On Becoming "Princesse Bibesco": The Intimacy of Modern Identity, Between the Self and the World

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With the exception of Eva Behring who does not regard Martha Bibescu (1886–1973) as an "exile writer," the few dictionaries and lexicons tackling Romanian exile writers only mention this turn-of-the century Romanian-French woman writer's name with modest assertiveness. This narrative of her censorship is probably the story of any exile woman writer, yet with a few entanglements created by her special social status (she became a "Princess" by marriage), by her outstanding political allegiances, and by her Bovaric spirit: malicious critics commented that her epitaph is a composition of four personae, none of them authentic. In this article, we present reasons and contexts of/for Martha Bibescu's exclusion from the Romanian national literary canon. Moreover, assuming "a new geographical consciousness" that might bring to the fore the transnational routes of emancipation, our specific aim in the present article is to move away from the enduring narrative of censorship in Martha Bibescu's case and to propose her as a candidate figure for a transnational literary canon, forging a specific, modern, intimate écriture*. Our stance is that shaping a complex intimacy, in-between the ways of the Self and the ways of the world, represents these women writers' major contribution to modernity and should be counted as one of the characteristics of modernism.*

Keywords: Romanian literature / Romanian women writers / Bibescu, Martha / literary canon / censorship / intimacy

Introduction: The dynamics of in-betweenness

The following remarks are grounded on the assumption that, at the turn of the twentieth century, women writers took an active role in constructing and deconstructing national modernisms at the fringes of Europe, which meant, most of the times, placing themselves in a problematic position of "in-betweenness" that challenged the classical conundrum core vs. periphery. Our stance is that shaping a multi-layered intimacy, in-between the ways of the Self and the ways of the world, is indicative of and represents these women writers' major contribution to modernity and should be counted as one of the key characteristics of modernism. Coined by Homi K. Bhabha's "Culture's In-Between," the concept of "*in-between*"-ness reflects a hybrid and dialogic positioning that involves exceeding the traditional divides between the public and the private, but also assuming the incompleteness of any cultural agency (53–61).

In line with Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's idea on the temporal, spatial, and vertical expansion of the concept of "modernism" (Mao and Walkowitz 1–19), we are claiming that modernization, modernity and even modernism (Călinescu 24–87) were shaped, not just from core to periphery, but also backward, from multiple European peripheries and semi-peripheries to multiple European centers. Moreover, it has been argued that an

> interesting twist in the thinking about modernism is offered by the view that while modernity was born in the West (even if authors differ on whether it is a universal or an entirely western phenomenon), modernism was the product of the periphery…. Some authors even posit that modernism is not in the core, but always in the periphery, and they speak of the modernism of underdevelopment, where culture is one form through which one can belong if one is excluded from modernity. This is certainly, very relevant to Eastern Europe, the first and closest periphery to the core of modernity. (Todorova 5–6)

Accordingly, in the present article we do not use the term "national modernism" with an ideological acceptation—thus modernism is not a "national allegory" (Osborne 61)—but in order to enhance *the variety* of aesthetic affiliations, political solidarities and socio-economic transactions across national spaces instead.

Though in our analysis, we make mention of the spearhead notions of the World-systems theory (that is, "center" and "periphery"), and thus amend its monistic and over-deterministic frame (Worseley 305; Chirot and Hall 97–99) by introducing a view on the transnational

routes of emancipation, that were charted by both carefree itinerants and tragic exiles. From this perspective, the intellectual conversation between "fringe" women intellectuals and their environment does not function as "an ambient universe of denationalized, deracialized forms of discourse" (Ramazani 350); on the contrary, this kind of conversation enhances the profound experience of in-betweenness and "gathers," as Homi Bhabha explains in his chapter on "DissemiNation," various "forms-of-life" *on the edge* (Bhabha, *The Location* 139–171)—on the edge of cultures, languages, countries, nations, cities, social classes and genders.

Taking on board Bhabha's hybridization and third space theories, Florin Manolescu regards the Romanian exile writers as in-between figures moving in a "non-Euclidean" universe because they are bi/multi-lingual, multi-citizens (Manolescu 17–18; Ifrim 182–186). This state, or, more specifically, dynamics of in-betweeness *in situ* between two or more cultures, civilizations, and sets of mentalities—triggers a specific imagery in the writer's works, but it is also reflected in the reactions that the home and, respectively, the adoption cultures generate in this kind of borderline positionings. Furthermore, Florin Manolescu asserts that there are certain advantages and disadvantages in being an in-between writer: first and foremost, because of the existence of, a pervasive identity complex, which is the friable bedrock of exile writers' literary achievements. As noticed above, it is equally important to trace what has been kept from these writers' original mentality in the adoption culture and language: for instance, Emil Cioran and Eugene Ionesco's Romanian works, written before their emigration in the 1940s, provided a genuine ground for further thought on their activity as international intellectuals.

A narrative of exclusion?

With the exception of Eva Behring, who does not regard Martha Bibescu as an "exile writer," the few dictionaries and lexicons tackling Romanian diaspora mention her name with modest assertiveness (Manolescu 80–86; Simion et al. 813–816). Assuming "a new geographical consciousness" (Sorensen 1) that might bring to the fore the transnational routes of emancipation, our specific aim in the present article is to move away from the enduring narrative of exclusion in Martha Bibescu's case and to propose her as a candidate figure for a transnational literary canon. The narrative of her exclusion is probably

the story of any exile woman writer, yet with a few entanglements created by her special social status (she became a "Princess" by marriage with Prince George Valentin Bibescu), by her outstanding political allegiances, and by her Bovaric spirit: malicious critics commented that her epitaph is a composition of four *personae*, none of them authentic (*Princesse Bibesco—Ecrivain Français*). Thus, holding that "what is relegated to the margins is often… right at the centre of thought itself" (Ahmet 4), we will present reasons and contexts of/for Martha Bibescu's exclusion from the Romanian national literary canon.

Born in 1886, Martha Bibescu had a prodigious literary activity spanning from 1908 (*Les Huit Paradis* [*The Eight Paradises*]) to 1972 (*Échanges avec Paul Claudel* [*Conversations with Paul Claudel*]), her last volume being published one year before her death. Possessing a charismatic and impressive personality—as much by her intelligence and social skills as by her beauty—Martha Lahovary, future "Princesse Bibesco," proudly claimed to belong to two cultures, declaring herself French at heart and Romanian in her origins. Also known as "The Princess (of) Europe" (Pavelescu 11–25), she was one of the most distinguished European personalities of the twentieth century and a celebrated writer, politician and hostess of lavish gatherings at her Mogosoaia Palace, on the outskirts of Bucharest. Her outstanding personality charmed Marcel Proust, Saint-Exupery, W. Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Alfonse XIII of Spain and many others. In 1954, the French Academy awards her with the Great Prize for Literature for her entire lifelong literary oeuvre. A year later, she is elected member of the Belgian Royal Academy of Language and Literature. In 1962 she receives the Legion of Honour. Her itinerant, cosmopolitan and carefree spirit was forced into exile by the dire circumstances of the Bolshevik regime in Romania. In spite of her public fame during the first decades of the twentieth century (Simion et al. 813), her writings have been constantly put in between brackets and today are quasi-unknown to Romanian readership, the only trace she has left in the collective memory being her tumultuous love life or the mysterious aura of the Romanian Mata Hari that her competitors, Elena Văcărescu, and Anna de Noailles, spread around.

The narrative of exclusion and its milder version, the narrative of omission, concerning exile literature in general, and Martha Bibescu in particular, come to the fore when we examine how the mainstream Romanian literary criticism reacted to her hybrid formula before and after the fall of the Communist regime. In order to show that Princesse Bibescu's literature springs from the experience of in-betweenness, we

chose to face off fiction and biography: on the one hand, with her most praised novel *Isvor, le pays des saules* (*Isvor, Country of Willows*, 1923; translated into Romanian only fifteen years after), on the other, her most cherished life-writing *Le Destin de lord Thomson of Cardington, suivi de Smaranda* (*The Destiny of Lord Thomson of Cardington, followed by Smaranda*, 1932), both of them pitch and toss of a constructed and censored intimacy, both of them sharing strategies of hiding and showing the Self.

Martha Bibescu's early debut (at the turn of the twentieth century) should be put in the template of the Romanian Francophonie, which was then already in its second wave. Programmatically following the model of French civilization, the young Romanian intellectuals—some of them "transnational figures belonging with the European aristocracy" (Manolescu 80)—experienced a certain cultural fluidity between Bucharest, Paris, and other places of the world (see, for instance, Matila Ghyka's memoirs *The World Mine Oyster*, 1955); this sense of continuity was enhanced by bilingualism or by the exclusive use of French for political influence, for cultural diplomacy and for easier integration into the European milieu. In spite of these transnational intellectuals' impact abroad, the Romanians' most prominent interbellum critics gave them the cold shoulder.

If truth be told, except for a few circumstantial praises that stressed on a gentle lady's noble delights, Martha Bibescu's publications did not have a friendly reception in the interbellum Romania either. While in France she was appreciated by Albert Thibaudet, Robert Kemp or Paul Souday, and praised without reserve by Proust, Rilke and Valery, in her home country, everybody criticized Bibescu's snobbery in choosing French as her main language and in dubbing herself "Princesse Bibesco." E. Lovinescu, one of the few male Romanian critics who promoted female literature during the interbellum period,[1] recommended his daughter to read the princess-writer's books (Lovinescu 191). This is not however an instance of public appreciation; along with Musset and an obscure Romanian memorialist, this kind of literature becomes a part of Monica Lovinescu's familial pedagogy. In spite of his acknowledged opening toward modernity, toward experiment with hybrid literary forms and toward female and ethnic minorities' literature, Lovinescu did not chose to include Martha Bibescu in his historiographical

[1] E. Lovinescu prefaced enthusiastically the first anthology of Romanian female literature entitled *Evoluția scrisului feminin în România* (*The Evolution of Female Writing in Romania*).

syntheses. The reason is not for her books' lack of aesthetic value, but for *Zeitgeist* reasoning according to which ethnic creativity is represented only by works written in the national language (Romanian).

In fact, this theory is the main framework of G. Călinescu's monumental and canonic history, where Martha Bibescu's name only appears, ironically, in the last footnote (930). Needless to say, this snapshot of the princess-writer's works serves as a kind of "fringe" contextualization to the consistent chapter entitled *The New Generation. Moment 1933*, which comments on other international intellectuals' works (Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran). Nevertheless, Călinescu's attitude is more complex than it seems because it epitomizes the Romanian readership's reactivity to Bibescu's literary endeavors: immediately after the publication of Bibescu's self-translated versions of *Le Destin de Lord Thomson of Cardington, suivi de Smaranda* (*The Destiny of Lord Thomson of Cardington, followed by Smaranda*) and *Quatre portraits d'hommes: Ferdinand de Roumanie. Herbert Henry Asquith. Anatole France. Jean Lahovary* (*Four Portraits of Men: Ferdinand de Roumanie. Herbert Henry Asquith. Anatole France. Jean Lahovary*), the Romanian critic is on the brink of "counting her among the national writers": more precisely, the princess-writer's talent for portrait takes after "Plutarch's model" and renders "hieratic and symbolic art," "poetically pathetic," "gracious and fine in describing moral and physical movements" (Călinescu 300–304). In 1939, somehow annoyed by the princess's experiments with genre fiction—the popular novel *Katja*, for instance—Călinescu acknowledges Bibescu's "writing skill, as being very nice for a mondain lady, but unsatisfying as a writer" (Călinescu 2007). Obviously, the famous critic was not ready to accept the princess-writer's defying attitude to write in French rather than Romanian: even though, by translating two of her biographic pieces, Bibescu had proved, with honors, her phenomenal talent in writing, in Romanian too.

Within this context, we contend that Camil Petrescu's intervention made a difference. Speaking from the position of the most appreciated modernist writer and with the authority of the philosopher, Camil Petrescu acts as an influencer for Martha Bibescu's postbellum reception. One of his articles on Bibescu was selected for publication in his synthetic volume *Teze și antiteze* (*Thesis and Anti-thesis*), which shows that his interest in the princess's personality is neither trivial nor circumstantial. Even if the text reads as a *pro domo sua* plea, the celebrated philosopher and novelist attacks his contemporaries' lack of interest of exceptional personalities. In a nutshell, despite the language she chose, Martha Bibescu expresses the ethnic substance in a very modern manner

because she is able to grasp the universal values: "She is an elevated flower of our [Romanian] race, a remarkable achievement of our national genius after so many strays and suspicions." (Petrescu 143) Moreover, the princess-writer illustrated one of Camil Petrescu's theses on authenticity, built upon Marcel Proust's narrative innovations. But the appreciation could not have been complete without the genuine admiration for Martha Bibescu's stylish femineity, which probably served as a real-life model for Camil Petrescu's fascinating female character, Doamna T (Lady T) from the much-acclaimed novel *Patul lui Procust* (*The Procrustean bed*) published in 1933.

The narrative of exclusion turned into censorship during the fifty years of Communism (1945–1989).[2] It is "cosmopolitanism" that becomes a taboo, allegedly threatening to replace all things national. Consequently, exile authors, their occurrences and their translations abruptly disappear from the Romanian literary field: for instance, *Dicționarul scriitorilor români* (*The Dictionary of Romanian Writers*, 1983) completely eradicated any exile writers from its pages. Starting with the Romanian translation of *Au bal avec Marcel Proust* (*Marcel Proust at the Ball*, 1976), Bibescu's name surfaces again: in 1979, a few fragments from the "political" diary are compiled and published, and in 1983 the first monograph appears, aimed at reintegrating her in the Romanian literary tradition. It is interesting that the critics of the Communist period avoided commenting on Bibescu's literature, some of them recycling Camil Petrescu's suggestions about aristocratic posture which was supposed to work as *universalia* beyond any racial or linguistic determinations (Cioculescu 395–398; Paleologu 274–282), and others claiming that the princess was a declared enemy of the Romanian Royal House. With these exceptions, the most authoritative voices of Romanian criticism—Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Simion, Lucian Raicu, Mircea Martin, etc.—did not reconsider her. Being perceived as a figure of the Romanian diaspora, Martha Bibescu becomes the specialty of other diaspora writers who, under the same sign of misfortunate reception, engage in a love-hate relationship (Lovinescu 75–78). The only notable recovery belongs to Elena Zaharia Filipaș, who analyzes *Isvor, pays des saules* (*Isvor, Country of Willows*) in the context of ethnic cultural movements such as Sămănatorism and Poporanism (localized versions of "*Narodnic*-ism"), and emphasizes Bibescu's originality in catching the ingenuity of the Romanian people.

[2] Martha Bibescu was not only the victim of Communist censorship, but also of the legionares' censorship before them, who confiscated her personal archive from Mogosoaia in the fourties—among these documents there was the draft of her *Nymph Europa*.

Nearing the 89' Revolution, the princess-writer's life and works become a rich topic for historians, some of them being interested in rediscovering the pre-communist aristocratic environment, others more committed to digging up secrets from the political police's archives (Pavelescu; Majuru; Bulei; Hîncu). After that, things seemed to clear up in literary studies with regard to the exiled authors. A series of monographs and articles exploring the Romanian-French co-influences provides solid ground to claim that Bibescu's work belongs to the Franco-Romanian cultural heritage, and thus to an in-between, hybrid area where cultural agency is always assumed as potential, and thus incomplete (Rujan).

In the revised editions of the above-mentioned dictionary, exile writers are an integral part of the Romanian literary history (Zaciu et al.; Simion et al.). However, at odds with this recent integration, the narrative of exclusion regarding exile writers persisted with certain literary critics, and this has now become a more recent trend of narrative of omission. On the other hand, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, many male writers of the exile such as Emil Cioran, Eugen Ionesco, Mircea Eliade have been retrieved by Romanian culture, translated and even introduced in school books after the Romanian Anti-Communist Revolution in 1989, despite the fact that both Cioran and Ionesco repeatedly insisted on their voluntary divorce from their Romanian identity. But some other exile writers took much longer to be rehabilitated, and some have not been rehabilitated at all, especially women writers. Moreover, scholarly interest in the period has labelled the rise and founding of the Romanian modern identity, as well as national models for constructing it, as generally being a male concern. By correlating reception fluctuations with the major political changes in twentieth century Romania, we assert that this narrative of exclusion continues to be political—be it the politics of nation or the politics of gender.

Despite Martha Bibescu's outstanding cultural heritage, Romanian scholars have consistently "edited" her occurrence in the national literary canon both before and after the Communist regime, claiming that her literary achievements should not be taken into account because of her linguistic "inaccessibility." While it is true that more recently Martha Bibescu has broadly been acknowledged as an exile Romanian author, and her life has been the subject of extensive research and even of tabloid columns (see for instance Stelian Tănase's "Bucharest, Top Secret"), one cannot omit or deny the fact that to-date there has been no major comparative work solely devoted to her output in the

Romanian literary canon, or even her contribution to Romanian literary modernism, for that matter.

As we can see, dealing with exile women writers is an intricate business of cultures belonging to the former Communist bloc, especially from a gender perspective. This is particularly problematic because although these authors originate from Romanian culture, they are transnational and trans-lingual figures, not belonging unequivocally to any national tradition. While we accept trans-nationality as an aesthetic value, the biographical, social or ideological circumstantial aspects (exile, social status, gender) should be given less prominence. Most certainly, in Martha Bibescu's case, she was a transnational writer even before the Communist party took over in Romania and her values and literary strategies did not suffer any interference or alteration due to her forced exile. Effectively we are confronted with a lack of theoretical fundament, lagging behind, so to speak, the realities concerning the special categories of writers who do not fit in the mainstream canon of the Romanian literature, such as exile, bilingual women, for example. In what follows, we endeavor to discuss Martha Bibescu's strategies of rendering intimacy as a social construct or, *mutatis mutandis*, to point where it makes "the realms of privacy" not a static and impermeable sphere, but an agential and relational device (Mitroiu 135). As in other cases—Carmen Sylva, for instance—the concept of "collective intimacy" could be used to describe a mechanism of self-censorship and postural composition: it is about dismantling and adjusting the Self so as to make it look like the person the others name "Princesse," which boils down to experiencing in-betweenness and fluidity between what is real and what is ideal (Parry; Patraș and Pascariu).

Intimacy and in-betweenness: Modern writing practices and strategies

This article builds on Anthony Giddens's *The Transformation of Intimacy* as well as on further developments in the field (see Berlant; Donovan and Moss; Parry), whereby intimacy is regarded as a cultural construct, a product of social and spatial relations, a medium for conveying modern affects and mentalities, a form of shaping a modern self-reflexive identity. This perspective may reveal, for example, how exile women writers thrived in the overlapping of private intimate spaces with public ones, such as in the theatre or salon. They used salons as spaces of in-betweenness, as members of French and Romanian high society were

grouped in Martha Bibescu and Anna de Noailles' salons, frequented by the most famous writers of the time. Also, this perspective on collective intimacy may enable us to explore how these women writers travelled and experienced exile as an in-between space, as an escape from the limiting and oppressive environment "at home," which was perceived as the static (thus, negative) side of intimacy; or, how they felt lost and alienated when spending time or living abroad, longing for the lost intimacy of the home and/or language they left behind.[3]

As shown above, sharing an in-between position enables exile women writers to have a deep knowledge of both cultures leading to a circulation of ideas as well as influences flowing both ways. For instance, before Marcel Proust became "Proust," his tremendous influence on the Romanian cultural milieu was channeled by Bibescu's agency: a much less known fact is that she and her cousin (and literary rival) Anna de Noailles are documented as having impressed the French writer to the extent that he even consulted the two Romanian ladies about important stylistic and thematic choices (Sturdza 450–535). Naturally, Proust's influence on Martha Bibescu (and her circle) is just as, as considerable, chiefly in her way of reworking life writing genres such as autobiography or biography. More specifically, the princess's sense of "collective intimacy" fashions the autobiographic discourse and generates (literary) strategies of elusion and auto-elision: to write a biography of an ex-lover (Lord Thomson of Cardington) is a way of disguising the frankness of the diary notes; to depict an exotic landscape and to frame it in an intimate letter is also a way of saying that the narrative of a love story is not only about discovering the foreign Other but also about returning to the fountain of one's true origins. It is probably worth mentioning that the princess's cultural circle at the Mogoșoaia Palace—restored in the spirit of the genuine style of the former Wallachian prince Constantin Brâncoveanu—was as cosmopolitan and prestigious as her salon in Paris. In fact, some of her guests wrote interesting travelogues about the wild and fascinating "country of willows," which should all be considered subtle intertexts to Bibescu's *Isvor*, echoing her literary manner marked by stylization, density and economy of tropes (Sitwell).

Our perspective about cultural in-betweenness also raises awareness about these non-normative texts and para-literary writing practices which have been repeatedly disparaged and undertheorized, proposing instead a more viable and flexible direction. Exile women writers are

[3] More on intimacy, women's writing and spatiality in Estelle, Duțu, and Parente-Čapková.

often consumed with an identity complex which becomes the bedrock of their literary achievements. They write on topics such as intimacy and diverse cultural identity, strange loves, new gender roles etc. and adopt hybrid genres, bordering autobiography and fiction, recycling obsolete forms such as the letter or the moralist's portrait (Principesa Bibescu). As we will see further, the thematization of intimacy plays a crucial role in constructing the modern self.

Martha Bibescu used the tropes of intimacy as a way of obliterating the limits between the self and the landscape, as well as the limits between the Self and the Other. We chose her novel *Isvor, Le pays des saules* (*Isvor, Country of Willows*, 1923)[4] and her biography *Lord Thomson of Cardington: A Memoir and Some Letters* (1932) as case studies in order to foreground her contribution to the (trans)national literary canon. The two works should be considered landmarks of her literary career, albeit for very different reasons: while the first one is probably the most praised of her books, the second one is the only one in which she secretly weaved both French and Romanian voices, by translating the original text *manu propria*, which is actually a notable exception of the princess's artistic behavior. The complexity of the biographic account is enhanced by the fact that Christopher Birdwood (Lord Thomson of Cardington), Martha's lover during his service as a British diplomat in the Kingdom of Romania, published, in his turn, a fictionalized memoir of his Romanian experience whose center of attention is a character called "Lady Smaranda," the romantic chatelaine with emerald eyes ruling over a place allegorically named "The Still Waters." As a sort of boomerang effect, the princess-writer's biography reverberates the secret Arthurian tones of her own myth as "Lady of the Lake": by writing his life, she actually writes about herself too.

Isvor begins on the brink of autobiographical writing and fiction. Marked by in-betweenness and generic fluidity, neither entirely autobiographical, nor entirely a novel, the text could be integrated to the category of "the autobiographical novel": the first person-narrative is the most adequate to illustrate the tension of a style oscillating between the key concept of distance (or relational identity, gap, otherness) and the need to express oneself, to narrate the Self and to give agentive force to the privacy of the self. This is not the first person of confessions, but a voice that hints at objectivity: "I learn to read between the lines of what I write, and I laugh all alone at my discoveries. Blessed

[4] The present article makes reference to the edition *Isvor, le pays des saules*. Paris: Bartillat, 1994. The translations from French into English also belong to the authors of this article.

mania of recording everything and then rereading what I record." (Bibescu, *Isvor* 167)

The same generic hybridity marks the biographical discourse in the biography of Lord Thomson of Cardington, which is also written in the first person in order to suggest not only the temporal contemporaneity, but also a kind of impersonation, a way of writing a beloved life from inside: "If I could write his life with musical notes, I'd be pleased." (14)

A letter at the beginning of *Isvor* introduces a fictional persona and sets forth the story line. A Romanian princess is confronted with an existential challenge: a law in her country does not allow foreigners to own land. Since she is about to marry her French fiancé, Émilien, before committing her life to him she decides to visit her Romanian estate for the last time. She takes her time, though: she allows herself a year before making the choice between the love of her fiancé (symbol of the Other) and the love of her country. Consequently, Marie (the main character) immerses herself in a universe that offers her another way of life, far from civilization. The narrator writes about the Romanian peasants on her estate, people whose spiritual richness inspires the princess to compose a veritable fresco of peasant life at the beginning of the twentieth century. The testimonial is organized as a collection of diverse ethnographic material (legends, myths or tales, translation of popular songs or various refrains etc.). In the end, the reader (who is left in suspense as to Marie's final choice throughout the story), is provided with the answer via a letter in the afterword: Marie will not return to Paris. Her integration is complete; the character remains in the realm she came from to regain. The fictional pact is therefore based solely on the attestation of the two letters framing the story itself. The first-person narrative exposes the reader to what could be defined as a real travelogue. Due to detailed and suggestive descriptions, the reader should have no trouble at all finding the Romanian countryside, with its traditions and oral culture.

In effect, the rural (or, better yet, primordial) realm recalls the writer's beloved residence at Mogoşoaia to which she devoted seventeen years of her life. The Still Waters, fashionable and cosmopolitan residence of artists, diplomats, politicians and aristocracy from the entire world, provides a place to suggestively illustrate the East-West relationship and the complexity of any such rapprochement process with the other. A fragment that opens the chapter "Their sad songs" is also restyled in the biography of Lord Thomas of Cardington as well as in Cardington's ficto-memoir *Smaranda*. The travelling passage catches a dialogue between the princess and Pitts, the English governess who

"understands nothing of the people of the country of the willows" (Bibescu, *Isvor* 37) and who criticizes the sad tone and the nasal voice of the traditional folk songs. Although the reflections of this bewildered spectator are accurate, her words sound unjustly contemptuous and the narrator resorts to an intertextual reference—most probably to Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* (2006)—so as to balance the verdict of "poor Pitts":

> I have however copied and translated into French the preludes of their songs, and my notebooks look like herbariums in preparation, for there is no flower on a stem that is not named there. I know many of these floral preludes; I like them and I collect them. In their succinct form, they remind me of certain Japanese poems which have only one verse, a cry thrown into the night when our senses are asleep. What force of restrained love, what science of observation, this supposed brevity in oneself and in others! (137)

Author of *La Nymphe Europe* (1960), an epic of the European civilization told through narrative genealogies, Bibescu pleads for the common origins of all civilizations: French and Romanian, but also, by resounding the echoes of Arthurian legends of the British. The return to the Orient, as represented by the journey of the Parisian princess to her native country, thus symbolizes the return to a lost Eden, to an intimate universe where original harmony is still possible. What makes *Isvor* and *Thomson of Cardington* so special is their interrogative and secretly intimate substance. The narrator plays with the in-between perspective: there is the freshness of the gaze which discovers a new realm but, at the same time shares an intimate familiarity with the cultural background.

For the peasants on the Mogoșoia Estate and for her foreign lover, she is the "exotic princess" because she comes from far away, from another world, even. This intrinsic ambivalent position of the subject relativizes the perspective. Dialogue can only take place within the framework of a relationship of trust and familiarity because, for the Other to reveal his/her knowledge, a universal language is needed which can only be that of intimacy. In *Fictions in Autobiography*, Paul John Eakin insists on the dynamics that the Self undergoes through the autobiographic narrative: "Autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and […] the self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure." (Eakin 3) Employing intimacy also involves the desire to charge writing with an existential, ontological value. The Self becomes the mediator of an experience that

never ceases to aim for transcendence, for fusing death, life and writing in the same discourse:

> Whiteness is nothingness… For the written page, the snow first replaces a blank page. But as soon as it has stopped falling, all the guests of *Isvor*, men and beasts, come to be inscribed legibly on this paper. My walks have become a kind of reading in the open air: I decipher, I do a kind of mental solfeggio and census, police investigation too. (Bibescu, *Isvor* 269)

Conclusion

The history of modern Romania and the abroad cultural agency of Romanian intellectuals represent an inspiring foundation for discussions related to the dynamics between language and culture, between the national and the transnational, between the intimate and the public. The in-betweenness status of exile women writers sometimes triggered an incontestable melancholy of displacement. They adopted different coping strategies to deal with this existential melancholy: some, negated their Romanian cultural and ethnic identity altogether, such as Anna de Noailles; others, such as Martha Bibescu, took an active role in creating a new European literary and cultural perspective. But both categories mediated indirectly or directly a cultural dialogue between French models and the local, Romanian forms of modernism, going both ways, in a continuum.

Martha Bibescu falls into the category of active agents of change, programmatically developing a European supra-identity and becoming a keen advocate for Romanian national emancipation and national identity, preoccupied with the remapping of European culture. In the present article we have argued that, the reconsideration of Martha Bibescu needs to be reassessed from a fringe perspective (relying on concepts such as "in-betweenness," "fluidity," "collective intimacy") and placed into the context of her efforts to link her birthplace and her place of residence, to link her public personae and the core of her Self. Her work is heavily reliant on the personal trajectory imposed by her family and social status to build a life between the two cultures, Romanian and French. The issue at heart in her writings is how the narrator/the author constructs her identity within a space that is imbued with intimacy, in which the Self moves incessantly towards others.

In the case studies briefly commented, the narrator of *Isvor* and the voice of the biographer from *The Destiny of Lord Thomson of Cardington* move towards the profound Self, whose profile emerges either from

Romanian origins (the native country of willows) or from the perfect, almost musical, communion with the beloved one (Christopher Birdwood, Lord Thomson of Cardington). To conclude, although the French myth, the dialogue of the Romanian-French culture was already a well-established fact during Martha Bibescu's time, to-date the contribution of this woman writer to this continuum is still not included in the Romanian canon. We have referred in particular here to the specificity of her writing, approached themes, negotiation with the literature of the time, the characters, the world vision, stylistic particularities etc. This article advocates for the repositioning of her writing within the national literary canon by regarding her, alongside other women writers of the exile, as an active mediator among Europe's national literatures (after all "the nymph Europe" is a political trope of solidarity), as well as a perfect example of the trans-national European culture. Her writings serve as a reflection of that invisible bridge, not only among cultures, but also between historical and political processes, which generated a two-way influence, beyond the apparent incongruences.

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Kako postati »princesa Bibesco«: intimnost sodobne identitete med jazom in svetom

Ključne besede: romunska književnost / romunske pisateljice / Bibescu, Martha / literarni kanon / cenzura / intimnost

Z izjemo Eve Behring, ki Marthe Bibescu (1886–1973) ne obravnava kot »izgnanske pisateljice«, je v redkih slovarjih in leksikonih, ki obravnavajo romunske izgnanske pisatelje, ime te romunsko-francoske pisateljice s preloma stoletja omenjeno le s skromno samozavestjo. Ta pripoved o njenem cenzuriranju je verjetno zgodba katere koli izseljenske pisateljice, vendar z nekaj zapleti, ki so jih ustvarili njen poseben družbeni status (s poroko je postala »princesa«), njena izjemna politična lojalnost in »bovarijevski« duh: zlonamerni kritiki so komentirali, da je njen epitaf sestavljen iz štirih oseb, od katerih nobena ni pristna. V tem članku predstavimo razloge in kontekste za izključitev Marthe Bibescu iz romunskega nacionalnega literarnega kanona. Še več, ob predpostavki »nove geografske zavesti«, ki bi lahko v ospredje postavila transnacionalne poti emancipacije, je naš posebni cilj, odmakniti se od trajne pripovedi o cenzuri v primeru Marthe Bibescu in jo predlagati kot kandidatko za transnacionalni literarni kanon, ki oblikuje specifično, sodobno, intimno pisavo. Naše stališče je, da je oblikovanje kompleksne intimnosti med načinom sebe in načinom sveta glavni prispevek teh pisateljic k modernosti in bi ga bilo treba šteti za eno od značilnosti modernizma.

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