

SWIFTIAN IRONY AND THE ROMANIAN NOVEL

This paper focuses on the use of Swiftian irony in two Romanian novels: *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* [*Gulliver in the Country of Lies*] by Ion Eremia¹ and *Călătorie în Capricia* [*A Journey to Capricia*] by Mircea Opriță². The influence of the troubled political environment in Eastern Europe during the twentieth century informs the intertextual relation between these three novels. The intertextual analysis has two levels: the ironical use of the Swiftian travelogue by the two Romanian novelists and the (Swiftian) irony within the two novels authored by Ion Eremia and Mircea Opriță. This intertextual relationship is also integrated within the international scholarship on Swiftian irony.

The statement that Jonathan Swift is considered a master of irony is a common place in many literary histories or even literary textbooks. Still, the critical literature about Swift, the ironist, is not very rich. Eleanor Hutchens distinguishes irony “from other kinds of deceptive acts”³ of literature. Basically, irony is “the sport of bringing about a conclusion by indicating its opposite”⁴, irony is an “understatement, which achieves emphasis by denying”⁵ its rhetorical power. Irony

¹ Ion Eremia (1913–2004) was a Romanian officer who fought in World War II both on the East and the West front (Romania fought against the Soviet Union from 1941 until 1944 and against Nazi Germany from 1944 till 1945). After World War II had ended and Romania entered the orbit of the Soviet Union, Eremia became a general and was even promoted Vice-Minister of National Defence. In 1956 Eremia was purged as a consequence of his critical attitude towards the new authorities. Disappointed and bitter, he wrote the fierce satire *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* [*Gulliver in the Country of Lies*] between 1956 and 1958. Eremia tried to send his manuscript to France where he had been promised that the book would be published in translation. This allegorical text was meant to be a message from behind the Iron Curtain about the realities of the new Communist world. The writer was denounced, the manuscript was confiscated by the Securitate (the Romanian political police), and the author was arrested in 1958. Beaten to death and submitted to the worst possible tortures during the inquest, he was sentenced to a twenty-five years’ prison sentence for treason and “plotting against the state order”. In 1964 Eremia was released from prison thanks to a general political amnesty. The manuscript was returned to the author only in 1990, upon his request. It was under the new political circumstances after the collapse of the Communist system, at the end of 1989 that this book could be published. It immediately attracted the attention of the literary critics as it was a great sample of the so-called “desk drawer literature” (literature that could not be published under the Communist regime because of censorship).

² Mircea Opriță was born in 1943. He has a university degree in Philology from Babeș-Bolyai University (1966) and a doctorate on the utopian discourse from the same university (1998). He has worked for Dacia Publishing House, and for the Romanian Cultural Institute in Budapest. Opriță is one of the most important representatives of the Romanian SF.

³ Eleanor N. Hutchens, “The Identification of Irony”, *ELH*, 27, 1960, December, 4, p. 353.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 358.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 362.

relies on “the juxtaposition or the interplay of opposites; and to insist on this is also to reverse the normal laws of causal connection”⁶. David Holdcroft considers irony to be both a trope and a discourse, “an expression of an ironist’s attitude to the world”⁷. Theoretically, Holdcroft relies on Grice and his notion of the Constructive Principle of the discourse and sentence (CP). Questioning is one of the ironist’s most powerful weapons and consequently, “he does not adhere to the spirit of CP”⁸, hence irony “can be at the same time subversive, destructive, and infuriating”⁹.

Many scholars prefer to combine the analysis of satire and irony rather indistinctly, irony being considered, at best, a tool to achieve satire¹⁰. For instance, Linderman emphasizes Swift’s indebtedness to the Menippean satire, irony being one of its tools in the sample text *Tale of a Tub*¹¹. Richard Nash also analyses Swiftian irony in *Tale of a Tub* and comes to the conclusion that there are two ironic modes: the narrative one and the allegorical one. The narrative mode requires “the reader to distinguish truth from the erroneous utterance of a narrator”¹², whereas the allegorical one requires “the reader to recognize a metaphoric truth implied by the text”¹³. Nash emphasizes that in both cases irony “requires the reader to participate actively in the text’s creation of meaning in a manner that conforms to the meaning being created”¹⁴. It is clear that Eremia’s and Opriță’s use of the allegorical ironic modes helps the reader create meaning that is important for the understanding of the reality where these writers found their inspiration. The problem is to what extent they succeeded in surpassing the constraints of their inspiring reality and give food for thought and meaning to next generations of readers.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 362.

⁷ David Holdcroft, “Irony as a Trope, and Irony as Discourse”, *Poetics Today*, 4, 1983, 3, p. 508.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 511.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 511.

¹⁰ An unfortunate example of superficial scholarship about Swift’s irony and its connection with satire is Elena Țărălungă Tamura, “Jonathan Swift’s Satire and Irony”, *The Economic Journal of Takasaki City University of Economics*, 46, 2003, 3, pp. 129-135. Elena Țărălungă Tamura mentions that Swift “draws with caustic irony an idealized picture of the English social and political institutions” (p. 133) but gives no explanatory details. The ironical destiny of Swift’s novel which turned from “one of the most powerful attacks ever made against man’s wickedness and stupidity” (p. 135) into “a charming book of adventure popular with children” (p. 135) is fugitively mentioned, but the author does not try to find any explanation of the infantilization/ minorisation of Swift’s book. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

¹¹ Deborah Linderman, “Self-Transforming Ironies in Swifts *Tale of a Tub*”, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 16, 1979, March, 1, pp. 69-78.

¹² Richard Nash, “Entrapment and Ironic Modes in *Tale of a Tub*”, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 24, 1991, 4, p. 416.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 416.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 431.

Satire and irony are interchangeable according to Dyson's essay "Swift: The Metamorphosis of Irony". Although Dyson analyses irony only in Book 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*, his conclusions are worthwhile. Both irony and satire serve a moral purpose and they are meant to mend the world. Irony is an increasingly important element during the four voyages of Gulliver but in Book 4, the voyage to the country of the rational horses, irony is no longer a verbal device, it becomes a structural principle with an important existential function. Irony "ceases to be a functional technique serving a moral purpose and becomes an embodiment of an attitude to life"¹⁵. If we follow Gulliver's four voyages, Swift's irony gets more and more pessimistic and points to the real "world's essential unmendability"¹⁶. Irony "communicates a tragic sense of life which is no longer supported by a strong belief in any universal and uncompromised values"¹⁷. Dyson considers Swift the tutor of two other great ironists of British literature: Aldous Huxley and Samuel Butler and this statement could be extended to world literature. In my opinion, after the 1950's Swift became the great tutor of two Romanian authors, Ion Eremia and Mircea Opriță

Irvin Ehrenpreis has also noticed the connection between satire and irony. Namely, Swift "writes the opposite of what he means, in a tone which indicates the real intention. But he can also be ironic about an irony"¹⁸. Ehrenpreis acknowledges that malleability has made Gulliver attractive for other writers' intertextual exercises: "Moderately successful, infused with the ordinary bourgeois ambitions, benevolent and hopeful toward man, boastful about his native land and about European civilization, he has an irresistible attraction for the reader's fantasies of identification. After going through the opening episodes, one becomes Gulliver"¹⁹. This is exactly what happened to both Eremia and Opriță.

Walter Bliss Carnochan recognizes that the scholars "have trouble disentangling the idea of satire from the ironic procedures of the satirists: satire and irony (we think) just go together. Irony is the indirection that converts criticism to satire. But is there any reason behind what looks like a dependency relationship?"²⁰. Carnochan considers irony a verbal device which is connected to satire by its simultaneity. Irony "is the simultaneous assertion and denial of the existence of opposites. Simultaneity is of the essence of irony which fuses what we can only say consecutively: "not-p implies p ... p implies not-p"²¹. In this way,

¹⁵ Anthony Edward Dyson, "Swift: The Metamorphosis of Irony" in *Essays and Studies*, vol. 11, London, John Murray, 1958, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹⁸ Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Swift and Satire", *College English*, 13, 1952, March, 6, p. 309.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 312.

²⁰ Walter Bliss Carnochan, "Swift's Tale: On Satire, Negation, and the Uses of Irony", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 5, 1971, 1, pp. 123-124.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

irony “is a creating of the timeless world, a sort of paradise, though of course the mockery of paradise, too”²². The Houyhnhnms’ idealized mode of life needed the mocking opposition of the Yahoos. Eremia’s or Opriță’s realms also need an idealizing and mocking counterpart. In Carnochan’s words: “the mutual implication of opposites and the consequence that both are true, is the ironist’s life-blood”²³. Swift’s irony “is the satirist’s rhetorical victory in the presence of self-defeat”²⁴. Satirists Eremia and Opriță were able to win that victory.

Daniel Eilon connects satire and irony on the basis of stylistic parsimony. The ironic style – Swift being one of its most important representatives – “is thrifty in its allowance of signals and guidance”²⁵, this efficient stylistic sobriety characterizes Eremia’s and Opriță’s writing. Eilon also notices that irony “defines two communities: those who fall for it and those who are on it”²⁶. Swiftian irony is characterized, according to Eilon, by some similarity with the bite: “the linguistic practical joke that deliberately manufactures this kind of embarrassing situation so as to enjoy the privileged satisfaction of irony: ‘Pity to the Ignorant’”²⁷. Although irony “is a trope whose rhetorical effect depends upon the audience’s desire to ally themselves with the elite speaker, lest they be counted among the vulgar”²⁸, Swift’s irony is particular because the “clubs, cabals, sects, ‘families’ (in the Mafia sense of the term), professions, and parties that Swift attacked are unions of interest and privilege. Their closure defines them. Swift’s irony... forms a meritocracy rather than an aristocracy”²⁹. Eremia’s and Opriță’s Swiftian irony forms a readership that condemns tyranny and warns about the possibility of tyranny to return.

The scholarship on irony cannot omit the canonized critic Frank Raymond Leavis who analysed Swift’s irony in a well-known article published in 1967. Although the title of the article announces that the critic’s focus is irony, in fact the article rather deals with satire than irony³⁰ with Leavis announcing the latent death of political satire: “He [Swift] will, of course, be aware of an ingenuity of political satire in ‘Lilliput’, but the political satire is, unless for historians, not very much alive today”³¹.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

²⁵ Daniel Eilon, “Swift’s Satiric Logic: On Parsimony, Irony, and Antinomian Fiction”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1988, 8, p. 25.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

³⁰ Leavis is not an exception. Several other critics mix irony and satire.

³¹ Frank Raymond Leavis, “The Irony of Swift”, in *Fair Liberty Was All His Cry*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1967, p. 117. Nowadays in 2021 we can only agree with Leavis. Derision is not absent

Swift's Use of Irony by Herbert John Davis tackles irony in relation with Defoe and historicity: "[S]ome problems in the interpretation of irony may become more difficult with the passage of centuries"³². Change of morals and ideas because of history and the influence of time passage may make aspects of Swiftian irony difficult to assess and appreciate three hundred years later. The historicity of the moment when Eremia and Opriță wrote their ironical travelogues influenced the creation of these texts and it will always affect their reception. The historical reference point that connects but also separates the two novels is the anti-totalitarian revolution of December 1989. The plot of Eremia's text occurs before and during the revolution, the plot of Opriță's text occurs after the revolution that gave people so much hope. The ironical conclusion is that the revolution does not bring something necessarily better, but it does bring something less bad.

The historicity of irony³³ is explained by Frank Stringfellow from a psychoanalytical point of view. Irony is a device which deals with two verbal levels: what is said and what is meant, the conscious and the unconscious.³⁴ Consequently, the analysis of irony must go beyond the verbal level and find the rich ambiguities of this verbal device in the unconscious meaning hidden in our mind. As our mind develops according to the historical and the social environment, irony has a powerful historical content.

Rolf Breuer also relies on a psychological approach to irony, more precisely he scrutinizes it in relationship with schizophrenia. Breuer considers that there are two types of irony: classical irony and tragic irony or the irony of fate: "In classical irony, a proposition does not mean that which, according to its wording, one would expect it to mean; in fact it often means the opposite"³⁵. Tragic irony or the irony of fate results from "the experience of the discrepancy between intention and result, between means and end"³⁶. In other words, irony has a ludic character, it is "a game played with the levels of interaction, such that contradictions are combined, and mutual exclusions exist simultaneously. It is the paradoxical response to a paradoxical situation, similarly, schizophrenia is a contradictory response to a contradictory situation"³⁷. Schizophrenia presupposes the creation of a world in itself. Exactly in the same way, "a work of art is a universe in itself, which follows its own laws and cannot therefore be judged by standards extrinsic

from Romanian public life, but it manifests mainly by mockery, banter, and gross caricature. Irony is scarce, subtle irony even more so.

³² Herbert John Davis, "Swift's Use of Irony", in Earl Miner (ed.), *Stuart and Georgian Moments*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972, p. 221.

³³ Already noticed by F. R. Leavis.

³⁴ Frank Stringfellow, *The Meaning of Irony: A Psychoanalytic Investigation*, Albany, University of New York Press, 1994.

³⁵ Rolf Breuer, "Irony, Literature, and Schizophrenia", *New Literary History*, 12, 1980, 1, p. 109.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

to it”³⁸. In the ironical exercise, there is simultaneity between surface and depth, form and content, mask and face. This “implies that irony may be the only legitimate form of communication for the artist at certain times. This is because it is irony alone, as a form of schizophrenia, which reconstructs the discrepancy between means and end, form and content, agent and act”³⁹. In *A Modest Proposal* Swift uses such a schizophrenic procedure where “irony is awareness of the gulf between world and self”⁴⁰. There is a connection between schizophrenia and irony because “literature cannot be understood merely in terms of itself, divorced from the environment which gives rise to it or to which it is a reaction”⁴¹. Consequently, “schizophrenia becomes the appropriate form of experiencing reality, irony the only legitimate principle”⁴².

Denis Donoghue starts from Leavis’s article on irony and emphasizes the existence of a span of time between the said irony and the understood irony⁴³. This delay empowers the ironist:

The delay between the utterance and its being understood corresponds to a certain subjective freedom. The ironist, since he does not coincide with his meaning, has within his power the possibility of a beginning which is not “generated from previous conditions”. The ironist masters every moment by travelling incognito. The purpose of irony is to enable the ironist to feel free to move in any direction he chooses: he is not intimidated by any object in view⁴⁴.

As a consequence of this freedom, “irony is a risky business because one cannot at all be certain that readers will be directed to the ironic meanings one intends”⁴⁵.

Breuer’s and Donoghue’s approach to irony can help us understand Swiftian irony as well as the way in which Eremia and Oprea put Swiftian irony to efficient use in order to respond to the needs of different historical periods. With both Romanian authors, the discrepancy in time and the discrepancy between reality and the reality fictionalized according to the “schizophrenic” recipe can be better grasped relying on Breuer and Donoghue.

Wayne Booth considers that verbal ironies can be divided into two categories: stable and unstable. The former are “interpretable, with some stopping point in the

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 116-117.

⁴³ Donoghue refers to the historicity of enunciation and not to the historicity of the context where the enunciation is made.

⁴⁴ Denis Donoghue, “Swift and the Association of Ideas”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1988, 18, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Stanley Fish, “Short People Got No Reason to Live: Reading Irony”, *Daedalus*, 112, 1983, 1, p. 176.

act of interpretation"⁴⁶, the latter are characterized by a hermeneutical act that is "inherently, deliberately endless"⁴⁷. According to Booth, "when a clever ironist manages to hook us, we come closer than at any other time to a *full identification of two minds*"⁴⁸. Irony is like an "intellectual dance"⁴⁹ that brings us to "tight bonding with the ironist... following the tight web of his or her mental processes"⁵⁰. This is why irony is a history dependent interpretation, hence its frequent instability⁵¹.

Wayne's strategy to understand/produce irony is deftly commented upon by Stanley Fish who insists on the role of the interpretative community: "Thus, when a community of readers agrees that a work, or a part of a work is ironic, that argument will have come about because the community has been persuaded to a set of assumptions, to a *way of reading*, that produces the ironic meanings to all of its members... irony is a way of reading"⁵².

Douglas Colin Muecke first dealt with irony in his study *Irony and the Ironic*. He starts from the importance of this verbal device because of the very nature of literature: "Literature, with language as its medium, is inescapably ideational"⁵³. He notices that "the concept of irony is vague, unstable and multiform"⁵⁴ and that "irony has basically a corrective function"⁵⁵ which it fulfils relying a lot on the principle of economy⁵⁶. Too many words ruin the irony. In his 1983 article "Images of Irony" Muecke resumes the problem of irony which he considers to be an exercise of power:

Accordingly the archetypal ironist is God because he is omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, absolute, infinite and free. The archetypal victim is man insofar as he may easily be seen as trapped and submerged in time and matter, blind, contingent,

⁴⁶ Wayne C. Booth, "The Empire of Irony", *The Georgia Review*, 37, 1983, 4, p. 724.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 724.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 729.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 729.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 729.

⁵¹ Swift's own irony can be considered brute and bare and having no philtre, especially nowadays in the age when political correctness led to cancel culture. Remember, for instance, the very crude episode at the end of Gulliver's voyage to the country of the rational horses. He makes his canoe out of yahoo skins. He even insists that he took care to look for skins of younger yahoos as this material is more flexible and more enduring. Gulliver, the colonialist, forgets about any moral principles and the yahoos are othered beyond the level of slavery, they come to be considered to be very valuable raw material. In the twenty-first century, one cannot help wondering: Do the yahoo, abominable as they are, actually deserve this?

⁵² Stanley Fish, "Short", p. 189.

⁵³ Douglas Colin Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, London and New York, Routledge, 1982, p. 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ See *Ibidem*, pp. 52-53.

limited, unfree, the slave of heredity, environment, historical conditioning, instincts, feelings and conscience, while all the time unaware of his being in these prisons⁵⁷.

Like Wayne Booth, Muecke offers researchers a classification of the types of irony:

“Vertical” irony is imagined from the ironist’s point of view, “horizontal” irony from the point of view of an ironist who is also a victim or sees himself as potentially a victim, and “labyrinthine” or “Protean” irony from the point of view of a victim or potential victim who resents not so much his victimization as his loss of contact with the ironist – in other words from the point of view of a victimized reader or critic⁵⁸.

Wayne Booth’s and Muecke’s classification of irony are very helpful to understand Eremia’s and Opriță’s intertextual operations. These Romanian hypertexts rely on stable irony, namely there is a “stopping point in the act of interpretation”⁵⁹. This point is Gulliver. It is on him and with him that all acts of interpretation stop. According to Muecke’s grid, both Romanian ironists apply horizontal irony. They themselves are victims of the intertextual irony as they lived the reality fictionalized in Kukunia or in Capricia. For the moment the interpretative communities of the Romanian ironists are still pretty close to the historical moment that inspired these imaginary travelogues. But it is not impossible that in the future, the interpretative communities will react to other fictional elements. As Fish draws our attention, it is not impossible that the interpretative communities of the future will read irony differently.

Swift’s Gulliver is connected to the utopian trend in English literature. Edward J. Rielly relates Gulliver to Thomas More’s *Utopia* in a very comprehensive article. Firstly, in both books “the irony begins in prefatory material with the sustained pretence that these books record actual journeys by real people, Hythlodæus and Gulliver”⁶⁰. Rielly agrees with Ian Watt that, on one hand, irony calls for an audience of “men of wit”⁶¹ and, on the other hand, irony is for the “literary mob”⁶² who fail “to identify themselves as satiric objects”⁶³. Rielly finds irony in the fact that “Gulliver is as deceived about the Houyhnhnms as Hythlodæus is about the Utopians. That Swift presents the rational horses as superior to the degenerate Yahoos, and a life led according to reason as preferable to a life rooted totally in the senses, seems clear. But those are not the only

⁵⁷ Douglas Colin Muecke, “Images of Irony”, *Poetics Today*, 4, 1983, 3, p. 402. An analysis of *The Book of Job* from the point of view of irony would be most interesting.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 412.

⁵⁹ Wayne C. Booth, “The Empire”, p. 724.

⁶⁰ Edward J. Rielly, “Irony in Gulliver’s Travels and Utopia”, *Utopian Studies*, 3, 1992, 1, p. 71.

⁶¹ Ian Watt, “The Ironic Tradition in Augustan Prose from Swift to Johnson”, in Claude Rawson (ed.), *The Character of Swift’s Satire*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1983, p. 305.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 306.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

alternatives; nor are they the final issues. Is Houyhnhnm society Swift's ideal? This question, a fundamental issue raised by the question, and the answer further establish parallels to More's Utopia"⁶⁴.

The societies presented in Ion Eremia's (dis)topia and in Opriță's *Capricia* have different relations with the ideal of a perfect society. Eremia does not explicitly mention Raphael Hythlodæus as Gulliver's predecessor, but Opriță does. Once shipwrecked on Capricia's shores, Gulliver remembers the honourable Sir Thomas More "who, before being taken to the scaffold, also told stories about an island discovered in the seas that the Europeans had not explored"⁶⁵ and he wonders if "the uncontrollable whims of fortune"⁶⁶ had not carried him in the same direction. Besides introducing an element of fear, this literary reference, which does not appear in the Swiftian text, is an irony to the utopian dreams of Capricia's inhabitants.

Very interesting Swiftian scholarship has been constructed upon a comparative basis. For instance, Katarzyna Bartoszyńska compares Swift's travel to the country of the Houyhnhnms with Krasicki's voyage to the island of Nipu. The latter is the author of the first Polish novel *Mikolaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki* [*The Adventures of Mr Nicholas Wisdom*], published in 1776. Bartoszyńska starts from the connection between utopian literature and travel writing: "Travel writing is an obvious model for utopian literature: the structure of travel narrative offers the perfect justification for devoting so much attention and detail to the inner workings of a fictional society"⁶⁷. Travelling increases one's ability to educate and enlighten but the irony is "that simply going to a different place does not automatically confer wisdom on the traveller"⁶⁸.

My approach is similar to Bartoszyńska's essay which allows a comparison between Swift's country of rational horses, Eremia's country of lies, and Opriță's Capricia. The Houyhnhnm society is not only a rationally ordered world but also one that is structured around pure logic. The "Houyhnhnm society is theoretically a timeless, universal template. It is not only a rationally ordered world but also one that is structured around pure logic"⁶⁹. The country of lies also relies on a utopia and it becomes a dreamland, or rather a nightmare land, where generous ideas were twisted and betrayed. Capricia's utopia is consumerist. The ideal is to be able to

⁶⁴ Edward J. Rielly, "Irony", p. 78.

⁶⁵ Mircea Opriță, *Călătorie în Capricia. Cu adevărat ultima aventură a lui Gulliver* [*A Journey to Capricia. Gulliver's Truly Last Journey*], București, Eagle Publishing House, 2011, p. 17: "care, înainte de a fi fost dus la eșafod, povestea și el despre o insulă descoperită prin mările nemaicercetate de europeni".

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 17: "toanele de nestăpânit ale întâmplării".

⁶⁷ Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, "Persuasive Ironies: Utopian Readings of Swift and Krasicki", *Comparative Literary Studies*, 50, 2013, 4, p. 620.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 621.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 629.

buy as much as possible and be rich: “The problem with utopian modes of government is their attempt to map out an all-encompassing logical system that will apply universally”⁷⁰. The argument that Swift and Krasicki “make is that when theory and experience collide, the result is disastrous”⁷¹. This argument can be extended to Eremia and Opriță. In fact, with Swift, irony ultimately becomes “the death blow to utopianism”⁷².

The ironic twist embodied by Swift’s *Gulliver* also hovers on the discussion of colonialism. This aspect of Bartoszynska’s comparison is justified by the very situation of Ireland and Poland when Swift and Krasicki wrote their novels. When *Gulliver* describes the countries he has visited he also tries to protect them from any possible colonial ventures by the British: “As those countries which I have described do not appear to have any desire of being conquered, and enslaved, or murdered or driven out by colonies; nor abound either in gold, silver, sugar, or tobacco; I did humbly conceive they were by no means proper objects of our zeal, our valour, or our interest”⁷³. It is important that Swift condemns both colonialism and the greed and violence that accompany it. Paradoxically, at the end of Swift’s novel “*Gulliver* can be read as the ideal colonial subject”⁷⁴. He adores the metropolis of the rational horses and admits his inferiority: “In his complete dismissal of his wife and children – his repulsion towards them, even – *Gulliver* can be seen as having totally internalized the structures of (colonial) authority”⁷⁵.

One of the few studies dealing with the transformation of Swiftian irony by another writer is Marjorie Perloff’s article “Beckett in the Country of the Houyhnhnms”. After carefully analysing how and what elements of the hypotext were transformed into the Beckettian hypertext, Perloff concludes that “the caricaturing of others is largely a phantasmagoria within which the narrator’s own self is burlesqued and held up to ridicule”⁷⁶. In other words, Beckett’s caricatures the world like Swift but in doing so he also affects his own self that becomes a burlesque entity. Swift remains trapped in the cultural and philosophical structures of the Enlightenment, Beckett drives Swiftian irony toward the absurd.

A similar case of Swift’s intertextual use by a twentieth-century writer is Antony Johae who analyses the intertextual connection between Swift and Wole Soyinka. The latter used *Gulliver*’s travel to Lilliput in a poem he wrote while he was in prison. According to Johae, there is a correspondence between the

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 630.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 631.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 640.

⁷³ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, New York, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964, p. 289.

⁷⁴ Katarzyna Bartoszynska, “Persuasive Ironies”, p. 636.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 636.

⁷⁶ Marjorie Perloff, “Beckett in the Country of the Houyhnhnms: The Transformation of Swiftian Satire”, *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui*, 2010, 22, p. 34.

allegorical modes of Swift's novel and those of Soyinka's poem *Gulliver*: "Rather than refusing Swift's idiom, Soyinka immediately appropriates it as a device to place a temporal and spatial distance between his speaker, Gulliver, and himself – a poet who, because he is also a prisoner, must use an alien archaic language in the manner of an eighteenth-century satirist to disguise an attack"⁷⁷ on (post-)colonial structures.

Not much Romanian scholarship has been dedicated to Eremia's and Oprea's Swiftian novels. Eremia has been the focus of Gabriela Chiciudean's study which analysed the novel *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* as an anti-utopian space⁷⁸. Badea-Gheracostea commented on Oprea's revisitation of Swift under the circumstances of post-communist Romania and the country's transition from totalitarianism to an "original" Romanian democracy. The critic notices that Oprea does not impress by his "mimetic capacity", Romania being allegorically represented by Capricia. According to Badea-Gheracostea, the Romanian novelist followed the speculative fiction recipe and built a fictional world whose signification means a lot to the twenty-first century reader⁷⁹. The same critical "track" is followed by Cornel Robu who also connects Oprea's novel to speculative fiction and insists on Oprea's use irony as a very efficient litotes⁸⁰.

In my opinion the analysis of ironical use of the Swiftian travelogue by Eremia and Oprea cannot neglect the fact that Swift himself wanted to challenge two literary models when he wrote *Gulliver's Travels*. One such model is *Utopia* by Thomas Morus and the other one is Defoe's story of Alexander Selkirk, the shipwrecked sailor who became Robinson Crusoe. In both cases, a seaman tells the story of his travels. We can talk about a chain of ironical revisitations, but the irony is much clearer in the intertextual relation between Gulliver and Robinson Crusoe⁸¹.

⁷⁷ Antony Johae, "Wole Soyinka's 'Gulliver': Swift Transposed", *Comparative Literature*, 53, 2001, 1, p. 36.

⁷⁸ Gabriela Chiciudean, "L'Imaginaire de l'espace antiutopique chez Swift et Ion Eremia", *Caietele Echinox*, 2013, December, 25, pp. 277-292.

⁷⁹ Cătălin Badea-Gheracostea, "Sfada cu literatura. Mircea Oprea îl aduce pe Gulliver *La Bloc*" ["Quarrel with Literature. Mircea Oprea Brings Gulliver to *La Bloc*"], *Observator cultural*, 2012, 620, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/sfada-cu-literatura-mircea-oprea-il-duce-pe-gulliver-la-bloc-2/> Accessed on December 21, 2021.

⁸⁰ Cornel Robu, "Sarcasm cu zâmbetul pe buze" ["Sarcasm with a Smiley Face"], *Tribuna*, 2012, 234, pp. 7-8.

⁸¹ Gulliver is an ironical replica to Robinson Crusoe, the Puritan slave trader who was shipwrecked and spent twenty-eight years on an island working and praying. Can one imagine a young man spending years on a deserted island and having no erotic dreams? Gulliver is shipwrecked several times but is much more aware that he and the humans are not only mind, but also body. The erotic is vaguely suggested in some relations Gulliver has with his female hosts, but Gulliver is quite different from the puritanical Crusoe.

Like *Gulliver's Travels*, Eremia's novel begins with a "Preface" signed A.I., pretended best friend of I.A., the author of the book. It is an ironical strategy that reminds the knowledgeable reader that Swift himself began his book with the paratextual correspondence between Captain Lemuel Gulliver and his publisher Richard Sympson. The more insistent and precise these paratexts are, the clearer is fiction's pretence of being a genuine, true experience. Both Eremia's and Oprea's main hero claim the same thing in the novel's paratext. Upon his return "amidst the British yahoos, he [Gulliver] decided to record his experiences again and for the last time"⁸². The pretence to truthfulness is ironically argued by both authors who make their Gulliver land on the warm sands of a beach, exactly like their illustrious model.

Eremia resumed the Swiftian narrative from where the great eighteenth-century writer had left it. After his return from the country of the reasonable horses, Lemuel Gulliver decides to embark on a new journey that will take him away from the disgusting British Yahoos. A shipwreck brings him to Kukunia, a country where an oligarchy mercilessly imposes the ideology of Granitism that nobody can challenge or doubt. The greatest crime in Kukunia is to think differently. The authorities are extremely vigilant and see enemies everywhere. The basic tenet of Granitism is devotion to and fear of the Leader simultaneously. In Kukunia, the enemy of all enemies is reality: "Reality is the great enemy: it dares to oppose to Great Granit!"⁸³. The lie imposed by force and cruelty, the supremacy of ideology over reality, these are the dominant characteristics of Kukunia.

An important episode where Eremia ironizes both his hypotext and his hypertext, more precisely the wonderful Kukunian realities, is Gulliver's visit to the Academy of Science. Swift's projectors are transformed by Eremia into Kukunian scientists preoccupied by equally strange projects. The food problem preoccupies both institutions. Swift's projectors want to extract food from excrements, the Kukunian scientists want to create a new species: "the stomachless man"⁸⁴. However, in some respects, Eremia's Academy of Science surpasses the Swiftian model, the irony turns into an enormous peal of laughter. Even scientific basic truths are twisted in order to satisfy Granit's personality cult. An extraordinary discovery of the Kukunian scientists is that "the axis of the terrestrial globe crosses Kukunia, it meets the earth exactly in the village where the Great Granit was born, and it stops seven thousand feet under the cellar of his

⁸² Ion Eremia, *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* [*Gulliver in the Country of Lies*], București, Fundația Academică Civică, 2015, p. 27: "în mijlocul yahoo-ilor britanici și-a pus încă o dată și pentru ultima data, mâna pe condei".

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 237: "Realitatea-i marele vinovat: îndrăznește să se împotrivescă Marelui Granit!".

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 141: "omul-fără-stomac".

parents' home"⁸⁵. Another important discovery, made by Granit himself, is that in Kukunia the ratio between the ray of the circle and its diameter is no longer 3.14 but only 3. All wheels must be built in such a way as to follow Granit's discovery, which creates great problems for transportation. Nobody dares to apply the traditional geometry and have vehicles with round wheels where the ratio between the ray of the wheel and its diameter is 3.14.

Like Swift's Gulliver in Lilliput, Eremia's Gulliver also becomes involved in the political life of the country. But if Swift's Gulliver is reluctant to take sides, Eremia's Gulliver tries to help the opposition. Neither does Eremia neglect to mock at the naïve or the hypocritical Western leftists who believed or pretended to believe the lies of Granitism, namely Communist propaganda. The end of Eremia's novel is a concoction based upon its Swiftian hypotext and some details depicting the end of the Romanian totalitarian regime forty years before it really happened in December 1989. Eremia foreshadowed history forty years before it happened. The end of the Kukunian totalitarian regime begins with a popular revolt (as in Romania, the end of Ceaușescu's regime). This revolt breaks up at one of the rallies summoned by the dictators themselves. The mob finally realize that they have been stupid, but they are numerous, they have force. The authoritarian regime is overruled. Gulliver returns to Britain coming to the conclusion that, in spite of their shortcomings, the British Yahoos are far better than the Kukunian Yahoos.

Upon his return to Britain, Gulliver is put into an asylum. The stress of the journey as well as his unbearable conclusions about human nature have taken their toll. Mental disorder affects both Gullivers, but Eremia's irony is much bitterer. In the asylum where he is interned, Gulliver meets Garry Bullit, a fierce defender of Granitism who converts Gulliver to his ideology. The inmates are looking forward to the future and the imminent victory of Granitism in Britain when Gulliver hopes to get out of his prison/asylum. How beautiful would England's Granitic future be! Eremia's humour is no less than Swift's. At the end of his journey, the Swiftian Gulliver converts to the hyper-rational ideology of the Houyhnhnms. Eremia also made his hero convert. The reader is warned not to believe that "the wonderful Kukunian state was run by a despot, half crazy, half charlatan, who apparently mocked at his poor people who suffered because of hunger and maddening fear"⁸⁶. The future belongs to Granitism! – announces Eremia ironical with himself, with his readers, and with his Gulliver.

Mircea Opriță's *Călătorie în Capricia*, a very daring satire of post-communist Romania, a more recent resurrection of Gulliver's myth in Romanian literature, operates like to sort of sequel to the overthrow of Granitism. In Opriță's allegorical

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 145: "axa globului terestru trece prin Kukunia, înțeapă pământul exact în satul unde s-a născut Marele Granit și se oprește la șapte mii de picioare sub beciul casei sale părințești".

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 31: "că minunatul stat kukunez ar fi fost condus de un despot pe jumătate nebun și jumătate șarlatan care, chipurile, și-ar fi bătut joc de bietul său popor hămesit de foame și înebunit de groază".

travelogue the tyrannical Granit is replaced by the tyrannical Ciocesko. Like Eremia, Opriță maintains some elements from the Swiftian hypotext and he makes them operate in an ironical mode.

Mary, Gulliver's wife, is only an episodic appearance in Swift's novel. Lemuel has married her because he needs her dowry. He does not spend too much time with her before he goes on another journey. But the epitome of ingratitude occurs when Gulliver returns from his fourth voyage and he finds, in his patient wife and even in his children, only Yahoo features. While Eremia shows no interest in this female figure, Opriță notices how age and time has changed Gulliver's wife as if youth and beauty were supposed to be a woman's eternal duty. Says Opriță's Gulliver: "I loved her a lot, but I was almost ashamed to get out into the world with her, and she did not seem to remember the years of her virginal youth, nor did I feel that they had ever existed"⁸⁷. In Opriță's novel, the alienation and the estrangement between the spouses lead to the ironical treatment of the main character's ideas about masculinity.

There are two scenes in Opriță's novel that remind the knowledgeable reader of Gulliver's famous discussion with the monarch from Brobdingnag. In one of them Gulliver *encounters* King Maidan, a successful businessman, great admirer of royalties and leader of a minority community easily recognizable by the Romanian reader. He had done good business "in cahoots with some M.P.'s and they had made good money together at a time when nobody had the stupid thought to pay his taxes to the island's treasury out of his winnings"⁸⁸. The mores of post-1990 Romania are analysed against the litmus of eighteenth-century England. Irony is the instrument. In the second conversation, Gulliver challenges the present-day leader of Romania, ironically called Trosnack. The naïve British will be severely punished.

Opriță does not confess to having read Eremia's novel, but he seems to have written a sequel to Eremia's dystopia. What happened after the overthrow of Granit's regime? "It seems to me [Gulliver] that having removed the barriers of the Bright Age⁸⁹ almost overnight, the island's inhabitants spoiled themselves with lots of democratic perversions..."⁹⁰. The mushrooming private universities are, for instance, one of the consequences of the rigorous censorship of academic life under the previous regime. Quantity and aggressive pecuniary interests have

⁸⁷ Mircea Opriță, *Călătorie*, p. 51: "o iubeam mult, dar aproape mă cuprindea rușinea să mă arăt cu ea în lume, iar de anii tinereții ei feciorelnice nu părea să-și amintească nici ea, după cum nici eu nu-i mai simțeam să fi existat".

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 152: "întovărășindu-se cu niște politicieni din Parlament, și câștigaseră mult împreună, într-o vreme când nimeni nu se gândea la prostia fără margini de a-și plăti din câștiguri dările către visteria insulei."

⁸⁹ Ironical denomination adequate both for Granit's and Ciocesko's regimes.

⁹⁰ Mircea Opriță, *Călătorie*, p. 162: "Ieșiți peste noapte dintre opreliștile Luminoasei Epoci, locuitorii insulei îmi pare că au trăit un adevărat răsfăț al desfrânarilor democratice..."

replaced the ideological control. What is better? – this is the question lurking behind the ironical discourse. Gulliver's visit to one of these universities is one of the most efficient ironical episodes in the novel: "The Lord Dean was a short and stocky man whose figure would have signalled a charlatan in England, but here in the City of the Sun pointed to the most distinguished academic guarantees"⁹¹. Gulliver could not talk with the Rector who was abroad. He wanted to sign an agreement with the main university from Gulbbdubdrib. Gulliver could only see his portrait: "The Lord Rector was full of authority and determined to stay by himself on the wall, undisturbed by any other follower interested in his position"⁹².

The second comparative level involving Swift, Eremia, and Oprița operates with Gulliver's experiences which have no counterpart in Swift's hypotext. Eremia's and Oprița's hypertexts include various ironic strategies: derision, mordancy, raillery. They all make possible the moral survival of the locals – be they from Kukunia or from Capricia - under specific socio-historical conditions (communism and post-communism) which, ironically and sadly, are less different than their ideologies preach.

The title of Eremia's novel *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* hides a pun in Romanian. The author played upon a phonetic phenomenon: the closeness of the Romanian word *minciună* (lie) and the word *minune* (wonder). The inhabitants of the country visited by Gulliver call it *Wonderland* (Țara Minunilor) with an ironical reference to Alice's upside-down world, whereas Gulliver calls it *The Country of Lies* (Țara Minciunilor).

The Swiftian Gulliver is supposed to be an enemy, a spy of Blefuscu. In Eremia's book, Gulliver is suspected of being an agent working for one of the numerous enemies of Kukunia, but most plausibly an agent of Goldania, Kukunia's fierce rival. In Eremia's book the reference to the Cold War paranoical obsession about the overwhelming presence of the enemy everywhere in society is much more powerful, detestable, and also ironically heart-breaking. The methods used by Granit's police during the inquest remind the reader of the real Romanian secret police. The prosecutors changed but the detainee, poor Gulliver, was submitted to torture for days and nights on end. Even the language reminds one of the Romanian literature of detention. Gulliver's cell is "his stone coffin"⁹³. Gulliver is condemned to forced labour in "the Slaves' Valley"⁹⁴, the Kukunian Gulag. The similarity between the Slaves' Valley and the Danube-Black-Sea Canal, one of the most important locations of the Romanian Gulag, is striking. The

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 53: "Lordul Decan era un bărbat scund și îndesat, cu o figură care în Anglia ar fi părut de șarlatan, însă aici, în Cetățuia Soarelui, prezenta cele mai distinse garanții academice".

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 54: "Lordul Rector era plin de autoritate și hotărât să stea cât mai mult pe perete, singur și nederanjat de nici un alt urmaș interesat de funcția lui".

⁹³ Ion Eremia, *Gulliver*, p. 61: "coșciugul meu de piatră".

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 65: "Valea Robilor".

most terrible torture in the Slaves' Valley is hunger. But, ironically, Gulliver can eat his fill during the night. He looks at the sky and sees: "The Taurus was sizzling in an enormous frying pan, and the Ram was frizzling at a slow fire, while the Crab, red and tempting, bathed in clove sauce"⁹⁵. The theatricality of Kukunian life is another grievous irony which, unfortunately, the Romanians experienced before 1990 and the North Koreans still do. Fiction and reality blend again in dire irony. Eremia's Gulliver records how the Kukunian people bless their destiny because it has made them "contemporary with his glorious reign"⁹⁶, Granit's reign. People mimic they have three meals a day, although there is no food on the plates. Everything is an appalling and ironical make believe. Lolla, the head of Kukunian opposition explains to Gulliver: "Theatricalization and worshipping Granit are two aspects of the same problem, two effects of the same cause"⁹⁷. Granit, the ironical re-presentation of Stalin, is the ardent follower of "Kalamuk-the Lunatic"⁹⁸, an honest but utopian stringer recognizable as a fictionalized Lenin: "In fact, Granit himself does not deny this: he proclaims himself to be the follower and legitimate heir of this wise man"⁹⁹.

Among the institutions that Gulliver visits in Kukunia is the Writers' Palace, an episode which Eremia added to the delight of Romanian readers. The increasing ideologization of culture is a main point in Eremia's allegorical dystopia. Article 578 of the writers' regulations says that the only genres admitted by law are the ode and the psalm: "Under certain conditions, the epic is also allowed but only when it exalts the glorious deeds of the ruler or of a Granitist hero"¹⁰⁰. Books are ordered by the "generous leader of thought from our country"¹⁰¹. Every year, the writers' guild receives "a list of orders, according to all the rules of modern trade"¹⁰².

Eremia points to the perverse character of Granit's philosophy, a bitterly ironical reading of the discourse on freedom and human rights. The slave himself proclaims that he is a free man. Gulliver's Kukunian guide asks the British visitor to make an evaluation of his former experiences and recognize that this is the most deviant situation one could imagine: "Did it ever occur to any slave master from your land to ask the slave to admit by himself, shout at the top of his voice, and

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 68: "Taurul se perpelea într-o uriașă frigare, iar Berbecul se rumenea la foc mocnit, în timp ce Racul se scâldea, roșu și ispititor, în sos de cuișoare".

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 71: "contemporanii strălucitei sale domnii".

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 72: "Cultivarea teatrului și divinizarea lui Granit sunt două aspecte ale aceleiași cauze".

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p.106: "Kalamuk-Lunatecul".

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 139: "De altfel, nici Granit nu susține altceva: el se proclamă adeptul și moștenitorul legitim al acestui înțelept".

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 215: "În anumite condiții, este îngăduită și epopeea, dar numai atunci când cântă fapte glorioase ale cărmuirii sau ale oricărui erou granitist".

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 222: "generosul dirigitor al gândirii din țara noastră".

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 222: "o listă de comenzi, după toate regulile comerțului modern".

boast that he, the slave, is a free man?"¹⁰³. Schizophrenia is a national mental disorder and its association with the workings of irony by Breuer is more than adequate in reading both Eremia's Kukulnia and Oprea's Capricia. The inhabitants of Capricia, Oprea's allegory of post-communist Romania, tell Gulliver about their way of life before the overthrow of Ciocesko. They thought and discussed privately in a certain way, but they had to discuss publicly differently:

Pushed by necessity, they slowly put together a new science which is called "skizophrenia", in the idiom of that place, and which helps you divide your personality exactly into two parts, like a fish carefully split from head to tail, along its spine and which also has incredible effects for someone who is not acquainted with the secrets of this subject matter under Caprician patent. Consequently, at his workplace, a native can be a fierce admirer of the princely wisdom, but at home, with his wife, more rarely with his children, he is an equally fierce opponent of Ciocesko, after he has made sure that his windows are closed and the key has been turned in the lock¹⁰⁴.

The similarities with the Romanian realities under the communist regime create a fictional reality where reality itself seems to overpass fiction. Kukulnian academics must rival not so much in scholarship as in their faith to Granit and the loser often ends up in prison, or even worse¹⁰⁵. Kukulnia has a lot of wood but all of it is exported abroad for good money which is used by the ruling class¹⁰⁶.

Finally, the people of Kukulnia put an end to the Granitist regime by a massive revolt. The similarity with the 1989 revolt of the Romanian people is stunning and moving. The foreshadowing capacity of literary creativity is amazing and an implicit irony to all the supposed specialists in political science who could not foresee the end of the Communist regimes at the end of 1989. Almost half a century before the real fall of the Romanian communist system, Eremia crystal-balled the enthusiasm of the people who realized that they could be free, that they could overthrow this political horror – Granit's regime:

At the beginning, people seemed to have woken up from a terrible nightmare and could not believe that reality is different from what they had seen in their dreams. [...]

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 201: "I s-a năzărit vreunui stăpân de robi de la voi să-i ceară robului să recunoască singur, să strige în gura mare și să se bată cu pumnul în piept că el, robul, este un om liber?"

¹⁰⁴ Mircea Oprea, *Călătorie*, p. 105: "Împinși de nevoie, ei au pus încetul cu încetul bazele unei științe noi, care în limba locului se cheamă 'skizofrenie' și te ajută să-ți împarți personalitatea exact în două, ca pe un pește despicat cu grijă de la cap la coadă, de-a lungul șirei spinării, dar cu efecte de necrezut pentru cine nu cunoaște secretele acestei discipline cu patent caprician. Astfel, un localnic poate fi un îndârjit lăudător al înțelepciunii princiare la locul său de muncă, iar acasă, de față cu nevasta, mai rar și cu copiii, un la fel de dârz înjurător al lui Ciocesko, după ce s-a asigurat că geamurile îi sunt bine închise și cheia răsucită în broască".

¹⁰⁵ The purges of the Romanian universities in the 1950's are the model of these Kukulnian evolutions.

¹⁰⁶ The priority of export to fulfilling the local people's needs was a main characteristic of Romanian economy during the Communist regime.

This put them in a real mood of exaltation. The happiness that entered their soul all of a sudden, the impetuous joy that flooded their heart and their eyes were so overwhelming that people seemed to be drunk. They walked randomly on the streets, laughed, sang, hugged one another, even if they had never met, they did all sorts of childish pranks and tricks¹⁰⁷.

The trial of the Kukunian leaders forecasts the real trial of Communist Romania's top leadership in 1989, but the literary version is more brutal and lacks the compromises of reality¹⁰⁸. In Eremia's fiction these top leaders have, at least, the "dignity" of keeping their dark faces to the end. The trial takes place in the main square of Kukunia's capital. The leaders start fighting with one another and in the end, they all die at their own hands, in a general skirmish. In Romania's historical reality the former Communist leaders did not even have the dignity to admit their evil deeds. Reality becomes the irony of fiction.

Gulliver's ironical end in Eremia's novel presages today's nostalgics in Romania. Interned in an asylum, Gulliver comes to the conclusion that the peoples are unable to rule themselves. They need great leaders, such as Granit, or Nero, or Caligula. The Kukunian people "could not or would not understand such a great genius as him [Granit], who wanted to change humanity and the whole Universe"¹⁰⁹. Fiction is no longer the ironical representation of reality, reality is the ironical representation of fiction.

Opriță's exercise of ironical intertextuality, namely his depiction of Capricia, contains elements in which Romanian readers can easily recognize post-1990 everyday realities. Streets are decorated "cheaply and from their inspirational point of view, in very diverse ways, with scraps of paper and garbage"¹¹⁰. Gulliver admires the Romanian malls: "endless shops holding so many garments that the whole Kent could be clothed in the silk and the velvet one could find over there, and even Ireland, after getting rid of its surplus of snivelling and starving children as the honourable Master Swift fancied"¹¹¹. The reference to Swift's famous

¹⁰⁷ Ion Eremia, *Gulliver*, pp. 329-330: "La început, oamenii păreau că s-au trezit dintr-un groaznic coșmar și nu le venea să creadă că realitatea e alta decât cea văzută în vis. [...] Asta le-a provocat o adevărată stare de exaltare. Fericirea care le-a pătruns dintr-o dată în suflet, bucuria năvalnică ce le-a inundat inima și ochii erau atât de copleșitoare, încât oamenii păreau cuprinși de o stare de beție, care îi făcea să umble pe străzi în neștire, să rădă, să cânte, să se îmbrățișeze unii cu alții, chiar dacă nu se cunoșteau între ei, să facă tot felul de năstrușnicii și năzbătii copilărești."

¹⁰⁸ The most prominent leaders of Communist Romania were initially (in 1990) given long prison sentences. Five years later they were all free for medical reasons. None of the members of the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party died in prison.

¹⁰⁹ Ion Eremia, *Gulliver*, p. 340: "nu putea și nu voia să înțeleagă un geniu nemaipomenit ca el, ce voia să schimbe fața omenirii și a Universului întreg".

¹¹⁰ Mircea Opriță, *Călătorie*, p. 63: "ieftin și extrem de variat ca inspirație, cu hârtii și gunoaie".

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 65: "niște prăvălii fără capăt cu hăinărie cât să îmbraci tot Kentul în măturile și în catifelele de acolo, ba chiar și Irlanda, după ce te scapi de surplusul ei de copii mucoși și leșinați de foame în felul închipuit de onorabilul Master Swift".

pamphlet *A Modest Proposal* creates a multi-layered text where the encounter of literary and historical references leads to humour. Nor are the numerous academies of Capricia forgotten. The Swiftian Academy of Projectors gets multiplied in Opriță's Capricia because of the potential academicians' limitless pride. By *reductio ad absurdum*, the academic imposture and fragility are emphasised even more efficiently: "Some [Academies] only have five-six founding members"¹¹² and would not admit any more

lest they should be obliged, later, to exclude them for plotting to occupy the stool of the incumbent president. I also heard that there are Academies with only one member who has put on the wall, like the Lord Rector I have previously mentioned, his own portrait, but not the empty frames of his successors; either because the president of such an institution is to die only at the same time as the academic business founded by him, or because he truly thinks he is immortal¹¹³.

Gulliver is informed about the previous political regime led by a local Granit, called Ciocesko, whose fastuous visits abroad either to the powerful Tramontania¹¹⁴ or to the small and remote Cumingie are meant to stimulate his personality cult. On the other hand, at exactly the same time the people of Capricia are starving. Swiftian irony is deftly used. Opriță's Gulliver presents soberly and mockingly realities of the communist regime's last years. Lady Frusina, Ciocesko's wife, is a female scientist of "inter-island renown"¹¹⁵. A Romanian reader immediately remembers Elena Ceaușescu's ambitions to be considered a famous scientist. Food and electric power lack "because the prince had decided to sell Volta's current to other islands"¹¹⁶, the Capricians' enthusiasm for their leaders is, apparently, overwhelming. They want to be led by Lady Frusina and her husband "on the luminous way opened by their wise thought towards an even brighter future at which one cannot look without eclipse goggles"¹¹⁷. In Capricia, the post-revolutionary political changes brought freedom of speech – an idea that does not appear so vigorously in the Swiftian hypotext – and an invigorated and hyper-agitated political life. Gulliver is to be the voice of common sense and Swiftian irony is at its best:

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 70: "Unele se mulțumesc cu cinci-șase academicieni fondatori...".

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 70: "ca să nu fie nevoite să-i excludă mai târziu, pentru uneltiri la fotoliul președintelui aflat în funcție. Am auzit că există și Academii cu un singur academician, care și-a pus pe perete, asemeni Lordului Rector despre care am vorbit nu demult, portretul propriu, nu însă și ramele goale ale succesorilor, fie din pricină că președintele unei astfel de instituții se pregătește să moară doar odată cu firma academică înființată de el, fie că se crede cu adevărat nemuritor".

¹¹⁴ Allegorical USA.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 113: "renume inter-insular".

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 112: "fiindcă principele hotărâse să vândă în alte insule curentul lui Volta".

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 115: "pe calea luminoasă deschisă de gândirea lor înțeleaptă spre un viitor încă și mai luminos, la care să nici nu te poți uita fără ochelari de eclipsă".

I do not want to give the British example as the best in the whole world because it is still unclear to me where the Tories break the egg and what egg end is to be broken by the Whigs. But in any case, I do not find the rash of parties that have erupted, like measles, on Carpacia's skin to be very useful for the island¹¹⁸.

Opriță insists on transporting peculiar elements of Romanian post-1990 politics into his fiction of Swiftian inspiration. Irony is multiple. Swift becomes a target and a tool of irony. Remarkable, in this respect, is the reference to one of the ethnic parties that makes Romanian politics ever since 1990. It is as if “overnight the honourable Celtic townsmen from Cardiff founded a party called Wide Ireland and they saw this expanse up to Scotland and even continental Normandy, namely all over the lands where their ancestors once roamed”¹¹⁹. After refusing to submit to Trosnack, the amoral leader to Capricia, Gulliver falls into disgrace.

The author and his Romanian readers catch a last view of Gulliver abandoned on the last ship of the Romanian fleet, all the other ships having been surreptitiously sold by Trosnack for his own benefit. The ship turns in a whirl and the north can be everywhere. It would have been very difficult to find a more adequate metaphor for the post-communist Romanian society deprived of any inspiring ideal except gross consumerism.

In conclusion, the analysis of (Swiftian) irony in its making and refashioning by Ion Eremia and Mircea Opriță offers a great example of intertextuality. On the one hand, their ironical use of an illustrious literary model shows the vigorous versatility of the hypotext. On the other hand, Eremia and Opriță include the Romanian novel into a world network of influences where impact and significance enrich both the hypotext and the hypertext.

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¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 119: “Nu vreau să dau exemplul britanic drept cel mai bun ce poate exista în întreaga lume, mai ales că încă nu m-am putut lămuri unde sparg oul cei din partidul tory și ce capăt le mai rămâne de spart celor din partidul Whig. Dar în orice caz, nici puzderia de partide erupte ca un pojar pe pielea Capriciei n-am găsit că ar fi de mare folos pentru insulă”.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 124: “onorabilii târgoveți celți din Cardiff și-au încropit peste noapte un partid cu numele de Irlanda Lățită, văzând lățirea asta până în Scoția și chiar în Normandia continentală, adică peste tot unde au băntuit cândva strămoșii lor”.

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SWIFTIAN IRONY AND THE ROMANIAN NOVEL

(Abstract)

This paper offers a comparative analysis of two Romanian novels – *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* [*Gulliver in the Country of Lies*] by Ion Eremia and *Călătorie în Capricia* [*A Journey to Capricia*] by Mircea Opriță – which constitute excellent samples of the subversive use of Swiftian irony during the Communist and the post-Communist period. The first comparative level focuses on the ironical use of the Gulliver's travels (as a trope) by the Romanian novelists. The second comparative level points to the practices of derision in Eremia's and Opriță's hypertexts. Swift, like all great writers, belongs not only to his age. His irony is topical even in historical and political contexts very different from the Enlightenment.

Keywords: hypertext, hypotext, communism, post-communism, subversion.

IRONIA SWIFTIANĂ ȘI ROMANUL ROMÂNESC

(Rezumat)

Această lucrare oferă o analiză comparativă a două romane românești – *Gulliver în țara minciunilor* de Ion Eremia și *Călătorie în Capricia* de Mircea Opriță – care constituie modele excelente de folosire subversivă a ironiei swiftiene în perioada comunistă și post-comunistă. Primul nivel comparativ e focalizat pe utilizarea ironică a călătoriilor lui Gulliver (ca trop) de către romancierii români. Al doilea nivel comparativ indică practicile derizivii în hipotextele lui Eremia și Opriță. Ca toți marii scriitori, Swift nu aparține doar unei epoci. Ironia lui este de actualitate chiar și în contexte istorice și politice foarte diferite de iluminism.

Cuvinte-cheie: hypertext, hipotext, comunism, postcomunism, subversiune.