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PhD THESIS SUMMARY

THEATRICALITY AND MEDIEVAL IMAGINARY IN VIRGIL MAZILESCU’S POETRY

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SUMMARY

Keywords: Virgil Mazilescu, poetry, imaginary, medieval imaginary, theatricality, troubadours, generation

Virgil Mazilescu is perhaps the most influential Romanian poet of the latest literary generations, whose work has not been the subject of substantial monographs devoted to his creative vision yet. Paradoxically, Virgil Mazilescu's work is part of the most influential suite of post-war poetic voices, despite the limited bibliography illustrating its originality. Thus, the relatively small number of chronicles focused on his work so far seems to contradict the elective principles that define the mechanism of reception and literary history. However, the limited dimension of the linear and homogeneous work of Mazilescu has not lost its fascination yet, and continues to intrude and defy patterns of reception, even over three decades after the disappearance of the poet. Similarly, the preponderance of a critical reception focused mainly on the journalistic level demonstrates the difficulty of applying a unitary and globalizing hermeneutical direction, using only strictly literary exegetic instruments. For these reasons, but also from a pragmatic motivation to fill in the *blank spaces* of a reception that only referred to the obvious structures of Mazilescu's work, I felt the need for an approach that exceeded the strict perimeter of literature (by reference to both medieval art and to the terminology specific to the theatrical space), working on depth structures of the text. Another feature of this work was to bring out a poet and work under a conventional, monographic, descriptive, monolithic theoretical approach by means of a reading that takes into account the principle of contamination, impurity, difficulty in framing based only on classical analysis tools. It is not a *perverting*, but rather a *conversion* of critical discourse into textual analysis, stratified on samples of unity of detail, the specificity of difference, and not the uniformity of a unifying approach.

The work *Theatricality and Medieval Imaginary in Virgil Mazilescu's poetry* aims to provoke the internal morphology of the current literary canon in order to find the

coherence of a selection and a synchronous reception. One of the major motivations that led to the work of Virgil Mazilescu is precisely the possibility of an unconditional analysis of a pre-existing inhibiting bibliography that has overwhelmed, restricted, limited or denied the originality of the subtle mechanisms of his creative vision. I considered that a recent reading of this literary work could reveal a set of interesting observations that would take the post-war poet out of the labels that have many times cut the possibility of pertinent typologies, respecting the specifics of some aesthetics, well-defined movements. Not by chance, the difficulty of a generic and generational classification that obsessed with the analyses applied to the Mazilescian work has not satisfactorily given an answer yet. Seen from this perspective, the understandable difficulty of such a poetry, whose structural, thematic, stylistic nonconformity, etc., could generate an endless suite of polemics on the part of the poet's membership or non-membership to a certain creative descentance. Virgil Mazilescu's work succeeded in reaching the difficult situation of being able to be defined by what it is not, but by what it is, in fact. Most likely, this formal bizarreness specific to a poetry that has managed to homogenize a multitude of such antagonistic stylistic and visionary influences – by joining, for example, the surrealist props with the *truly frightening precision* of a lucid textual engineer – has boosted this fear of accurately tracing the path of a pertinent literary heredity to the subtle mechanisms of Mazilescu's poetry. Thus, in this work, I proposed a framing of Mazilescu's poetry, using the Antoine Compagnon's *antimodern* concept which is a valid alternative to the taxonomic patterns proposed by the Romanian poet's exegetes.

This paper proposes two complementary readings of Mazilescu's literary work (the marking of the medieval decoration and the identification of the *scenography* elements and the theatrical indices specific to this poetry) which, although it will not reach a consensus regarding the possible framing of this lyric in the aesthetic patterns of an *implemented* stream in the terminological palette of criticism, marks an innovative and pertinent exercise regarding Virgil Mazilescu's *vices of framing* in any of the literary movements mentioned.

Therefore, another purpose of this PhD thesis is to outline some readings that aim to reveal the internal structures of the creative approach, by applying terminological and interpretative grids to overcome the isolated frame of poetical discourse. Besides the correspondences taken from the French medieval poetry, I used, during this exegetical approach, also pictorial references, so that, finally, I could resort to specialized works from the field of semiotics, identifying the visionary coherence of the Romanian poet.

The chapter *The reception of Virgil Mazilescu's work in Romanian criticism (studies and chronicles)* marks an analytical approach to the study of Mazilescu's poetry,

based on a systematic review of the critical observations contained in volume studies and literary chronicles that discussed the status of this literary work, in order to identify both a suite of recurring thematic `obsessions` in the existing exegetical discourse, as well as a series of gaps justifying the course of this thesis. As in any study focused on a specific literary work, identifying a coherence, a pattern of critical reception is an indispensable element in the mapping of ideas chronologically debated over the past five decades since the Romanian poet's 1968 debut. Thus, the premises of this analysis started from four obsessive themes focused both on the belonging or non-belonging of the Mazilescu's work to the surrealist and postmodernist aesthetics, as well as on the excessive preoccupation of the Romanian poet for formalism, the oral character of his texts, and for structuring his fictional universe, depending on certain spatial coordinates and discursive indices.

Beyond the thematic review of the critical discourse obsessions, the chapter *The Virgil Mazilescu's poetry and the medieval imaginary* marks the first concrete part of this exegetic analysis, putting into practice one of the theses of this work. More precisely, debating a potential framing of Mazilescu's work in the postmodernist aesthetic straps, this chapter aims at a dual intentionality: on the one hand, the approach of the poetic imagery specific to the poetry of Mazilescu who finds in medieval art a substance he is processing, on the other hand, the surprising of the discursive specificity of Virgil Mazilescu's poetry, which, through the *vitalism* encountered by this medieval imaginary scale, departs from the aesthetic program of postmodernism. In order to materialize this analytical step, I proposed a theoretical overview of the *imaginary* concept, in order to finally trace a more applied analysis of the elements of the medieval universe, identifying a set of literary and artistic references comparable to the semantic palette and imaging of the Mazilescu's work. Using largely in this theoretical course the studies of Jacques Le Goff and Michel Pastureau, I proposed a thematic approach to Mazilescu's poetical imaginary, following the guidelines of several segments: the vegetal, animal, architectural and heraldic, social, nominal and locative imaginary. In a careful reading, a semantic look of the lexicon used by Virgil Mazilescu, we can observe an obvious concern of the Romanian poet for the cultural sphere of the Middle Ages: from the vegetal and chromatic luxury of the wild gardens, from the multitude of animal references that descend from the medieval bestiaries, from the paradisiacal and nightmarish visions of the medieval individual, to the castles inhabited by knights, princesses with Mediterranean names, poets and angels, Mazilescu's poetry becomes, thus, a cultural, intertextual cultural literary voyage through the fascinating Middle Ages. In addition to the actual reading of Mazilescu's integral work, I have based my comparisons on textual and visual references existing in the medieval poetry and art, especially in the Breton, French

segment. Among the main sources that animated this approach, I mention the masterpieces *Le Roman de Renart* and *Le Roman de la Rose*, but also the works of French troubadours and *trouvères* (such as Rutebeuf or Guillaume de Machaut).

The chapter *Theatricality and ceremonial in Virgil Mazilescu's poetry* follows the debate in the previous chapter. If the surface cover of the poetry of Virgil Mazilescu finds in the elements taken from the medieval imaginary a creditable reference, the discursive skeleton of this literary work marks a textual construct composed of a suite of stylistic and formal artefacts, not missing the direct addresses, the game with the lyrical masks, the gestural ceremonial of the actor instances, and the discursive modulations of an erotic lyric deeply influenced by the *courtois* love. All these specific components are framed by a multitude of spatial and temporal indices, by a discursive structure that frames the parenthetical / didascalia inserts, the aside discourses and the soliloquies, in a poem based on a premeditated and lucid *directorial* vision, orchestrated on the basis of a creative program familiar with the representative formal premises of the dramatic text. Not by accident, Mazilescu's poetry approach from the perspective of theatricality confirmed to us the premeditation of this artistic act which at first defies the principles of the *pure automatism* invoked by surrealist aesthetics, without discussing the multitude of variants, rewritings and *corrections* performed by the poet on his texts. Although this analytical stack did not merely support the identification of elements of Mazilescu's poetry that eliminates its potential framing in the aesthetic patterns of André Breton's school, I considered that a stylistic repertoire of formal artificial elements used by Virgil Mazilescu marks an innovative reading that can privilege a subsequent debate on the versatility of the readings applied to this kind of poetry. Being aware of the *comic illusion* convention, Virgil Mazilescu seems to build his fictional universe basing on operator indices taken from the scenic vision of the text, structured at the level of lyrical masks, at the level of the page layout, punctuation, the actual discourse following a suite of segments related to the props of the stage performance. These aspects are continued in the intimate structure of the text, by shaping concrete and metaphorical spaces of temporal alveoli, with the help of the didascalia insertions, thus defining a spatial and affective geography of Mazilescu's poetry. Without disconfirming the exegetical route discussed in the chapter on critical reception, I considered more necessary for such an analysis to refer to a theoretical bibliography taken from the theatrical semiotics perimeter. The specialized works signed by Patrice Pavis and Anne Ubersfeld marked the theoretical foundation of the debate proposed here, to which I added an evolutionary chronological debating on the concept of *theatricality* in its various meanings along the second half of the last century.

Finally, the chapter *Virgil Mazilescu's poetry as a defiance of generational criterion* comes to mark another taxonomic difficulty specific to a historical-literary approach. The obvious incompatibility of Mazilescu's aesthetics with the creative premises of his congeners potentiates this delicate problem of his understanding. Debuted in 1968, Virgil Mazilescu becomes a *șaițecist* lacking an aesthetic *șaițecism*, putting his work in the straps of an exercise comparable to the works of his *colleagues* for decades showing his weaknesses. Regardless of the debut volumes of some writers, such as Nichita Stănescu or Marin Sorescu, whose belonging to the homogeneity of a *șaițecist* aesthetics was confirmed, regardless of whether we bring into discussion either the works of those who founded the Romanian *oneiric group*, the specificity of Mazilescu's poetry opera has enough counter-arguments to prove a stylistic incongruity in such an arrangement. The fact that I did not refer to the generational criterion as a fundamental principle for understanding the subtleties of Virgil Mazilescu's poetry does not prevent us, instead, from seeing in the analysis undertaken to this point a pertinent reading applied to this work, a necessary contextualization either and to eliminate possible interpretative *skirmishes*. Consequently, within this chapter, I have conducted a non-exhaustive terminological and evolutionary discussion of the concept of *literary generation*, ultimately to surprise the incapacity to assign to Mazilescu's work the homogenous creative program of a precise literary promotion, while the taxonomic stakes do not have a strict historical record. At the same time, in this chapter I tested Virgil Mazilescu's affiliation to a possible "antimodern" poetic / aesthetic, leaving apart the limited applicability of certain concepts used in the critical reception in order to reveal a possible typological grid of this work as restrained as paradoxical. Structurally rejecting affiliation to the poetic *șaițecism* or *sapțezecism*, we considered that Virgil Mazilescu is an antimodern inspired by the troubadours' art, defying the homogeneity of generational patterns applied to post-war poetry. The author of the 1968 *poems* draws an arc over time, recalling his descendants of creation in the medieval ballad discourse, whose patterns, structures and elements he takes with the nonchalance of a *apparently* surrealist, subliming them into the revolutionary forms of a lucid and organized discourse on the principles of a premeditated theatricality.

Beyond the exegetical stakes of this PhD thesis, Virgil Mazilescu is indeed a generational *anomaly*, whose stylistic bizarreness differentiate him in his historical sample. In spite of (or maybe thanks to) these aspects, his work is still fascinating by his particular complexity, intelligence and *poeticism* which, however many analytic patterns he defies, is still one of the great achievements of the Romanian post-war literature.

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