it? I had made a joke, without intending to"⁶². A similar sort of self-irony is practiced by Kogălniceanu at the end of the *Soirées dansantes*, in the scene of the meeting with the housekeeper in the morning after a social event. The description of the party before Lent which his maidservant participated in on the same night is constructed in counterpoint to the elitist atmosphere of the author's soiree. Despite the primitive feel of her experience, the woman enjoyed it "like an empress"⁶³; on the other hand, although in an elite society that creates enviable appearances⁶⁴, the author felt extremely bored. Kogălniceanu's very expressive self-ironic conclusion concerns the idea that simple people enjoy life in an authentic way, unlike sophisticated people. Through irony, the nostalgia of patriarchal life is activated once again – "Hm! I said to myself, biting my lips, that if I ever want to write the story of hostess A. ... I won't let my maidservant read it"⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ Costache Negruzzi, *Opere I. Păcatele tinerețelor [Works I. The Sins of Youth]*. Edited by Liviu Leonte, București, Minerva, 1974, p. 232: "Figurează-ți unul din acei vechi boieri de țară, moldavi primitivi, cu deprinderi patriarhale, cu haine lungi, cu față voioasă și pălită de soare, care sunt întotdeauna veseli și mulțămiiți când săcerisul a fost bun, care nu-și bat capul de politică".

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 324: "m-a făcut să râd de mă durea inima".

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 324: "Barbarul! gândea că-mi face un compliment, și nu știa cât mă umilea! Auzi colo! făcusem comic, fără să-mi treacă prin gând".

⁶³ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere I*, p. 42: "ca o împărăteasă".

⁶⁴ Especially considering the maidservant's remark: "Ah! You are boyars! It must have been so beautiful, your party!"; "A! dumneavoastră sunteți boieri; a trebuit să fie tare frumos" (*Ibidem*).

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 19: "Hm! zisei în mine, pișcându-mi buzele, dacă vrodată voi scrie istoria sărdăresei A... nu voi da-o s-o citească jupâneasa din casă".

Returning to Negruzzi's *Letter VIII (Why Gypsies are not Romanians)*, the exchange of remarks between him and Bogonos consists of an imposing picture with a specific character. Their dialogue seems to fall under Bergson's strategy of *Jack-in-the-box*, part of his theory on laughter⁶⁶. Leaving his neighbour to tell him the story of the gypsies in the life of St. Gregory, the author repeatedly interrupts him and questions the validity of the recounted facts, in the midst of Bogonos' eloquence as a devout storyteller. The boyar's offended countenance is extremely comical: "If you won't let me say what I want, I'll stop talking!", "Very well, I'll be quiet"⁶⁷. For the third time, Bogonos loses control over the anticipation of the mechanics of a spring ("a compressed feeling which is released like a spring, and an idea that finds amusement in compressing the feeling anew"⁶⁸) and protests for no reason – "In a month's time, the council gathered. There were the bishops from the St. Petersburg Synod, from Hina and... do you want to interrupt me again? In a word, from all over the world"⁶⁹. But this time Negruzzi, the maverick participant in the jovial dialogue, had not interrupted him.

Costache Negruzzi is also the author who opens the thematic series about provincials in the literature of the time (in 1840). His *Physiology of the Provincial* is joined by *The Physiology of the Provincial in Iași* by Kogălniceanu and *The Provincials and the People of Iași*, a text by Dimitrie Ralet. Similar in many examples of the subject, each of them still differs from the others in the specific kind of irony they resort to in theorizing the various nuances of the evoked personalities. Negruzzi's provincial is first of all the landowner – the rigid "landlord boyar" ("boierul ținutaș"), with patriarchal airs, interested in his superior boyar class, eager to gain access to the aristocratic circles of society by being related to the aristocracy of Iași. On an almost imperceptible scale in relation to the towering figure of the old boyar, the type of the young provincial quietly enters the scene. He is a tardy bachelor, almost deadbeat, dressed in tight western clothes, with ambitions of a social or erotic nature, whose opportunistic nature predisposes him to being classified as an upstart. We notice the layers of a fine, almost protective irony in the warmth of the Moldovan interjection "iaca" – "look, here's a subject to talk about at least for two months", but also in the subtlety of the cultural allusions to the domestic quarrels of a landlord boyar. "Those scenes are

⁶⁶ Henri Bergson, *Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Translated by Cloudesley Brereton, Maryland, Wildside Press, 2008, p. 24. See also Henri Berson, *Râsul: eseul asupra semnificației comicului*. Translation by Ana-Maria Datcu, București, All, 2014, pp. 60-66.

⁶⁷ Costache Negruzzi, *Opere I*, p. 235: "Dacă nu mă vei lăsa să spun cum mi-e spusul, tac", „Foarte bine, tac”.

⁶⁸ Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 24. See also Henri Bergson, *Râsul*, p. 63: "un sentiment comprimat care se destinde ca un arc și o idee care se amuză comprimând sentimentul în mod repetat”.

⁶⁹ Costache Negruzzi, *Opere I*, p. 235: "În vremea de o lună, soborul s-au adunat. Erau vlădicii de la s. sinod din Petersburg, de la Hina și... iar vrei să mă curmi? Într-un cuvânt, din toate părțile lumii”.

worthy of Hogarth's brush"⁷⁰ in giving credit to the worthy "provincial man of spirit"⁷¹ who could, in turn, illustrate the vices of the inhabitants of the capital by being more virtuous than the way the provincial had been previously described.

Enhancing Negruzzi's writing, Kogălniceanu positions himself in his lineage, claiming this filiation with the promise of enriching the written cultural heritage by another version of the bombastically announced provincial – "Take off your hats and bow. The provincial enters the scene"⁷². However, Kogălniceanu's reader can easily recognize, from the contexts in which the protagonist takes shape, the same landlord boyar from Negruzzi's text. He has the same traditionalist and inflexible style, the same infatuation with his high social position acquired through kinship, the same passion for theatre, balls and aristocratic walks. Kogălniceanu further outlines the impact of the first impression that comes to correspond, gradually, with the imaginary projection of the city in his mental legacy enthusiastically formed since childhood, to which the ingenuity of the countryside landlord exploited by the capital's opportunists is added. With an alleged nobility in his literary projections, Kogălniceanu excludes from the category of the provincials the vulnerable groups: "the elderly, children and women"; those adopted by the capital city by means of their jobs or long stays; the intelligent, the intellectually gifted individual who "has much more spirit than six capital inhabitants of his rank", whom "his mind makes an inhabitant of the civilized world and who, wherever he shows up, has the right to stay"; the peasants – poor fellows of prolonged injustices; the extremely wealthy people, "The happy ones of this world"; the beautiful ladies and young women. On the other hand, Kogălniceanu does not forgive the "uglies", categorized as the "unshakable feature of the province, now and forever, to the end of time"⁷³.

Replying to the prediction made at the end of Negruzzi's sketch, Dimitrie Ralet, in the *Provincials and the People of Iași*, opposes the risible simplicity of the provincial to the ridiculousness of the cosmopolitan of Iași: "The people of Iași got used to talking about provincials like everyone else; without looking at the work and faith of the poor dog, they took his name beforehand as a familiar disgrace. The defence of that beast must also be mentioned. Here, however, we will join only a few types of people from Iași and province, and let the reader

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 245: "iaca materie de vorbă cel puțin pentru două luni", „Ce scene atunce, vrednice de penelul lui Hogart!”.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 245: "provințial om de duh".

⁷² Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere I*, p. 53: "Scoateți-vă pălăriile și vă închinați. Provincialul intră în scenă".

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 56: "pe bătrâni, pe copii și pe dame", "are mai mult duh decât șase capitaliști de rangul lui", "mintea sa îl face locuitor al lumii civilizate și, orișunde se înfășoșează, are drit de împământenire", "fericiții acestei lumi", "slute", "nestrămutată proprietate a provinciei, acum și pururea și în vecii vecilor".

equitably judge who can laugh of whom”⁷⁴. Equally, at the beginning of his sketch, the author confesses his continuing Kogălniceanu’s writing, which entails, from Ralet’s perspective, the need of a reply from the part of a provincial. Ralet’s declared intention is to write this reply. The text illustrates, in addition, the type of the “provincial prince” in contrast to the fancy townsman of Iași, impossible to include in the landscape of the province, but also the opportunistic type, “neither provincial nor from Iași”; “The caricature of the hasty civilization” spends his time in the capital for most of the year, neglecting his household duties. “With parental righteousness we can claim the return of our lost son. In Iași he is worse than the provincialized in the country”⁷⁵. Ambitious enough to prove that he has exceeded his condition of a provincial, “that he became an inhabitant of Iași, getting out of his mind and out of order”⁷⁶, “he is both a knight, a diplomat, a good-for-nothing (as the provincials call him), and an employee; he is all and nothing”⁷⁷. Endowed with a warm kind of irony, Ralet shows an unbiased attitude, constructing a temperate satirical verve of the descriptions. The general idea of his text is that the people of Iași and the provincials share the same human quality, with its qualities and shortcomings, so that the solution of reconciling the contrasts is extremely simple – the people of Iași “have their own to look after them; we have ours”⁷⁸.

In the literary writings of the Moldavian Forty-Eighters, the interplay between the representation of a chromatic reality of the epoch and the ideal vision of its development towards a distinct, superior, Western mental boundary, translates the Romantic confrontation between the real and the ideal, between the creative self and the reality of the represented world. In the Forty-Eighters’ prose, irony has the role of mediating this often conflicting dynamic movement. Although the stylistic directions recall a classical configuration specific to rhetorical irony, at a semantic deep level, in the subtext of this apparent childhood of Romanian prose, the critical distancing of the subject from the artificiality and incongruity of a contradictory object-world and the indispensable detachment emerge, albeit not

⁷⁴ Dimitrie Ralet, *Suvenire și impresii de călătorie în România, Bulgaria, Constantinople* [*Souvenirs and Travel Impressions in Romania, Bulgaria, Constantinople*]. Edited and preface by Mircea Angheliescu, București, Minerva, 1979, p. 250: “Ieșenii s-au deprins a vorbi de provinciali precum toți oamenii, fără a privi la slujba și la credința bietului câne, i-au luat numele înainte drept o ocară familiară. Apărarea aceluia dobitoc trebuie deosăbită. Aice însă vom alătura numai câteva tipuri de ieșeni și de provinciali, și rămâne ca cetitorul să judece fără părtinire care de care pot râde cu deadinsul”.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 255: “nici provincial, nici ieșean”; “caricatura pripitei civilizații”, “cu dreptate părintească putem reclama întoarcerea perdutului nostru fiu. El este în Iași mai rău ca provincializatul în ținuturi”.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 255: “că s-a ieșit, ieșindu-și din minte și din rânduială”. In Romanian, an amusing word play: “s-a ieșit” = one became an inhabitant of Iași; and “și-a ieșit din minți” = getting out of one’s mind;

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 255: “e și cavaler, și diplomat, și pierde-vară (cum îi zic provincialii), și amplotiat; el e tot și nimică”.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 254: “ție-se ale lor de ei; nouă ne ajung ale noastre”.

without sanctioning the snobbery invested in the illusion of an unborn Western society.

Although the striking societal contrasts and the huge socio-economic gap between classes do not indicate a clarity of vision of the dreamed prosperity, whatever its nature – national, economic, intellectual, cultural etc. -- the writings of the Forty-Eighters preserve an effervescence and optimism about the future that are meant to subtly change the foundations of Romanian society. Slowly but steadily, the face of the Principalities visibly changes between 1821 and 1878. Thus, the construction of the text carries an ideological significance – the constant articulation of the cultural-political directions in which the modernization of Romanian life is outlined, in accordance with the values attested by the West. Implicitly, the process of self-reflection in formulating one's own identity is rigorously influenced from the outside. At first glance, it would seem that the result obtained can only be a conformist one. However, the interweaving of political, diplomatic, theatrical, journalistic, technological realities and the literary works issued by newly established publishing houses reveal a variety of procedures that allow the configuration of worlds and of fundamental experiences that render the “spirit of the place” in its amazing richness and diversity.

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VARIATIONS OF ROMANTIC IRONY IN THE WRITINGS OF THE MOLDOVAN FORTY-EIGHTERS

(Abstract)

Used mainly as a discursive strategy with the function of sanctioning and correcting the sharp contrasts and cultural inconsistencies, in an era of transition from East to West irony takes, in literary and journalistic discourse, various forms according to both the interrogated register - the salon, with all the French labels, the colourful bustle of the capital Iași with the wide oriental costumes and the European clothing patterns, rigid and tight – and the formative course, life experience and inner structure of each author. This paper proposes an investigation of the discursive nuances of elitist irony in the prose of the Forty-Eighters and in their entire approach to depicting their national identity as a space between two distinct mental boundaries. If Vasile Alecsandri practices a gentle type of irony corresponding to his endearing nature, Mihail Kogălniceanu adopts a pungent speech as a fine observer of his contemporary society. Equally uncompromising, Alecu Russo adopts, however, like Costache Negruzzi, a writing infused with rather self-ironic and reflective notes.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, Forty-Eighters, romantic irony, national identity, Principality of Moldavia.

VARIAȚII ALE IRONIEI ROMANTICE ÎN SCRIERILE PAȘOPTIȘTILOR MOLDOVENI

(Rezumat)

Întrebuițată îndeosebi ca strategie discursivă cu funcționalitatea de a sancționa și corijă contrastele stridente și incongruențele culturale, într-o epocă aflată în tranziție de la Orient la Occident, ironia primește, în discursul literar și publicistic, forme variate în acord atât cu registrul interogant – viața de salon, cu toate etichetele franțuzești, forfota colorată a capitalei Iași cu costumele orientale largi și tiparele vestimentare europene, rigide și strâmte –, cât și cu parcursul formativ, experiența de viață și structura interioară ale fiecărui autor. Lucrarea de față propune o investigație a nuanțelor discursive pe care le comportă ironia elitistă în proza pașoptiștilor și în întregul lor demers de radiografiere a identității naționale și a unui spațiu aflat între două granițe mentalitare distincte. Dacă Vasile Alecsandri practică o ironie blândă, în acord cu firea sa amabilă și solară, Mihail Kogălniceanu adoptă un discurs caustic și neiertător, fiind un fin observator al societății contemporane lui. La fel de intransigent, mai cu seamă în polemica sa cu latiniștii ardeleni, Alecu Russo adoptă totuși, în tandem cu Costache Negruzzi, o scriere cu note mai degrabă autoironice și reflexive.

Cuvinte-cheie: Europa de Est, pașoptiști, ironie romantică, identitate națională, Principatul Moldovei.