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**ICONS OF FEMININITY
IN VASILE VOICULESCU’S SHORT FICTION**

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of PhD in
Philology**

ABSTRACT

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The present research project sets out to aims to test the importance of contextual hermeneutics and cultural anthropology in identifying the codes and symbolizing practices used by Vasile Voiculescu in the construction of the fictional universe of his stories.

Our revisionist attempt was motivated by the circumstance that the author had been read mainly in the context of myths and religious meanings, the authors of studies and monographs dedicated to him respecting the etymological meaning of the word *hypostasis*: the substratum, the fundamental reality of anything, which defines it beyond phenomenal accidents. Contrary to the spirit of these interpretations, we are redefining the *hypostasis* signifier in the post-incarnationist and post-metaphysical context in which Vasile Voiculescu evolved.

Neither the hierarchical structures (individual-special-general-universal), nor the metaphysics of transcendence and revelation were definitions accepted by the epistemology of the age in which Voiculescu was formed and in which he published his works. Nietzsche had replaced metaphors with concepts, Alfred Binet had replaced classical syllogism with deductions from associations of images which used to be considered incongruous (*La psychologie du raisonnement, recherches expérimentales par l'hypnotisme*, 1886), Husserl had limited knowledge to phenomenological variation and eidetic reduction of an object subject to an infinite process of purification of the impressions received through the senses of what is random, insignificant. The process was known as the phenomenological constitution of an object, capitalizing on perception, not on revelation. (*Cartesianische Meditationen*, 1929). Heidegger had deconstructed the logos (*Destruktion*, course at the University of Freiburg, 1920), proving that language is a palimpsest of the meanings given to words by generations of speakers. The psychology round the turn of the twentieth century had reduced subjectivity precisely to those associations of a physical picture with a psychic picture (through which, according to Wilhelm Wundt's theory of psycho-physical parallelism, any landscape is filtered as object of perception). Psychophysics is mentioned by Vasile Voiculescu as the origin or simulation model of his own fiction.

How could we then talk about the symbols of romantic works on the same level as Voiculescu's symbols? The functionalism of the early twentieth century drew attention to the independence of meaning from the materiality of the signifier which can take on multiple meanings depending on the distribution.

Defining the sign by its signifier / signified binary, Ferdinand de Saussure was also able to support a timeless, universalist vision of the artistic object. Modernists cultivated the formal relations that gave the work of art inner cohesion, a haughty autonomy from the historical world, emblematic being, as W.B. Yeats says in *A Vision*, Brâncuși's ovoids and Wyndham Lewis' geometric shapes. Suspended in a vacuum, like Brâncuși's birds, or spatialized (Joseph Frank's article, "The Spatial Form in Modern Literature," 1945) by incremental figures (Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern*, 1963), these creations offered the possibility to conceptualize, stylize, abstract the flow of sensations and understand the experience in a rational and logical way: "the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice." (W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, London: Macmillan, 1937, p. 25).

Another matrix of modernism is located in the Central European tradition, Germany being at least as influential in Romania as France. Similarly to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, psychiatrist Vasile Voiculescu applied himself to the study of Wilhelm Wundt, but also of the American pragmatist, William James. If James Joyce essentially sifts through the chaotic reality of the Proteus episode in the novel *Ulysses* (let us add the importance given to form to such an extent that *Finnegans Wake* can only be printed respecting the original pages), if the characters in *Dubliners* are prototypes of Irish character, Voiculescu's stories bring to the stage characters from the perspective of those who perceive them (focalizers), which is, in turn, an effect of reading, of language, of a previous representation.

This tradition is heteroglot, supported by the triadic sign of semiologist Peirce, who interposes between signifier and meaning the multitude of interpretations. It is Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic fiction, the carnival world in which masks, signs, and symbols constantly change their semantic charge. With roots firmly rooted in a recognizable social reality, in a chronotope that could very well serve the realistic novel, characters at the same time claim a rather bookish origin. There are representations that are **hypostasized**, that are set up in front of an observer as a bet won by him. They are not simulacra, as in typical postmodern fiction, they are phenomena. In the spirit of the gender policy of modernism, the observer is usually masculine, the woman being the object of his perception in accordance with a certain expectation, pre-vision, created by language. Transitivity works from perceptually active masculinity to the narrated, dreamed, inscribed woman.

Once established the historical, mutant character of the structures of meaning and of the function of language, we will go on to introduce our method of reading Voiculescu's stories,

intended as an exercise in cultural anthropology, of studying literature in the cultural context out of which it was born.

The paper is structured in seven chapters, to which are added an Argument, which explains the motivation, the purpose and the method of the research, Conclusions, Bibliography and three appendices.

The introductory chapter, *Vasile Voiculescu and the Movement of Ideas at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, is meant to identify the place occupied by Vasile Voiculescu at the beginning of the twentieth century through an interdisciplinary approach that highlights the discursive negotiations between various cognitive fields (literature, psychology, philosophy, linguistics) that provided the semantic energy of Vasile Voiculescu's short fiction.

Previous approaches assimilated Vasile Voiculescu to a mythical, Romanian folk tradition, while the writer himself states in an interview that Wundt, Tarde, James and Vaschide exerted an influence on his entire work. Through their contribution, psychology had become a science with a decisive influence both socially and in terms of literary epistemology. Practicing this profession himself, attracted by the latest school of this discipline - physiological psychology or pragmatism - Voiculescu followed a fertile direction of modernist fiction.

Voiculescu himself knew the aftermath of Gabriel de Tarde's *Law of Imitation* (1890), which inspired a tradition of Impressionistic portraits, connected by a repertoire of tastes, mannerisms and addictions that transform each of them into affiliated group members, communicating in an intersubjective order. This includes the influence of artifacts, but also archetypes of the Jungian collective subconscious, the museum of works of art, the sphere of representations (artefacts, art objects) pitted against the world conceived of as blind will, matter devoid of intelligence.

The years of Vasile Voiculescu's intellectual training followed the directions foreshadowed in adolescence, starting from positions if not opposite, then at least distant. We focused on these epistemological landmarks indicated by the author himself in an attempt to revise the universe of his stories: "From high school I started reading psychology and morals. I soon arrived at Schopenhauer and I do not regret that because he took me to the Upanishads and to Buddha. From the early years of acculturation, psychophysics and psychopathology, as embodied by Sergio, Wundt and Hofding, led me to medicine, following in the footsteps of Vaschide, Pierre Janel and William James, with his religious experience. (*White Thoughts*, Appendix 2).

However, more important in Vasile Voiculescu's case was a shift in modern consciousness from self-expressionism to ego analysis, as Frederick J. Hoffman remarks commenting on William James' influence on modern literary consciousness. The ego is not preconstituted before the writing

of the text, but rather a process, its constitution depending on self-analysis, “moral, experiential and situational positions of the ego.” (Frederick J. Hoffman, *William James and the Modern Literary Consciousness, Criticism*, Vol. 4, No. 1 Winter 1962, Wayne State University Press, p. 1). The hypostases of Vasile Voiculescu's female characters are such processual events: under the eyes of the reader a character is born from a book or from conversations in the protagonist's mind (*Sakuntala*); from the words of a witch and from the sermon of a priest, a consciousness is formed whose conversion is not related to the vision but to the resonant chamber of social interactions (*The Hermitage of Wax*).

Chapter II. *The East-West Dialogue Upon the Sacred* brings forward the sources indicated by Voiculescu for the theme and ideas of the stories. Born in the archaic Bărăgan, with the memory and influence of the first Christian scholars and martyrs, Voiculescu borrows the biblical thrill, to which they will add, in an eclectic spirit that emulates the example of Wilhelm Wundt (the combination of science and humanistic erudition), continuing with writers such as Wundt, Hoefnig, Pierre Janet, after becoming acquainted with the positivism of Darwin and Littré.

Although he became a doctor, he dedicated himself to writing, which initially revealed to him poetry's imaginary spaces, and, towards the end of his life, in fiction, the world of lower magic and the attempt to transcend reality, on the border of a magical-mythical horizon. With a doctor's experience, a special gift in his career was that of quickly and accurately projecting himself into the patient's psyche - a skill that falls into the category of special bioenergetic endowments.

It turns out that Voiculescu was natively endowed with qualities, almost shamanic, at the same time making use of all the discoveries and studies offered by science. (Cf. Dr. Constantin Daniel, in vol. V. *Voiculescu, Medical Retrospectives*, studies, notes and documents, edited by G. Brătescu, Bucharest, Medical Publishing House, 1985, p. 581). The writer identified in Indian philosophy a model of asceticism, the anchorite, who fit perfectly into his inward search, his zeal for loneliness and asceticism being evident: “I miss the Ganges and the Himalayas.” He felt the need for the redeeming transformation of the human soul. In the Analyzed Stories, we find influences of Indian philosophy, highlighting aspects that refer to the theme of incarnation, the characters' spiritual experience, the exit from the world of incarnations and into a sort of void, an “inner emptiness” (Nirvana).

As early as his teens (1901), Vasile Voiculescu created the long, versified epic entitled *Indica* (Annex 3), in which two visions seemingly unrelated intertwine. The epic combines a fairy-tale, *Călin-file din poveste*, by Eminescu, and *Sacountala*, epically retold by Coşbuc. The young poet identified the connection between the two works, namely the union between The Flying Man and the princess locked in the castle, as in a hermitage, which resembles the secret wedding

between King Dusyanta and the adopted daughter of the Brahmin Kanva (...). Voiculescu's attention is not focused on the love of the young couple, as in the Sanskrit drama and Eminescu's poem, but on the old Brahmin Handar and the pain he feels upon parting with his dearest daughter, the light of his life, Shinka. Voiculescu had not yet had any contact with hesychasm, but his strongest attraction was the figure of the mystical ascetic, the Brahmin and the hermit, as well as his problems of conscience. (Roxana Sorescu, *Voiculescu-Nostalgia Indiei*, in "Trivium. Revistă de gândire simbolică", Iași, an. 2, nr. 1, ianuarie- martie, 2010, p. 32).

In Chapter III, *Woman Represented as Nature*, the writer starts from the existence of a close connection between nature and woman, by carefully observing the behavior of nature, hence the opening of ways to identify and perceive female icons in *Stories*. Each feminine hypostasis, based on a symbol, is an exercise in the construction of woman by associating her with the elements of nature. These hypostases represent an extension of the female character into nature, in a continuous search for spiritual truth. It is obvious that the writer's intention is to achieve a balance and unity of the feminine-masculine presence in nature, to reach the ideal human paragon which means a return to the original state, to restore the universal balance.

The reunion of the self, animus-anima, the two primary complementary anthropomorphic elements of the unconscious mind is realised by accessing the sacred, which is not revealed to male characters, but only to female characters: delicacy, feeling, sensitivity, flirtation, whims, compassion, charm, irrationality, instinct, sensuality, energy.

Starting from the finding that, in most spoken languages, the word nature is feminine (in the Romance language family, for example, in Latin - *la natura*, in Italian - *la natura*, French - *la nature*, in Spanish - *la naturaleza*), the connection between nature and femininity is mainly based on several assumptions and qualities that are generally associated with women: the relationship between woman, nature and life cycle, but also biblical references. By virtue of the patriarchal tradition, women are perceived as pious, gentle, graceful, but also capricious, changeable, like the weather. This description was consistent with the idea of the nature of separate spheres, according to the thinking about gender roles from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century in the United States: men and women were essentially different in terms of their characteristics, so that men were seen as hardworking, industrial, rational, full of themselves, self - arrogant, independent and proud; nothing of that can be easily associated with nature.

Culturally, women are strongly connected to nature through common types of experiences. Nature can be said to represent a feminine dimension of existence, a conscious extension of the manifestations of feminine hypostases in nature, "conceived as feminine and maternal, beneficial

as well as destructive.” (Elizabeth A. Fay, *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*. Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell, 1998, p. 13.)

Nature is also feminized due to the patriarchal nature of society; many romantic travel writers were men, so travel writing was entirely a specific masculine genre, which could thus give feminine qualities to nature, creating the desire for physical closeness. For the male ego, woman and nature have become tools of self-definition, identities being the result of the inscription of the female body with texts inspired by the ideology of the community.

Nature represents more visual experience than anything else, the decisive role being played in this case by Voiculescu, the gaze, through which the human being is allowed to discover another world, the mystery, the magic, the feminine symbols of nature, which promotes rebirth and discovery of the origin of life. We are not dealing with a simple, “purely functional, transparent, transitive” look that “shows us a flat world, devoid of any mystery.” (Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Fantastic Literature*, a preface by Alexandru Sincu, translated by Virgil Tănase, Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 1973, p. 146.)

The gaze is the only way to the miraculous. As in Gaston Bachelard or Ernst Cassirer’s cases, the gaze has a formative and meaningful effect (symbolic forms, as the latter puts it). The motif of the eye proves an extraordinary power to receive, analyze and reveal the feminine symbols of nature, at a higher level, the illumination and texture, the maternal symbolism, personification. Endowed with this visual gift, by detailing the appearances of nature, the writer reveals his feelings of the inner life.

In Vasile Voiculescu’s *Short Stories*, nature is not just a simple setting, an environment, it transforms into a decisive character of the action, highlighting the power, the grandeur, the nostalgia of the original times, the achievement of the absolute. As a female entity, in all symbols, nature reveals its secrets, protects the natural balance from the invasion of civilization, announces, participates, intervenes in the development of forces and events, transformations that influence both the psyche and the ability to understand, act and behave. In front of the reader or critic there is a vivid picture, of a lively nature, drawn by the sure hand of a true connoisseur of essential cultural values, complemented by medical knowledge, literature, folklore, mythology, symbolism, alchemy, philosophy, anthropology and psychology.

This chapter submits to a thorough analysis of Voiculescu’s nature, which can be seen as a feminized entity in its multiple appearances, richly represented by the presence of female symbols/ elements. It is nature with a particular touch, reflecting through intropathy (*Einfühlung*) its own soul experience. Through the radical transformation of the feminine elements of nature, appealing to accentuated deformation or stylization, symbolic nuances and alterations of concrete

symbols, the diversity of the reactions of the human soul is highlighted. We encounter an allegorical or symbolic landscape, idealized or misleading, fantastic or fascinating “through the hybridization of beings and objects or the unusual relationship between them.” (Gheorghe Macarie, *Literary Geography - Spiritual Horizons in Romanian Prose*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing House, 1980, p. XX.).

In Chapter IV. *Man – a Symbol-Making Being*, as a result of human interaction with everything that represents the world and how to perceive it and create its own universe, the imagination involves a symbolic understanding. The spatial elements intertwine perfectly with the symbolic representations and depths of human thought, in fact being references to the relationship between man and his own world, thus emphasizing that the human being “no longer lives in a purely physical universe, he lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art and religion are parts of this universe. They are the threads that weave the symbolic web, the tangled web of human experience.” (Ernst Cassirer, *Essay on Man. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Culture*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1994, p. 41.)

We have reached the end of this brief foray into ways of understanding the constitution and function of symbols in semiology, inaugurated by Charles Sander Peirce, from which derives the pragmatist understanding of symbols, especially with William James. As James Luther Adams, who recalls the conversations of a group of Harvard students, points out, Peirce had introduced the essential distinction between truth and meaning (see the two articles published in *Popular Science Monthly* entitled “The Fixation of Belief” and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”). Adams compares the symbolism of the Renaissance as this cultural phase was assessed by Jacob Burckhardt and the totally different meanings given by Konrad Burdach’s interpretation. We would add a book by Hélène Vedrine, which reveals a completely different Renaissance, its dark side: not a Renaissance of enthusiastic discoverers and apologists for renewal like Erasmus, but an era dominated by concerns for Agrippa’s *Occult Philosophy*, of esoteric circles of the initiated, of alchemists.

Symbols were no longer considered, in the modern world, revelations of the essences of things, but meanings attributed by man defined as a meaning-making being. The meaning of a read work is no longer a given of the text with eternal and universal value, but a built entity, negotiated between author and reader. Adams argues for the historicity of symbols, conceived mainly from the pragmatic perspective of the perlocution effects (they are beliefs, beliefs, on the basis of which one acts). Symbols have the role of structuring the universe of experience, which does not remain the same throughout history.

As a result of the collective mentality, a symbol is identified with a sign, whose connection with the object is established by the collective mind. It is an object, image or graphic entity that

designates or expresses something other than what it is. The connection between the symbol and its meaning is established on the basis of some conventions, having a circumstantial character, being valid either for smaller groups of people or for shorter periods of time.

In the tradition of Peirce’s semiotics, a symbol represents a triadic relation among the designated object, or symbolized/ signified, the way of designation or the symbolizer/ signifier and the interpretive term/ interpretive consciousness or human being. The category of designated objects includes elements of nature, moods, human relationships. In *Of Reasoning in General* (1895), Peirce “spaced” the signifier and the meaning that made up the binary sign of Saussure – a linguistic model that Voiculescu was closer to in time, but did not choose. The spacing is made by the “interpretant”, a differential that interposes a mental sign between the two elements of the Saussurean binary and by which their relationship is relativized, because the same signifier can arouse different mental signs/ representations in different people (Fig. 1, 2):

“Article 5. A sign is a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to stand for or represent. This thing is called the object of the sign; the idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an interpretant of the sign.” (Charles Sanders Peirce, *Of Reasoning in General*, in “*The Essential Peirce*”, Vol. 2 (1893-1913), Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, p. 13.)

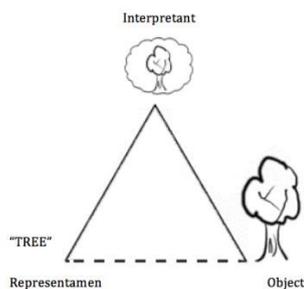


Fig. 1. The Peirce sign model

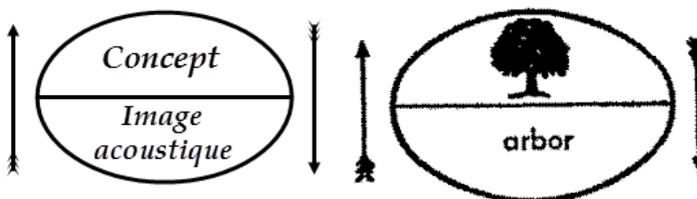


Fig. 2 The Saussure sign model

The same group of letters or phonemes can convey very different representations. It can arouse in someone’s mind the tree of the Fall from Paradise, or the Tree of Life in the Paradise of the Revelation, the stylized, two-dimensional tree from Saussure's definition, or the anthropomorphized tree of Nichita Stănescu’s *Non-Words*, etc.

Symbolism has a special importance in anthropology, taking into account the role of this current in the development of a so-called school of symbolic anthropology in the years 1960-1970, as well as various positive and critical responses to this recourse to the ethnographic study of symbols.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a symbol is defined as “a thing considered by general consent as a natural cataloging / typification, representing or reminding of something because it possesses analogous qualities or by association in fact or in thought.” (Victor Turner, *Symbol Studies*, in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, No. 4, p. 151.)

Applying the concept of anthropological analysis, the idea of this general consensus should be limited to a certain cultural context, because the meanings have in many ways cultural ties. Symbolism has been essential to definitions of culture since Kroeber and Kluckhohn emphasized that “culture considers explicit and implicit patterns, as well as for the behavior acquired and transmitted through symbols, constituting the distinct realization of human groups.” (Cf. A.L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Peabody Museum, Cambridge, MA, 1952, p. 357.)

Adams notes that the same symbol can be used in one sense by the privileged classes and in another by the wretched of the earth. The poem *Emperor and Proletarian* by Mihai Eminescu, for example, has often been misinterpreted as the author’s identification with the latter’s social critique. Actually two points of view are here in conflict. Nude paintings, for example, symbolizing the perfection of the human body, sometimes with connotations of the creative force of divinity, are grotesquely literalized by the low-life speaker: he sees in those “canvases” (the work of art is degraded to the synecdoche of the material from which it is made) real female bodies, accusing painters of ... pimping (the paintings are meant to arouse the lust of the aristocrats who sacrifice the poor’s innocent daughters). Likewise, the symbol of the “human crop” that freezes like lava (“freezes,/ petrifies, here in a slave, there in an emperor”) characterizes the emperor as a Schopenhauerian reflector, whose existential vision was divided between the flow of matter as blind will, lacking in intelligence, and the world of representations, of the symbolized material body (“The same longings disguised under another garment, / And in all mankind forever the same man”). On the contrary, the proletarian believes that the emperor is guilty of the miserable condition of the “ragged mob” attributing to him hypocritical conduct towards them, because he knows that they earn him his lavish life. It is very interesting to compare Eminescu's poem with Vasile Voiculescu’s *Sakuntala* from this point of view. Peirce says that the interpretant is a representation which can be in its turn interpreted.

Episode 62 of the Mahabharata is “interpreted” by Kalidasa and is again cast by Voiculescu in a pragmatist matrix. The heroine is the adopted daughter of a tent of gypsies who are attributed Hindu origin. Her name, Rada, is Hindu indeed. Sakuntala, according to the ancestral, heroic epic model of the book read by the protagonist, means “surrounded/ protected by forest / wilderness”. The tent also lives in the shelter of the forest, the adventure of the two young men being a symbolic

escape from civilization in the wild, seeking the indulgence of the body. Rada, the name of Voiculescu's heroine, is also of Hindu origin and means "tooth" but also splitting, division. Rada overlaps at some point with the text being read, which, in a pragmatist view, has the ability to induce a stronger vision of reality than reality itself. Reality is interpreted by the artifact, it is the effect of language. Therefore, Rada emerges from Kalidasa's book as the alphabet emerged from Cadmus's teeth. Voiculescu's story is a new branch of the common trunk of the original - *Mahabharata*. The Voiculescu text is an interpretation of Kalidasa's interpretation, and the symbols on each level acquire meaning according to the new historical contexts.

In *William James and Symbolic Interactionism* it can be noticed that the importance of mediating symbols of meanings in social interactions, among individuals, within communities, was a topic of interest, symbolic interactionism emerging as an approach to social relations at the University of Chicago (1910-1950 first Chicago School; after 1970 , Chicago Second School).

Symbolic interactionism is a concept that brings together different theoretical approaches that highlight the role of communication in social relations. It is an approach focused on intersubjective communication and its role in producing and reproducing rules, norms, rituals and behavioral patterns.

William James is a primary source of conceptualization in symbolic interactionism. Of particular importance is the social and ideological context of James' ideas, as well as his major contributions to symbolic interactionism, beginning with the association of current with functional psychology. James' concepts were ground-breaking, the most important being symbolic interactionism, according to which people react to the objects and beings around them depending on some previous meaning they possessed in relation to them. This sociological theory develops from practical considerations and alludes to the particular effects of human communication and interaction, integrating images and meanings, to deduce the meaning and achieve a correspondence with others, respectively, highlighting human behavior and social life.

James explored how people develop resources and strategies that help them adapt to the community and the environment, laying the groundwork for key symbolic interactionist principles, including selective impulse attention, the dialectic between environment and human behavior, the idea of continuous flow of consciousness and the voluntary component in human behavior.

The study of how people create and recreate social reality through interaction and the use of symbols is the center of symbolic interactionism, which views the individual as an active agent in his center or in his world. In common actions, interactions and connections with other active individuals, the individual forms and reshapes his world/ external life. But this does not mean that individuals are masters of their world, because their actions are contextually restricted. However,

as rational, thoughtful social actors, they act in accordance with the tone, so to speak, measuring and responding to each situation in accordance with the appropriate or appropriate rules and “rules of employment”. In other words, the individual actor acts according to his own definition of the situation.

Subchapter IV.4. *Symbols – A Functional Approach* presents the transparency of the symbols, this having a predominant role in the process of interpretation of the symbols by the interpretive consciousness. The universe of symbols can be deciphered provided that there is a connection between the cultural universe of interpretive consciousness and the general universe in which the symbols function.

A symbol can have different meanings and connotations, depending on the perception of the individual, the community, the historical period, the cultural current. Mircea Eliade states that the sets of symbols “are not (...) spontaneous discoveries of man (...) but creations of a well-defined cultural complex, elaborated and conveyed by certain human communities” (Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1994, p.41).

The weight of the pragmatic approach of the last century can be deduced from the fact that a Unitarian theologian such as James Luther Adams, a prominent Harvard University graduate, argues for the changing meaning of symbols almost in Heidegger's terms when he speaks of the palimpsest character of the meaning over time (*Destruktion*, the aforementioned 1920 conference):

“As the Oxford linguists remind us, a variety of meanings may be attached to or be latent in a particular word or symbol or in a particular complex of symbols. This variety of meaning becomes evident when one examines the contexts within which the symbol appears. The pragmatic meaning of a belief may be interpreted in differing ways in different times and places, partly because of the great diversity of nonreligious as well as of religious conditions (or contexts) at various stages of the social process. Besides this consideration one must take into account what Schelling called the *infinity of the idea*, the fact that any fundamental symbol is pregnant with, latent with, a variety of implications or connotations. This variety almost inevitably appears in time, for symbols belong to history, that is to the temporal sphere.” (James Luther Adams, *On Being Human Religiously*, Boston, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1976).

Through his *Short Stories*, Vasile Voiculescu indirectly outlines a portrait of a superior connoisseur of universal symbolism, with all that means mythical, folkloric, anthropological meanings. The concern for the valorization of the local symbols, of those that individualize the Romanian people, is also obvious.

In Chapter VI, *Woman as an emical object*, cases are highlighted when, according to the patriarchal tradition, Vasile Voiculescu positions woman, not as the subject of perception, but the

passive object of the gaze of the male characters. We find in his *Stories* an analysis of illusory perceptions, in accordance with the statements of William James in Chap. XIX of *The Principles of Psychology*. The senses do not perceive directly, but according to previous impressions, knowledge, memories. That is why different people perceive the same object or the same being differently. For Voiculescu, the perception of a female character is related to the influence of myths and legends, readings, conversation, debate. The heroines encountered in these stories are “seen” differently by male characters, coming from different backgrounds/ social groups.

In most cases, the female characters in Voiculescu’s fiction are secondary characters. All the characters that appear in Vasile Voiculescu’s work are loaded with symbolic significance. Female characters are no exception to this rule, whether they are real appearances, which look unimportant, or figments of the other characters’ imagination. As in most of Vasile Voiculescu’s stories the action takes place in an archetypal village, not fixed in space and time, it is almost impossible to identify a model of femininity specific to a certain period or a certain vision. In Voiculescu’s *Stories* there is a wide pageant of feminine hypostases, such as: the faithful woman, woman as a figment of the imagination, woman as the embodiment of temptation, woman as a victim of induced ideation, the sinful woman converted to the right faith, the old woman, bearer of old beliefs and white magic. All these hypostases are analyzed from an emic or ethical perspective, depending on the approach.

The two terms, emic and ethical, used mainly in anthropology, folklore, social and behavioral sciences, refer to two types of research, respectively to the two complementary perspectives in approaching a socio-cultural system, or an element of composition: emic, from the social group/ from the perspective of the subject, and ethical, from the outside/ from the perspective of the observer.

A community has specific gestures, beliefs, practices, with more general meanings, which can be understood/ interpreted/ analyzed by all individuals, including those outside the community, but which have a core of meanings that can only be understood if you belong to the community, if you are inside/ inside the group. Thus we encounter the opposition “inside” and “outside”, without which knowledge at this level would be much poorer, even if the threshold between the two coordinates is not always visible, well marked or easy to indicate. The emic thus designates facts, attitudes that are real and meaningful to community members, having an analytical perspective in modern anthropology thus resonating with ontology, the study of values, cultural relativism, by approaching the system within it, placing itself in the realm of morality.

The social environment and the way individuals are perceived by others becomes defining for behavior in society. It is a kind of social programming followed by its effects on the way

members of a circle of knowledge imitate behaviors in order to be accepted. This emic report is a description of the behavior or belief, consciously or unconsciously, of a member of the community within that culture.

The perception of the female characters in the analyzed stories is a process between the image of the woman described to the readers, on the one hand, and the fused or interwoven images and ideas of all the women ever seen, on the other; it is a process between two factors or moments, one of which existed before the process and was an old possession of the mind (the group of ideas or concept, namely), while the other is only presented in the mind, being the immediate factor of surveillance (impression of sense).

Based on the emic conception of the self that William James highlighted in his chapter on *Self-Consciousness*, the female character's self, which is subjectively identified by the female character, has an empirical dimension that constrains its subjective identification. As an emic object, the self is neither synonymous with the feminine being, nor the equivalent of the concept of self; rather, it is the unity of the empirical existence of the being and its perception of that existence. The self is the woman's own person viewed from the point of view of that being, which may differ from what others perceive from their distinct points of view.

Similarly to *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James' palimpsestic novel, which emerges from various impressions of the other characters about Isabel Archer, the main character, so do women in Voiculescu's Short Stories metamorphose under the male gaze, becoming a kind of psychic and behavioral mutants.

In Chapter VII. *Case studies*, woman is presented in different icons/ hypostases: the metaphorical imaginary, the object of fascination, an emic object, a victim of induced ideation, the muse, the good witch, the demon, the faithful or the sinful woman, the woman as the embodiment of temptation, the evil or the hobgoblin.

In *The Metamorphic Imaginary*, the whole story *Lostrita* is conceived as a game of mirroring: the equivocation being maintained not only by the human/ animal overlap represented in the portrait, but also by a system of coincidences resulting from the organization of epic matter along multiple human/ animal/ demonic levels. Thus, the presence of the lizard in the water coincides with Aliman's miraculous rescue from drowning and his luck in fishing; its hiding in the depths coincides with the disappearance of the bait for the fish in the pond and the devastation of the traps that seem to have been destroyed by human hands. When the wooden double of the magic fish sinks into the swirling river, the hero renounces the world of God. After completing the magic ritual, a pact with the devil in fact, a girl without identity appears above the water.

Ileana, the wild girl that the young man falls in love with and who becomes his ideal in love, has features reminiscent of the world of fish. It has only primary, instinctive needs. “She is all right. With many hiding places and secrets. And yet, he didn’t even know her name. He named her Ileana.” (Vasile Voiculescu, *Complete Literary Works*, p.292). The seemingly beneficial effect on Aliman, in the guise of a satisfied soul, is due to the presence of the girl and the love he has for her. Aliman’s fate is fatefully ruled by his very ideal. He tries to achieve the impossible, the tragic end meaning that the attainment of the ideal is done only through one’s own sacrifice.

We could say that the lizard is nature itself, which dominates and ultimately defeats Aliman. The recomposition of the whole pushes the logical explanation to the supernatural plane: the lizard and the wild girl are incarnations of an evil spirit, “with a tempting, dangerous corporeality” that “works through spells of the body, of matter.” (Vasile Voiculescu, *Op. Cit.*, P. 295).

We find, therefore, in Voiculescu’s story the emulation of William James’ ideas explored in *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*: a deeper level of nature (ours) will show “the inferiority of the rationalist level in the founding faith”. (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in *The Works of William James*, p. 67). James describes how the imagination makes sense of the reality of ideas with the human being ready to act on them. Imagination helps ideas or ideals that seem distant and abstract to become absolutely vivid and begin by taking over the center of the field of our consciousness. Thus, pragmatism is based on a fine descriptive psychology of how ideas become real, and in that becoming, the imagination, far from being a queen of falsity, is elevated to the status of an ontological faculty.

The Story of Sakuntala, in *The Voiculescu Hypotext and the Hindu Hypertext: Sakuntala*, refers to the early books of India occupying chapters 62-69 of the epic *Mahabharata*, even subtitled *The Story of the Beginning*, and some fragments are even older, appearing in the Vedic corpus. The heroine is the wife of King Duhsanta and the mother of Emperor Bharata, whose name is confused with the land of India and its inhabitants. In a study of the cultural and political history of representation at the turn of the last century, entitled *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Sakuntala in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1999), Romila Thapar comments on rewritings of the story over time in order to identify the dynamics of the historical changes produced in time by the filter of different civilizations from the one in which the epic was composed. The biography of this narrative thus demonstrates how the historical context and the new poetics condition the rewriting of a subject. Thus, the Indian poet Kalidassa (4th century AD) romanticizes the subject, insisting on the sentimental drama, introducing motives taken from tribes by Greek invaders, such as the ring of recognition or the curse accidentally cast on Sakuntala.

What is new about the rewriting of the story by Vasile Voiculescu? In his case, the differences in treatment have an epistemological origin. The author was a psychiatrist, and the story cannot be understood without appealing to the conceptions of William James or Carl Gustav Jung, who metamorphose the plot and characters of the Sanskrit epic. However, they are constantly floating in the background as a benchmark and a term of comparison.

As in many other stories, the origin is not physical, but textual: visiting his friend Dionysus in his absence at a country mansion, whose surroundings were familiar to him from childhood, the protagonist discovers an English version of Kalidassa's play, which he reads during the night. The next day he goes in search of or to save Dionysus, about whom the childhood nanny, Dionis's housekeeper now, says that she fell into the nets of a gypsy, spending all her possessions to feed some gypsy tents, thus preventing them to go down to the inhabited lands to beg and steal.

From this moment on, the narrated events take place on the horizon of two similar trajectories: the story of the gypsy Rada, who seduced Dionysus and now seduces the narrator, who looks like an incarnation of Sakuntala, and a metanarrative warp whose threads come from William James and Carl Gustav Jung's theories.

Under the influence of reading, the narrator has the impression that Sakuntala descends from the illustrations in the book incarnating as Rada. Since he is admonished for his abandonment in the gypsy's nets, Dionysus decides to see if the same thing would have happened to someone else if he had been in his place. He claims to be leaving, but remains hidden in the tent of Gypsy Kiva, spying on what is happening to his guest. This becomes a much more critical case of Dionysus, being ready for theft and lying, crawling like an animal with snacks for the gypsy tent. When he runs out of resources and falls ill, Dionysus reappears, explaining his stratagem.

How does Dionysus know that the narrator will react and behave like him?

The narrator had undergone a personality transfer, as if he had been inhabited by someone else. How was this possible? Of course, through the story they both knew and which was now confined to the book in his coat pocket.

In *Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James argues for the unity of the whole being that makes such transfers possible. He believes in universal connectivity, he is a monist who sees common causes, influences, structural symmetries or emotional affinities everywhere. Beings, things, experiences are not separated like atoms - logical judgment, based on generalities, would no longer be possible - but integrated into totalities. These are:

- the unity of the subject of discourse that refers to the universe - a unique entity.

- causal unity (*Pragmatism* 51) (we also see in the analyzed story how, exposed to the same conditions, situations, they act as a cause with effects similar to those that determined the analogous destiny of Dionysus).

- generic unity: The field of experience can be reduced to invariants, to generic models under which empirical singularities can be inserted (singular phenomena, individual entities)

- continuity through influence. All that exists in the universe acts on each other. The author gives examples from the physical world (electricity, gravity), but also from the psychic universe. There are thus networks of knowledge, based on either hatred or love. Dionysus weighs well before entrusting the narrator with his role in the script of the Sakunthala legend. He recognizes in it an alter-ego.

- noetic unit. Just as there is a subject of discourse that makes possible communication through language (intersubjective order, Gabriel de Tarde had called it in the *Law of Imitation*, a concept taken up by Jacques Lacan), there is also a universal knowing subject, whose omniscience approximates it without reaching it the individual thinkers. James found the notion of “all-encompassing noetic unity” to be “the most sublime achievement of intellectual philosophy.” The mind, he says, is full of necessary and eternal relationships between some of his favorite conceptions that make up an ideal network waiting, and our desire is to find realities over which this network overlaps so that the real and the ideal coincide again and Voiculescu develops the theme of the hypostasis of a scenario that reaches him through language.

- aesthetic unity. This is the concept that attributes, not to a text, but to the world of empirical experience a narrative structure. The romantic conception of individualism or solipsism gives way to a space of interference of the texts of each life. The basic unity of mankind makes these stories resemble each other: “The world is full of partial stories that run parallel to each other, beginning and ending in strange moments. They overlap and interfere at certain points, but we cannot completely unify them in our minds. Following a person's life history, I have to temporarily turn my attention away from mine.” (*Pragmatism*, Lecture 4, “*The One and the Many*”). Dionysus and the narrator go through the same scenario as an actor and his double: he is present sometimes one, sometimes the other in the same role.

The Locusts of the Apocalypse and the Guilt Complex: The wax hermitage is part of the series of Voiculescian stories inspired by the Christian vision of the world, the direct human-divinity relationship, the descent into a human being, the manifestation of the divine nature of God. However, in these cases, Voiculescu is closer to William James from *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study In Human Nature* (1902), who blames religious conversion sooner on an experience of “unconscious incubation” (liminal, marginal or even subconscious) than by

the dogmatic interpreter of orthodoxy. Thus, *The Wax Hermitage* illustrates the obsessive feeling of guilt, perceived as self-punishment due to the lack of balance between Self and Superego, the former being overwhelmed by the terror generated by the abysmal fear of the frightening mysteries of Christianity preached by the church.

Voiculescu subjects his female character to a research process identical to the one used by a psychoanalyst, analyzing him in extreme situations to highlight the impact of guilt and researching him to find out how to balance the tension between the Self and the Superego. The author makes up the whole symptomatic picture of the widow's neurosis, which shows characteristic states of guilt: fear of divinity and the world, feelings of nullity / inferiority and insecurity, self-blame, remorse and regret, depression, self-isolation in trying to cope with divine wrath.

Restoring peace with the divinity and with her own person, Profira realizes that she is “a living ark, like wax waxed in the heart of the hive.” (Gheorghe Postelnicu, *Vasile Voiculescu, Life and Works*, Bucharest, Europress Group Publishing House, 2012, p.289). Faith has the role of restoring both inner and outer balance, the religious experience of which the woman is a silent and humble witness has the effect of suppressing neurotic symptoms.

Voiculescu's texts, oscillating between myth and science, can be highlighted by a deconstructionist reading, because in them we find - as in the whole great literature -, several structures, even opposite ones, of meaning. One could persuasively argue that Vasile Voiculescu himself blocked the religious, mythical interpretation through the portraits of the witch and the priest. In either case, they are not agents or intermediaries of the sacred. The witch is an unscrupulous impostor who deliberately takes advantage of the woman's credulity by playing a prank on her. The priest is also not little convinced of his purpose or grace and even more skeptical of Profira's supernatural interpretation of the event. The Holy Sacraments are a routine for him, something he manages to get out of the mess and reassure the woman, the way doctors prescribe drugs that have only a placebo effect.

It would be necessary, then, to interpret the scientific, psychological, mystical experience of the woman, that is, the explanations given by William James, for example, to religious experiences. First of all, James analyzes in the *Principles of Psychology* (1890) the existence of a double self, the conscious and unconscious communicating with each other.

There are doubts about the veracity of the woman's story, Voiculescu remaining in ambiguity on the border between the real and the supernatural, which is characteristic of the fantastic genre. The chalice remains empty, according to the priest, but the curtain covering it is raised, proving that the woman was there. It is quite possible for the woman to have imagined the

theft of the communion, under the influence of the witch's words and because of her own nervous tension. These memories of something that did not happen are called by Freud screen memories ("Ueber Deckerinnerungen", 1899); they are meant to mask a deeply traumatic content.

What, in religious terms, can be described as enlightenment repentance is interpreted by William James as a double process on the border between the conscious and the subconscious. Painful memories can produce a kind of "subconscious incubation" while removing them brings healing. If the witch's words generate an unconscious commotion resulting in hallucinations, the priest's dismissal removes the destructive effects.

In *Experimental Introspection and Cultural Psychology in Magic Love*, the borderline situations in which the characters fall are due to an imbalance between culture, related to their inner or personal life, and respectively civilization, social life, the outer world in which the characters evolve.

The innovative element of the story consists in the poised relationship between the real and the bookish, in recreating a legend of a real situation, by adopting the theory of personality migration. The author presents the psycho-erotic mechanism caused by the complex play of the poet's imagination and intelligence, the character in the story, a scholar with a scientific mentality, based on logic, wanting to write a replica of Goethe's *Faust*, with inverted roles. His intention was to turn the pact with the devil in Faust upside down, switching the plot to heaven and reversing the meanings. But the effect will be totally unexpected: he will not have a pure and loving Margaret, but a Pearl-witch, a female Mephisto.

The pearl from the story *Magic Love* is a disturbing character who causes a drama that will be solved only by resorting to magical means. She is a beautiful peasant, Onișor's daughter-in-law, the host and guide of the poet and the doctor, who appears through substitution in his imagination like Margaret to Faust, whom the poet had just conjured through an exercise in concentration, or as an act of will.

This tempting Eve is an abyss of representation, which has no origin in reality, not even chronodiegetic (in the supposed fictional/ conventional real world). Origin is a myth. Myth is a signified which slides, in a Lacanian sense, under the Margaret signifier, Goethe's character. Looking at Mărgărită through the glasses borrowed from reading, the narrator sees the character he has just read about. Reality is replaced by the residual image, projected into the brain (an after-image) of reading. (William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. II, p. 202, Etext Conversion Project -Nalanda Digital Library). Perception, therefore, is not limited to the sensations transmitted by the senses on contact with an object, but they are largely altered by associations with previous experience, with expectations arising from the background of the apperceptive background.

Voiculescu's intention to demystify the supernatural element from folk traditions, resorting to psychology is obvious. The narrated events are subjected to a process of derealization, the author distancing himself from the action by multiplying the points of view, the perception of facts by a large number of narrators. The first narrator, serving as a mere narrative device, withdraws to make room for the poet, doctor, and painter. The triggering element that has an effect on the poet is the discussion about the folkloric influence of the sea, the result being the recollection of a story from his youth, when he had accompanied a friend, a folklore collector, in an isolated mountain village.

Following the rewriting of the episode in Goethe's work, the poet voluntarily undergoes an experience of "delirium of introspection by suspending adherence to reality" or "deep meditation", part of his own practices, to facilitate "concentration to exaltation", introspection is thus perceived as an extension of meditation and speculative contemplation in one's own consciousness that revolves around an obsession.

Using a magical artifice, the poet lives the terrifying experience of the metamorphosis of the woman who had enchanted him with her beauty, passing from surprise to anxiety, fear and dread, that specter of death materializing in a terrifying experience. The poet does not perceive the person in front of him, but the image that the witch had described to him, that of the undead smelling of death. It is a psychic trauma that will follow him permanently. Instead of the symbol of regeneration, of the eternal feminine, the desired woman will breathe out a "bitter smell, of death".

Omnipresent in the Romanian folklore, the undead motif is often found in literature, both in the world and in Romanian literature. Miss Christina, the character in Mircea Eliade's short story, a modern version of the undead stories, looks like an avatar of Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, especially since, beyond the erotic obsession to which the two degenerate characters are reduced, a vacuum is installed, their destiny being symptomatic for the disappearance of the social class they belong to (British aristocracy, Romanian nobility). It is not without relevance, for gender policy in modernism, that the derealization of a whole social class is symbolized only by the feminine gender.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper addresses a topic on which little research has been done. Much has been written in the literature about Voiculescu, but very little about his female characters, exegetes paying little attention to the gender policy and corresponding poetics.

I responded to this challenge by borrowing a recent method, inspired by the technology of digitalization and hypertext, the interpretation of both text and context opening access to the sources from which the literary text was born or the discourses with which Voiculescu's texts entered into dialogue. I have tried to realize a comprehensive picture of the epistemological frames in which the author projected his narratives.

The most important consequence of this methodology was the reCanonization of the author, previously seen as a mythographer or folklorist, in the context of modernist narrative schemes. The primary scene of most of the stories, as in Joseph Conrad's novel *In the Heart of Darkness*, is the meeting of the protagonists of a conversation. Some other narrative is the origin of the plot and feeds into the construction of the characters, prominent being here the shadow of William James. The group of narrators is, as in high modernism, a stereotype, a *machine célibataire* (repression of the erotic instinct by the male subject to dedicate himself to spiritual creation which is reserved for the male gender). Woman is the one who represents the object of their discussion or imagination, sometimes even the object of an experiment (*Sakuntala, Behaviorism*) or of an object lesson, of the illustration of some hypotheses on the functioning of the mind (*Magic Love, The Wax Hermitage*). Woman is hypostasized to their mind nourished by readings and conversation, she is the target of the transitivity of male intellectual activism, never the subject of the imaginative or introspective act.

Attracted by physiological psychology or pragmatism, Voiculescu embarked on a fertile direction of modernist prose which, through the fictional version of a psychology of perception, revealed its epistemological source in the writings of Wilhelm Wundt, Henry Bergson, William James, Gabriel de Tarde, Alfred Binet, Nicolas Vaschide, Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung.

The research of the contexts proved useful, not as one might think, although this is not negligible, to deepen the profile of Voiculescu's short prose or to gratify the author's taste for encyclopedism, but because the very poetics of these writings is grounded to a larger extent in epistemology than in rhetoric. If we think of the aesthetic program of Virginia Woolf as defined in her essay, *Modern Fiction*, the professed finality of her writing is the Bergsonian construction of a model of consciousness numinos in the center, but surrounded by an aura of the subliminal. Virginia Woolf's simulation model was a psychological one, which is true of all great modernists, who entered the canon of that cultural phase.

The warps in which the drawings of Vasile Voiculescu's stories are inserted are also psychological. The readings mentioned by him belong to a school of this discipline whose master minds are mentioned in the context of the formative years. This is known by several names: psychophysics, or physiological psychology, or psycho-physical parallelism or pragmatism - any

of these terms suits him. The multiple lives of characters who lack the unity and stability of the Cartesian self were born of Frederic W.H. Myers' theories of the hidden, subliminal self, recognized by William James as his model, or by Freud's layered, conscious/ subconscious self, or, especially, James' multiple self (empirical, social, spiritual, etc.). This fluid self, which is composed and recomposed under the ineffable influence of words, which is largely a speech effect is characteristic of the character in modernist fiction. We are talking, therefore, not about fashionable ideas, but about a poetics of the subliminal, a recipe for building the character and assembling multiple narrative voices. The character is like a camera moving forward in a social environment, changing according to the recorded images and voices.

Symbolic interactionism is also of Jamesian origin. Far from being a mere trope, the symbol acquires a social significance. It is not the fruit of a revelation, an embodiment of the idea in figurative language (as with the Romantics, especially in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Statesman's Manual*), but something closer to a code. The meanings are accumulations of social interaction, their interpretation depends, as in the case of the hermeneutic circle, on the aperceptive background (previous experience related to them) of the individual user of a collective code. Those who come from outside a community, in Voiculescu's stories, need to be instructed in the use of words or the meaning of rites and representations.

However, Voiculescu's symbols also belong to another category, which we have attributed to a so-called poetics of the elements. There is in Voiculescu a metaphysics of the natural element associated with a mental state in the context in which Gaston Bachelard elaborated his own commentary on the symbolic potential of the elements, that the act of perception is not neutral, objective, but in the highest associative degree, a wide range of mental states and visual metaphors. We have argued that symbolism is structured by gender as well. Similarly to Mihaela-Gabriela Păun in *Mihai Eminescu, Mircea Eliade and Vasile Voiculescu's Water*, we researched the imaginary of the elements and its tendency to establish characterological differences between genera, which, associated with the elements (water, air, fire, earth, cosmos) appear as a natural fact, an organic determinism.

Indian spirituality and culture, laden with philosophy, also exerted major influences on Romanian culture, with Vasile Voiculescu joining the third generation of Romanian writers who discovered India (see Appendix 1). The writer identifies in Indian philosophy a model of asceticism, the anchorite, which fits perfectly with his inner search, his zeal for loneliness and asceticism being evident.

We were able to identify in these analyzed stories the influences of philosophy on the East-West axis, approaching appropriate interpretations of themes, narrative structures or the construction of female characters.

Vasile Voiculescu tries to illustrate the close connection between nature and woman, by carefully observing the workings of nature, hence the opening of ways to identify and perceive female hypostases in nature in the *Stories* under analysis. Each female hypostasis, based on a symbol, is an exercise in psychologizing the elements of nature and embodying the female psyche. These hypostases represent an extension of the female characters in nature, respectively elements of a variety of human beings, in a continuous search for spiritual truth. One can divine the writer's intention to achieve a balance and unity at the feminine-masculine level in nature, to return to the original state, to restore the universal balance.

The chapter *Man-symbolic being* is the most developed and deals with the complexity and dynamics of symbols in Voiculescu's stories, because, in most of them, the real is often intertwined with the fantastic and, obviously, the poetics of the elements/ symbols is particularly interesting from this perspective.

In Voiculescu, the perception of a female character is related to the influence of myths and legends, readings, conversation, debate. The heroines encountered in his stories are "seen" differently by male characters, coming from different backgrounds/ social groups. As in most of Vasile Voiculescu's stories the action takes place in an archetypal village, not fixed in space and time, it is almost impossible to identify a model of femininity specific to a certain period or a certain vision. In Voiculescu's *Stories* we find only hypostases of femininity, such as: the faithful woman, the woman as a figment of the imagination, the woman as the embodiment of temptation, the woman as a victim of induced ideation, the sinful woman restored to the right faith, the old woman, bearer of old beliefs and white magic. All these hypostases are analyzed from an emic or ethical perspective, depending on the approach. Even if in Voiculescu's work we do not identify a large number of female characters, we have subjected to investigations the representative female characters the *Case Studies* chapter.

These characters are constituted in a mosaic, whose configuration has been outlined as the result of a research which has taken into account the historicity of symbolic tropism. Jamesian pragmatism does not look at symbols as having a universal and timeless meaning. The same signifier is loaded with different meanings in time, out of the virtuality of its meanings being realized those that resonate with the current ideas and practices of a certain cultural phase. The female characters in Vasile Voiculescu's stories are, in general, objects of the male gaze, which constructs them rather according to previous perceptions, induced ideas, etc. than through

innocent, direct observation. Placed mainly in rural areas, they are often alienated by the gaze of a visitor from the city, an intellectual, who reduces them to an object of desire. However, the author managed to overcome the sexism that in modernism was related to a convention of representation (artist, male thinker and sensual woman) rather than ideology. In many stories, woman is no longer an emic object but a subject of introspection that highlights the complexity of her affections, her effort to overcome an ethical or religious crisis, to face the confrontation with the consciousness of guilt and the capacity for redemption.

This paper aims to identify the complexity of femininity in Vasile Voiculescu's stories, to illustrate the dynamics of female symbols and to analyze their specificity in the context of pragmatist symbolism. We thus opened the way for a new research in the field of Vasile Voiculescu's literature, accompanied by a new canonization, as the effect of our applying the methods of contextual hermeneutics in identifying the codes used by the author in the construction of his fictional universe.

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