Cultural Intertexts
Year X Volume 13 (2023)

Aesthetic Dimensions in Novels by Writers from Banat

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Abstract
Writers belonging to cultures once subordinated to the Austrian Empire display a dual attitude towards the Centre: both rejection and nostalgia. These circumstances are translated into a multitude of cultural, behavioural, psychological and psycholiterary features, as well as a wide range of literary procedures. Sorin Titel, Miloš Crnjanski – as well as Danilo Kiš, Herta Müller and others – are writers who lived the moment of the disintegration of the Empire, with everything that this meant for the European literature, in general, and for the literature of the Banat region, in particular. This study examines how such writers analyse the history of the nations they belong to and the local perception of the Centre (administration, religion, political leaders) while exploring how they approach themes such as exile, migration, and the trauma of being separated from the place of birth. Moreover, it highlights the aesthetic dimensions of the literature from Banat and the presence of the Danube as a natural link associated with the Central-European space, together with other relevant hydronyms and toponyms.

Keywords: *Danube, Central European Literature, exile, migration, nostalgia*

The variability of a space and a concept: *Mitteleuropa*

This paper started from the idea of a concentrical analysis of the following terms: Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, Vienna and Banat, together with their location, role, history, the relationship between them, as well as their relationship with the whole continent. When referring to Banat, the goal is to establish the historical, socio-cultural and literary heritage of the region by taking into account the prism of social connections, the exchanges of ideas and the reciprocal influence of various ethnic, religious and social groups.

The research draws on various theories of *Mitteleuropa* formulated by well-known intellectuals like Jacques Le Rider and Victor Neumann, concerning the interculturality and multiculturality of the marginal zones of the former Habsburg and later Austro-Hungarian Empire. The research strategy is comparative and relies on literary history and criticism, analyses the thematic influences, and processes and operates with intertextuality and imagology. At the same time, the strategy refers to myths, literary genres,

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themes and models, characters, and the profiles of the characters. It follows the hypothesis that the literature of the Banat region belongs to Central Europe, because of its spirit, literary topics and motives, character profiles, psychology, cultural archetypes, geographical belonging, etc. When these aspects are carefully considered, the conclusion can be that the literature of the region must be placed in this multicultural frame and not in the "large", patronizing Romanian literature, in which it used to be included more because of political, ethnic and other reasons and less due to intrinsic literary evidence. Indeed, it is much more related and much closer to the Central European literature than it is to the rest of the Romanian literature.

The demarche has a practical purpose. It can prove that impersonal terms such as Europe or Central Europe get substance and life through the valuing of the spiritual creations that reveal their essence. Such terms are valued and understood properly mainly by those living in this area. This research is an opportunity to show the operative value of these theoretical terms by studying the *Mitteleuropäische* literature: Europe's image in the writings of several Central European authors.

Another objective is to bring Central European literature closer to those interested in seeing the affinities between the local literary productions and those from the other regions of the Empire, as there is a lack of studies and translations in the field. The results coming out of the present research might contribute precisely to changing some narrow perspectives on literature and dismissing some stereotypes concerning the assessment of regional literature. Furthermore, it might contribute to people better understanding each other if they realize the similarities of the problems and situations they are confronted with. It might also bring into the public's attention the European integration seen from a transnational point of view, suggested by the presence of the Danube as a river that connects several countries.

The preliminary research findings show that the term *Mitteleuropa* does not reflect only a geographical reality, easy to define. It entered the usual vocabulary (mainly German) at the beginning of the First World War and was introduced by Friedrich Naumann, as noted by J. Le Rider, and it is felt as marked by the pan-Germanic ideology: "the German vital space" and "Drang nach Osten" ("Drive to the East"). The term was often avoided and substituted by *Ostmitteleuropa* or *Centraleuropa* (Le Rider 1997: 21). *Mitteleuropa* contains two different meanings: one is linked to the relatively recent tradition of pan-Germanism and has its sources in the discussions concerning the objectives of the First World War around 1914; the other revitalizes a much older tradition, that of the sacred Roman-German Empire. From this perspective, *Mitteleuropa* presents itself as a project, a myth, or a utopia of harmony in Central Europe. It seems that this region is given different names – accepted or rejected – in accordance with the different perspectives of the nations that once belonged to

the Habsburg Empire. The Poles, the Serbians, the Italians and sometimes even the Czechs reacted critically to this form of governing power, while the Austrians, the Hungarians and, in different contexts, even the Slovenians and the Croats have expressed nostalgia for the Empire, overlapping it with the myth of the paradisiacal time.

While the Western European space was politically organized and consolidated from an economic point of view, the small nations from Eastern Europe were looking for an anchor, for help, to survive the Turkish invasion or the Russian expansion. Vienna was the closest and the most prestigious power centre, around which they could agglutinate to fulfil their destiny as European nations. Through their centripetal movements, they contributed to the extension of the Empire towards the East and the South-East. It was much later when the direction of rotation changed: by accumulating disappointment, the imperial policy was unjust exactly with those who were the most loyal, which led to a centrifugal movement that became more and more visible in literature as well. The fundamental principle that sustained the Habsburg dynastic model was that the ideal "cement" for the building of a multinational state was the harmonious cohabitation of the people, languages and the most various religions. In contrast, the German model of Romantic origin meant that the nation is conceived starting from the ideas of *Volk* and a dominant language as an ethnolinguistic model.

The culture and literature of Banat

Banat is a region that has been part of Romania for more than a hundred years now. By comparison to other parts of Europe, Banat has features that cultivate the balance between different religious influences, traditions, and customs, between different lifestyles. Both its past and its present can be better understood if we take into consideration that the Orthodox and the Catholic churches live together here; the Germano-Austrian world shares the region with the Romanian and the Serbian, and the world of the Hungarian culture and civilization shares it with the Slovakian and the Bulgarian. To all these, we must add the German Jews speaking Yiddish and the Spanish Jews speaking Ladino. The historical and literary writings in Romanian by authors like Constantin Diaconovici Loga, Paul Iorgovici and Eftimie Murgu were ideologically connected with the political and artistic writings of authors from Szeged, Budapest, Vienna, Cluj-Napoca, Braşov or Iaşi. This was possible due to the fact that some of the Romanian authors from Banat used German and Hungarian in their works, having access to the political and cultural environment of the Habsburg Empire. Cultural personalities such as Johann Nepomuk Preyer, Leonhard Böhm, Szentkláray Jenő, Franz Xaver Kappus,

Adolf Meschendörfer, Heinrich Zillich and Erwin Wittstock also belong to Banat (Neumann 1997, 7).

Framed between the Mureş River and the White Criş River in the north, the Tisza River in the west, the Danube River in the south and the Carpathian Mountains in the east, Banat is a region in which several denominations meet (Orthodox, Catholic, Reformat, Lutheran, Mosaic, Muslim) and several languages are spoken (Romanian, Hungarian, German, Serbian, Bulgarian, Yiddish, etc.). Under the impulse of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, a strong and powerful culture emerged in Banat, sustained by representative institutions of the imperial civilization: schools, libraries, and religious orders (Neumann 1997: 11-21).

The culture of Banat is almost exclusively based on printed literature and very little based on folklore, unlike in other parts of Romania. Books in Hungarian and German used to be common in both public and private libraries. A large part of the population used to study in German and Hungarian schools opened in Timişoara, Arad or Lugoj and in the universities from Budapest, Prague, or Vienna. The administration of the region used to be in Hungarian, which led to the acquisition of this language by the great majority of the inhabitants. After it was included in Romania in 1918, Banat was an atypical special region among other regions of the country: it had the best-developed economy and cultural life, in which many people took part. The forms of civilisation characteristic of the West, created at the same time with the colonisation of the region by the Austrians, tried to resist as much as possible even during communism.

The social and individual relationships have the most harmonious form in the entire space of Romania. Banat is a model not only for Romania but also for other European areas situated even farther to the West from a geographical point of view: Slovenia, Bosnia, Galicia (in Poland) and Slovakia. One of the essential questions is what has made these facts possible. I have tried to find the answer mainly in the local literature, although this study refers to other cultural phenomena too. It draws on the artistic and literary imagination of the writers who were born here, who lived here more or less, or of those who just visited the cities. I take into consideration writers of all ethnic origins and from several historical periods: the end of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the twentieth century, the interwar epoch, but also the contemporary period.

The first timid attempts at novel writing in Banat were recognized only in the eighteenth century. Johann Friedel (1755-1789) is considered by specialists as the first poet among the Banat Germans. Yet this acknowledgment is relative because he lived most of his life outside Banat and he did not approach themes related to the region in his work. He is the author of two sentimental novels of Viennese manners but without great artistic value. Karl Wilhelm von Martini (1821-1885) was the representative novelist of the Banat literature in German

until the twentieth century: *Pflanzer und Soldat. Bilder und Gestalten aus dem Banat* (1854) and *Vor hundert Jahren, ein deutsches Lebens und Sittenbild* (1864) focus on the German colonization of the Banat region.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, literature about the birth of the region (*Heimatliteratur*) emerged within the frame of German literature from Transylvania. It should not be confused with the literary trend with the same name, which appeared in Germany and Austria around 1900, although it surprisingly anticipates some of its elements. The novel from Banat belonging to this type of literature features the historical component to a significant extent. Friedrich Wilhelm Seraphin's novel *Die Einwanderer* (1903) is composed around the myth of conquering the land by the Transylvanian Germans (Bockel 1976, 9). There was a similar situation with the German novel form Banat at the beginning of the twentieth century, whose most important representative was Adam Müller Guttenbrun (1852-1923). His most successful novel was *Meister Jakob und seine Kinder* (1918), which has a pregnant autobiographic character.

The main topics in the German language literature from Banat are exile, colonisation, the history of the place, the new life in a new place and getting away from the centre. In contrast, the literature of the region in Romanian, Hungarian or Serbian attests to the fact that the main characters were looking for a centre or wanted to maintain their connections with a protective centre, which guaranteed a safe, quiet and prosperous life. Examples can be found in the works of Ioan Slavici, Miloš Crnjanski or Franyó Zoltán.

An interesting and relevant aspect of this research concerns the approach of the idea of the Centre. The attention of the writers who speak about the new places, where the German colonists built their new lives, is devoted to the present and the future. Life in the new colonies does not feel like a break from the large space of the Empire:

> The journey to the market, to the neighbouring village or to more distant places, to the city, the nearby one, or to Budapest, Vienna, Hamburg, is considered another way to broaden one's horizon of knowledge and understanding of the world and its differences (Vultur 2000: 528).

However, later on, after losing the contact to the Centre:

> The nostalgia for such a world translates into the highly valued aspiration to live together 'like one big family', as people of Banat used to live in the past." (528) [2]

In the works published after the Empire disintegrates, the emphasis is placed on the past, on the history of colonization. The Centre is the horizon which many of the characters in the novels written by authors from Banat contemplate. The Centre is the place they dream of, the place where they wish

to get to, which they value positively or, on the contrary, totally hate or disapprove of, to which they polemically relate themselves. In fact, the Centre may capture their full attention at a time when it does not exist as the Centre anymore, the one it used to be. Therefore, it is no surprise that other places – Paris, Rome, Budapest, Prague – often take over to inhabit the Centre, substituting or replacing Vienna.

After it gained maturity, the literature of Banat seems to have become a synthesis of these various and divergent elements, a cultural aspect that I am trying to demonstrate throughout my study. To prove that it is useful to extend the area of my research and include more writers from the twentieth century, with books considered to be very important for the literature of Banat (I. Slavici, M. Crnjanski, S. Titel, L. Ciocîrlie, Herta Müller) or in the immediate contact zone of the region (L. Blaga, E. Cioran, M. Krleža, S. Márai, D. Kiš).

From the preliminary data accumulated and continuing the hypotheses formulated, these writers configure a distinct literary area, which is difficult to assimilate into any national literature (Romanian, Serbian or Hungarian): although they are recognized as important writers, they are seen and perceived as eccentric and presented accordingly by literary historians and critics.

The intention of this paper is to pinpoint as clearly as possible those literary elements based on which we can speak about the literature of Banat as a buffer-zone literature between the different national literatures situated on both banks of the Danube River. This type of literature harmonizes the contrasts the same as the region of Banat has constantly assimilated, harmonized, and valorised oppositions of every category, the same as the river has constantly connected them, providing the conditions for mutual influence.

Pasărea şi umbra [The Bird and Its Shadow] by Sorin Titel

Two of the representative writers of Central European literature, Sorin Titel (1935-1985) and Danilo Kiš (1935-1989), born in the same year, one in the town of Margina, the other in Subotica, both approximately one hundred kilometres away from Timişoara, the first to the east, the second to the west, come from the outskirts of Banat. It is no wonder that the works of these two writers, who died four years apart from each other, are imbued with the defining baroque spirit of Central Europe, as Elisabeta Roşca stated: "Vienna and the agony of Empire nurtured an extraordinary movement of ideas, of culture in general, from art history to psychoanalysis, from economics to literature; its reminiscences and reverberations marked the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe everywhere." (2000: 22)

The marginality of Titel's hometown can be compared both to the universe of the old Habsburg Empire and to the dominant, powerful Centre, be it Vienna or Bucharest, after a large section of the Banat region became part

of Romania in 1918. Like any margin, it is a place where people imitate, in a specific way, and retain many of the manifestations of the centre; they maintain them long after they have assimilated them. Titel's characters are often marginals, and they are too little (or not at all) adapted to social norms, they seem even exiles. Titel's Romanian universe stretches along the axis Margina – Szeged – Vienna, intersecting the Danube, reaching the castles on the Rhine, then Paris and, later, Deauville, in the north of France. It is a rediscovery and reclamation of Europe from the periphery to the centre, from the south to the north. At least as far as the Romanian prose is concerned, Titel's work represents, perhaps, the most faithful mirror of the multinational Empire.

In his novel *Femeie, iată fiul tău* [*Woman, Here is Your Son*] (1983), the mix of ethnicities reflects the normality of the world, the same as in his novel *Pasărea şi umbra* [*The Bird and Its Shadow*] (1977). In *Clipa cea repede* [*The Fast Moment*] (1979), the ethnic mosaic and the account of the construction of the hotel with the pompous name "Emperor Trajan" refer to the myth of the Tower of Babel. The homogenization of the world is achieved through a centripetal movement, from Banat towards the Centre, through the journeys the characters make. For example, for the young men going to the army, Szeged was the centre of the world, even though that meant, in many cases, only the barracks and the training field, the recruits' unhappiness, the place of their alienation and of their coming of age. Szeged is situated on the Tisza River, an affluent of the Danube, which accentuates the subalternity of the characters. Through other heroes, Titel builds the fundamental chronotope of the Habsburg world: the Imperial Vienna, with its surroundings and points of attraction (Roşca 2000: 23-27).

Sorin Titel's prose preserves the multiethnic aspect even after the collapse of the Empire and the integration of ethnic minorities into national states, a situation that eventually leads to the accumulation of tensions. For Tisu, a character from the novel *Pasărea şi umbra* (1977), the capital of the Empire seems a maximally enlarged version of the cities he knows at home. At the same time, it also seems to him that Vienna is on the verge of sinking into death:

> Vienna seemed to him a rather sleepy city; polite old men, in well-tailored overcoats, were always shuffling with umbrellas for bad weather under their arms, under the chestnut trees with thick shade. He admires the statue of the emperor – in a military cloak, slightly bent forward, lost in thought – while the brass band in the kiosk in the middle of the park plays with great zeal the famous and immortal Viennese waltzes, whose golden age has passed, of course, but which the Viennese do not want to separate in their broken heads. (Titel 2005, I: 1023-1024)

Moreover, in the same novel, Sorin Titel brings together "the authentic artist and the producer of kitsch in the same world of Vienna at the beginning of the century" (Roşca 2000: 54). He does so through the characters Honoriu Dorel Rațiu and Ignasia. In Honoriu Dorel's case, Vienna is the stage of his formation as a painter. The culmination of his initiation is his journey on the Rhine and his experience in one of the castles there. Whereas, in Vienna, the young painter can easily dissociate art from life and fiction from reality, in Mr Günter's castle on the Rhine this operation no longer seems possible. At some point, the host shows him a huge rooster, the product of both nature and its owner's intervention. The episode seems to contain the idea that nature can surpass any imagination and that one of an artist's roles is to render this quality of nature, to observe how reality reveals its fantastic: "With the insatiable eye of a painter, Honoriu Dorel looked at the living model in front of him: so real and at the same time almost fantastic."(Titel 2005, I: 1062) The Romanian painter looks for the uniqueness, the particular and the essence of the model, while his artistic double, the Polish Ignasia, does nothing but endlessly reproduce the same Madonna, surrounded by angels and playing with the baby in a field with flowers, under a sky with diaphanous clouds above: "Everywhere in the world, in the banks, you can admire paintings of the same value", remarks the narrator. Ignasia participates with one of her works in a competition which, as the narrator says, "proposed to reward the strangest or most bizarre artworks" (Titel 2005, I: 1041), and she is awarded the second prize. This is possible in the agonizing imperial Vienna, in the apocalyptic atmosphere of the great capital cradled by the lazy, feminine Danube. However, this is unthinkable up the Rhine, the river of mighty warriors, where young Rațiu completes his initiation.

Despite the calm atmosphere of Vienna, despite its order and the obvious routine, it may seem threatening to the newcomers. For example, a simple poster scares Tit Liviu, a character from *Femeia în roşu* [*The Woman in Red*], an interesting Banat novel by M. Nedelciu, A. Babeți and M. Mihăieș. His panic and feverishness when reading the poster causes him to "see things slightly distorted" (Nedelciu, Babeți, Mihăieș 2011: 214). After three years, however, when he returns to consolidate his medical studies and with a lot of money in his pockets, Tit Liviu has a different perspective on the capital city situated on the Danube:

> He will then wander for weeks on end through this Timișoara, which is two or three stories higher, or through this Budapest, which is one story higher [...]. To have no one know you in such a city, to have this freedom about yourself, about how you look, how you move, about your own thoughts, to be so alone and free among thousands of people who seem like prisoners of friends, acquaintances and neighbours, to be able to think what you want while seeing others struggling to think only of what is necessary for their survival and their image, their

> prestige – here is a way to expand freedom to the threshold of a special madness, a madness that would not even be noticed from the outside (Nedelciu, Babeți, Mihăieș 2011: 217-218).

For the sake of comparison, in almost all of Herta Müller's prose, the Danube is a border, a Styx that must be crossed in reverse: those who want to escape the communist block must cross the river. In spite of the fact that the Danube was a place where one could die, shot by the border patrol or drowning in its dangerous waters, many people took the risk of trying to cross it, armed with the aim of living in a free land. Unlike Titel, Herta Müller does not remember the names of small, local rivers, but only that of the Danube, which has a terrifying resonance for her. Or it is used within standard expressions, as in the following example: "'My family was sad rather than superficial. After the years spent in the camp, our house was no longer very happy.' 'But a lot of water has flowed on the Danube since then, that was long before your life now.'" (Müller 2014: 118)

For the Banatian people, therefore, the space between their hometown and Vienna or the area of the Middle Danube is rather familiar, calm, and soothing—if peace reigns—, it is recognizable, established and part of their personal experience. Being exiled in cities on the Danube like Vienna or Budapest, or further north in Prague, is nonsense as these cities are perceived as being close enough to Banat. The Upper Danube and the Lower Danube can be brought together by this type of in-between literature of *Mitteleuropa.*

Migrations by Miloš Crnjanski

The characters in the novel *Migrations* (1929) by Miloš Crnjanski relate differently to the same space. With a structure obviously built on oppositions, between human types, spatial or cultural typologies, between religions or ways of relating to history, apparently historical (Vintilă 2001: 102-103), the book is an essential piece of Central European literature. The time span of the novel, which covers the spring of 1774 and the summer of the following year, centres on Major Vuk Isakovič:

> Almost two weeks had passed since the message arrived from the Marquis Ascanio Guadagni, the commander of the city of Osjek, to equip three hundred soldiers, carefully chosen, to start the war against France. […] That's how Vuk Isakovič set off to war in the spring of 1744. (Crnjanski 1993: 7-15, *passim*)

The war is seen both from the perspective of the central character and from that of the narrator. The same occurs with the imperial central institutions and their representatives (orchestrators of the conflict), the misery of Vuk Isakovič's places and soldiers, or the well-being of the lands through which his

army passes. Without excessive sympathy for the Centre, Vuk Isakovič is a soldier by vocation and a gifted commander, with a sense of duty and responsibility, even though he has the impression that he is always marginalized. The images of the Empire, the Court of Vienna and the representatives of the administration (governors, high officers or prelates) are mediated, alternatively or simultaneously, by two filters: the consciousness and voice of the narrator and those of the character Vuk Isakovič.

The novel is set in a vast territory between the Danube and the Rhine, toponyms with the highest frequency in the text: 36, respectively 32, occurrences, marking an obsession with the border through accentuated repetition. *Migrations* can be considered a mapping of eighteenth-century Europe. The text abounds in toponyms, which contribute to creating the impression of historical veracity and literary realism, and to sketching the routes followed by the protagonists on the Romanian territory and beyond, superimposed on the real, geographic one. Some toponyms form pairs: the Danube and the Tisza, Wallachia and Turkey, Trieste and Venice, Worms and Mainz. In other contexts, they form oppositions: the Danube versus the Rhine, Belgrade (or Zemun) versus Vienna, Serbia versus Austria (or Styria), Serbia versus Russia, etc. On the banks of the Danube, the "Slavo-Danube regiment" is formed, to be decimated on the banks of the Rhine. People leave Serbia when it falls under the Turks and return only when it is liberated. Vuk Isakovič dreams of a time when he can leave for good, with his people, to what seems to him to be the promised land: Russia. However, as the bitter irony of life goes, Vuk and his Serbian soldiers end up not in the East, but in the West, because they never did what they wanted, but only what others forced them to do. In other words, migrating to the East is a utopia, while migrating to the West is always possible, but undesirable.

The opposition between poor Serbia and Austria – the rich, highly civilized Styria, more precisely – is clearly highlighted by the perplexity of Vuk's soldiers, peasants from the Middle Danube, feeling troubled in front of the apparent miracles existing in the places they pass through:

> They heard music and they couldn't explain where it was coming from, because it was coming from the walls of the houses. […] This new country, green and cool […], took the other one, the land of the winds, out of their hearts. [...] Dirty and wretched, they passed through cobbled, country fences, places full of hay and animals, and they felt how bright their poverty was and how endless the mud of the villages where they had been born. (Crnjanski 1993: 77)

From the perspective of Vuk Isakovič (and of the narrator) – and in contrast with that of his brother, Archangel – the European space seems structured in three large segments: the East (Russia, Turkey, and Wallachia), the West (beyond the Rhine, France) and what we can call the Centre (Austria, Italy,

Hungary, Serbia, Banat, represented by the citadel of Timişoara). One strongly marked opposition is that between the utopian East – Russia, the homeland of "sweet Orthodoxy", the country to which Vuk, like a new Moses, dreams of taking his people – and the Centre, where the Serbs, and others like them, feel treated as outcasts. A second opposition configured on spatial coordinates is between the West and the Centre: they are lands divided by war.

The first plan of the novel, with the war as its central axis, the history of masculinity par excellence and the History in capital letter, is counterbalanced by a second plan, the history of femininity, the small, domestic history, which pivots around the boring life, consumed in waiting, chatter, fear and uproar, of Dafina Isakovič, Vuk's wife:

> She sat for a long time at the large, latticed window that faced the river. In the early days, she chose this place to cry. Day and night, the wide, silky river flowed here. And in it, her shadow. […] Zemun learns from her that the olive oil boiled with sugar was an excellent remedy against gallstones […] After that, Zemun also found out that she had been an orphan [...]. This is how Mrs. Dafina Isakovič met Zemun and Zemun met her. She never went out and she cried a lot. (Crnjanski 1993: 47-48)

It is possible that, from the perspective of the traditional reader of historical novels, often considered constructions of the history of masculinity, Dafina should embody the emblematic traitor. The author stretches the narrative thread in such a way that this sensation is realized with sufficient strength, to constantly relativize it via poetic reflections and references to natural elements such as the Danube River.

Dafina's fate is cruel, her life is sad and short, her pleasures are just a few, guilty and dangerous. Abandoned periodically by her warrior husband, left alone with her two little girls, seduced by her brother-in-law, torn by longing, regrets and expectations, still lucid, saved by the author from falling into a bovarism of dubious taste, she is as powerless as the feeling of living in vain, of failure. The illusion that the young woman still clings to, before ending her days in such a deplorable way, could be understood as a last form of resistance to the revelation of the waste of life:

> In her heart, Dafina felt that she was equally hesitant in both big and small affairs. […] Under the influence of her memories regarding the way her brother-in-law made love to her, she wanted, on the last day of her life, to convince herself that she had set out for a pleasant, tremblingly pleasant life, which was waiting for her next to Archangel Isakovič. In short, a life without which her previous life had proved to have been not only unhappy, but also futile, terribly futile: a childhood next to a stepfather, adolescence next to an aunt, a marriage, births, and the passage of time, which, along with absences and moves, had been so monotonous and limited. (Crnjanski 1993: 147)

Archangel Isakovič, Vuk's older brother, "a merchant known for his wealth across the meadows of the Danube and the Tisza" (Crnjanski 1993: 8), completes the triad of the main characters. Archangel is a double of Vuk. The major's dream is to move his village people to Russia, in order to get them out of the general misery in which they live (the muddy plain, periodical floods, small houses made of earth, poor and bad food quality, etc.), an act meant to fulfil the dream of pan-Slavism, but also to consecrate the integration into the great religious community of Orthodoxy. Archangel Isakovič wants to keep the people in the village, to prevent migrations:

> Moving from place to place, ever since his father was still alive, constantly watching over his impudent brother, Archangel Isakovič thought that the life of his family, of the nations and of all these people, who had moved away from Serbia and then moved again back to Serbia, seemed like real madness. Seeing swamps and mud all around, people living in huts dug into the ground so that, once the spring has come or before the first snow, they could move on, Archangel Isakovič felt the wild need to put an end to all these things, to settle somewhere and force others to do the same. (Crnjanski 1993: 71)

While Vuk appears as a utopian character, a dreamer, but also a civilizing hero for the community he leads, Archangel is far from an idealist. He embodies the new spirit of Europe, valuing money, time, goods, and the practical spirit, even if that meant, not infrequently, pulling the strings of business partnerships. Archangel is the merchant, the capitalist, the entrepreneur who dreams of rebuilding the world in which he lives according to the standards of living in countries where there are many like him. He aims at the West and does not want the East at all:

> He felt a certain supernatural power in his thalers as well, because where he took them out of his bag, there the ships stopped, and the houses became his. The thalers circulated according to his desire and imagination, and soon it seemed to him the rain fell and the springs were born whenever he wanted and as he wanted [...]. He had recently bought one house in Požun and one in the city of Buda. A large, huge stone building with storehouses and cellars on the riverbank, above the water. He didn't even want to hear about returning to Turkey, much less about any migration to Russia. (Crnjanski 1993: 72)

His pragmatism is evident in his love relationships and in his relation with the church as well. Despite his name and his generous contributions to the church treasury, Archangel is far from what we usually understand by a religious person. What is more, several passages in the novel outline the idea that Archangel would embody the opposite of what his name denotes.

Both Isakovič brothers experience a sense of loss – "nothingness was his future and vanity his past" (Crnjanski 1993: 142), Vuk thinks – just as both undergo a process of transformation: one following the war in which he participates, while the other due to the death of the woman he seems to really have loved. Vuk, the eternal fighter, in love with war, comes to love freedom and peace, while his promiscuous brother is looked upon by divine grace.

To use the literary terminology proposed by Gérard Genette, Crnjanski's novel is a heterodiegetic narrative, and the perspective is, for the most part, typical of non-focused storytelling. Not infrequently, Crnjanski also resorts to internal focus, as in the lines in which the reader is suggested the sensation of Dafina's demonism, thought and experienced by Archangel: "Avoiding her in the first year, as one runs away from a calamity, he muttered irritated: 'Go away, you wretch.' [...] He was afraid for his brother from the first moment, seeing that he had brought the devil into his house. (Crnjanski 1993: 41)

A modern novel in all its details, Crnjanski's *Migrations* gently guides the reader not only towards an epic universe, as it may seem at first glance, but also to the purest lyric.

Conclusion

Geographically speaking, the Danube connects two worlds: Western and Eastern Europe. Over the past century, from Vienna to the entrance of the river into the gorge of the Carpathian Mountains, there has been an intensely speculative space of aesthetic endeavour, including the emergence of the Central European novel. The artistic forms specific to the area have tried to harmonize the two intertwined civilizations and make them bearable to each other. Although the Danube is rarely mentioned in Sorin Titel's prose, it represents a majestic natural presence that is always implied, closely connected with the big cities down the river such as Vienna and Budapest, shaping them harmoniously. Otherwise, the hydronym Titel most often mentions is the Timiș River, the local, simpler, more provincial river, a tributary of the Danube, into which, like people who aspire to the Centre, many small rivers flow. In Miloš Crnjanski's works, the Danube and the Rhine are fundamental spatial landmarks since the life of many Europeans seems to be concentrated between these ancient rivers. Between these spatial watersheds unfold the dramas of the post-war years – deportations, abuses, crimes, denunciations, betrayals, etc. – favoured by the monstrous, demonic or inhuman characters of the time. Nonetheless, writers always take refuge in balanced views, in beauty and the arts, showing the humanity that exists in muddy waters.

Note

All excerpts quoted are translated by the author of this article.

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