ROMANIAN WRITERS DIPLOMATS IN GREECE

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The present article is a comprehensive account on the literary Romanian diplomats accredited to Greece. Their personalities and writings of which some were inspired by the Greek sojourn are definitely telling for the history of Greek-Romanian diplomatic relations. Often forgotten or ignored these writers-diplomats who conscientiously observed the interests of their country, were more vocal and recorded to a greater degree and in various manners the impressions left by their missions.

Keywords: Romanian-Greek diplomatic relations, writer-diplomats, literature inspired by a Greek sojourn.

This is an account on the literary Romanian diplomats sent to Athens ever since the beginning of the diplomatic relations between Romania and Greece[1]. Looking at their personalities and writings of which some were inspired by their stay in Greece, this is meant to be a fresh new turn in the way we think about the history of Greek-Romanian diplomatic relations. Usually looked at through the events harboured by the missions, the personalities who are diplomatically vested are often forgotten or ignored.

The instance of the writers – diplomats is maybe more interesting than that of the professional diplomats as they are more vocal and record to a greater degree and in various ways the impressions left by their missions.

Dumitru Constantin Olănescu-Ascanio (1849–1908)

The first Romanian diplomat writer sent to Greece was Dumitru Constantin Olănescu-Ascanio. He studied in his home town Focșani, in Bucharest, in Iași as well as in Germany and France. He had a PhD in law and was employed as a prosecutor.

Close to prime minister Mihail Kogălniceanu, he entered the diplomatic corpse as a secretary of the Romanian Legation of Istanbul. The ambassador was Dumitru Brătianu one of the Bratianu of the first generation, whom Ollănescu

[1] See Florin Stan, Apostolos Patelakis, *140 de ani de la stabilirea relațiilor diplomatice româno-elene (1880–2020*) (140 years from the establishment of Greek-Romanian relationships), UER Press Editions, 2022.

admired and on whom he was to write later: "extremely honest and cherished by the Sultan more than any other ambassador".

In 1878 Ollănescu was appointed first a director and then secretary general of the Ministery for Foreign Affairs. In 1886, he was chargé d'affaires in Vienna. On the 31st of January 1889 he was appointed minister plenipotentiary to Athens. His mission came after Constantin Esarcu's brilliant stage which assured a high quality to the Romanian-Greek relations.[2] Olănescu-Ascanio enjoyed a quiet kind of stay which allowed him to get on with his writing. In June 1892 he was joined for a short while by Duiliu Zamfirescu[3] appointed as a second secretary of the Legation (he had held the same position in Rome). As the two were came from the same city, Focșani, they spent quality time together. Zamfirescu described his friend as "tânăr, frumos, fericit" (young, handsome, happy) and made him a muse for one of his characters in the novel *Lydda*.

Ollănescu retired from the diplomatic service for good in 1892, when the Greek government broke its relations with Romania because of the Zappa episode. Olănescu-Ascanio's reports published in the *Green Book on the Zappa incident* are an invaluable stuff.

He published poems, prose, plays, translations (he translated Horace, Catullus, Victor Hugo, François Coppée, Ivan Tourgheniev, Eduard Douwes Dekker (Multatuli)) articles and essays. His most enduring contributions were his short-stories of which „Fata spânzuratului" (The daughter of the man who hang himself) is the most interesting. The traces left by his Greek mission are to be found in *Burdumba*[4] whose action takes place in what is today northern Greece (Lykovrissi a village in the vicinity of Dikelia) where young men of all the Balkan ethnicities become outlaws because of the persecutions by the Ottomans:

> But from among them and above them all were Burdumba and N these children of freedom who lived by themselves-almost without any other law but their own free will-in the middle of a desert and savageness and for them the natural tendencies were just a guide for living; these fierce repellents of injustice and unloyalty-as they saw and reckoned them- they were indomitable and passioned fighters for the fame of power and manliness who so many times had faced death these men without a limit in good or evil; these pagans that just believed in what awed them and bewitched their senses.

The prose showcases the good knowledge Ollănescu had of the Greek folklore and traditions.

He found recognition and was received in 1893 in the Romanian Academy at the same time with the well-known German researcher of the Romanian language Gustav Weigand. He was a member of the Italian Multi-language Academy, of the Paris International Literary Society Paris, of the Romanian Geographical Society and of the Athens Literary Assembly.

[2] Florin Stan, Apostolos Patelakis, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[3] See further in this text.

[4] See Florin Berindeanu (ed.), *D.C. Ollănescu-Ascanio, Poezii, Teatru, Proză*, București, Editura Minerva, 1988, p. XVIII–XIX.

He ranged, as his editor thought[5], among those writers "whose creation is not so much an achievement in itself but a necessary phase in the evolution of literature a half-way moment of resetting and reorganization of forces after a moment of a plenary manifestation of values and preparing, with punctiliousness and generosity the next one". One of his plays was translated in Greek[6] and his contribution on the Romanian theatre *Teatrul la Români* (the theatre of the Romanians) was mentioned in a history of the modern Greek theatre[7].

Duiliu Zamfirescu

He was born in 1858 as the son of the tenant farmer Lascăr Zamfirescu and to Sultana (born Mincu) and was the nephew of an architect who ranges among the national treasures of Romania, Ion Mincu.

He was a student at the "Matei Basarab" high-school in Bucharest and read law at the Bucharest University graduating in 1880. He then produced a poem, *Levante şi Kalavryta* in the manner of Byron dedicated to Kalavryta the first Greek town liberated from under the Ottomans. *Kalavryta weeps in the shadow. The Greek is laughing; he is mad*

In 1867 he was initiated in the free masonry „Steaua României". He functioned as a prosecutor and a barrister.

His diplomatic career started in 1885 when he was hired by Ministry for Foreign Affairs after sitting in an assessment test.

In 1885 he authored a historical play *Thargelia of Milet* set in the time of the Atreides. In 1888 he was appointed Legation secretary in Rome where he was to stay until 1906. His position in Athens was short-lived (July-November 1892) then followed Brussels (1892–1894).

A first "effect" of his stay in Athens was a poem, *Pe Acropole* (On the Acropolis) written in 1893 in which he confesses his pessimism as to the Greek and Roman past:

> …But the moon plunges on the vast peace of the sea…
> The bridge is broken; the past is overthrown to the ground.
> Pericles, Minerva depart… Without her, no matter what you do,
> The Parthenon is but a vault of a tomb.

The poem was read in an open meeting in 1893 at the prestigious *Junimea* literary society. The famous literary critic Titu Maiorescu sent the author a letter[8] in which he expressed his delight and Alexandru Odobescu remembered knowing it by heart.

[5] *Op. cit.*, p. XXII.

[6] I.e. *Κωμοδία μονόπρακτος*, translated by G. Moschakis, «Αττικό Μουσείο» Editions (*apud* Ciprian Suciu, *Στα βήματα των Ρουμάνων συγγραφέων στην Ελλάδα* [Tracing the Romanian Writers in Greece], Thessaloniki, Antonios Stamoulis Editions, 2017, p. 259–260).

[7] Γιώργης Ζωίδης, "Το θέατρο της Φιλικής Εταιρίας", *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*, 100, 1963, p. 260–297 (*apud* Ciprian Suciu, *Στα βήματα των Ρουμάνων συγγραφέων στην Ελλάδα*).

[8] On March the 7/19 1893.

After spending 18 years in Italy as a chargé d'affaires in 1906, he went back to Romania and was employed as a general secretary in Ministery for Foreign Affairs.

His aim was to encompass in his work the two major tendencies of 19th century Romanian literature – "art for art's sake" theorized by Titu Maiorescu and the "art with a message" advocated mainly by the Marxist literary critic Dobrogeanu-Gherea. In 1909, Zamfirescu was received in the Romanian Academy, and delivered a speech about the influence of a trend called *Poporanism* (the people's trend) and of traditionalism in literature, showing his disapproval for both. A fragment of it read:

> "I do not go as far as to state that the peasants' soul is not at all interesting to literature; that would be, as to my mind all of nature is interesting. Despite this, the greatest critics and the greatest creators of human characters do not deal with simple souls, because they are as uneventful as insignificance itself."

Zamfirescu opposed the use of folklore for direct inspiration, which made literary critic Titu Maiorescu, among others, defend folk literature and its supporters and reject Zamfirescu.

It was in the same 1909 that Zamfirescu was appointed a Minister Plenipotentiary and the Romanian Kingdom's Envoy to the Danube Commission. His *Furfanțo* volume of short stories and his novel *Lydda* were both printed in 1911. He was discharged from his diplomatic post in 1913, at a time when Titu Maiorescu became prime-minister of a Conservative Party cabinet – this occurred after a Romanian Army officer reported statements made by Zamfirescu, which he alleged were unpatriotic. Reportedly, Maiorescu never gave Zamfirescu a chance to explain himself.

During WWI, as a consequence of the occupation of southern Romania by the Central Powers, Zamfirescu followed Romanian authorities in their refuge to Iași. In 1918 he became a founding member of the People's Party, led by General Alexandru Averescu, and edited the paper of the movement, *Îndreptarea*. Under the second Averescu cabinet, Zamfirescu served as Foreign Minister in March–June 1920, and then as President of the Chamber of Deputies.

His novel *Lydda* is the first epistolary novel of the Romanian literature. It was written over a long period (1890–1898) and started as a theatrical play. It was somehow inspired by Paul Bourget's *Le Disciple* (written in 1889 and one of prime-minister William Gladstone's favourite books), and drew on the balance between existence and ideas. A widowed doctor lives on the reminiscences of his wife. He has an English daughter-in-law and after the death of his son he gradually discovers her. As a misogynist he is convinced that the young lady could not understand Plato whose *Symposium* he was reading to her. Gradually though he fell for her charming personality.

The novel has several descriptions of Greece of which we quote[9]:

In proportion as the coasts of the Peloponnese are green Megarida and Attica are arid. There is not a single blade of grass there.

We get into the restaurant. Surprise, surprise! An air from the times when the knyaz was in his prime, with table cloths stained with wine; with pilaf made with mutton¸ with peasants wearing the national costume¸ with evzonoi wearing fustaneles; with very civilized gentlemen; – a most intriguing mixture of things and people. The language, lively and here as in Patras, was crossing above the tables:

– Dos mas ten katálogon, bre!

– Paidí den éhomen kohliária!

– Ton logariasmon!

And I, as I did not know how to order, was punished by God with a mutton pilaf, that I will remember till the the end of my life.

When we regained the train, my travel fellow was tucking his moustache as a he-cat would do.One could tell that he had found something to his liking. I almost told him: hey was this the utel della Anglida? But, as I saw his satisfaction, I let him make his digestion.

We finally departed. After a few minutes we were crossing the canal. Here, the gentleman in the train would expect me fall face down. I would fall face down in admiration: provided I had a reason. I did have one, linked to the past, my thoughts went to the wall built by the Greeks during the Persian invasion in order to defend the Peloponnese against Xerxes; to the Islamic games celebrated in the temple of Neptune.To Caesar, Caligula and Neron, who had tried to dig the channel meant to unite the gulf of Corinth with the Saronic gulf- a channel the honourable general Türr was now about to put an end to. How strangely some names associate: Caesar, Caligula, Neron and Türr.

There is little I can say on the channel as such. An immense cut in the ground, seen from the train speed, heaps of sand, hurriedly built houses dryness again, once more the yellow dust of clay.

Making an entrance in Greece itself, the train left the Western coast of the Lepanto gulf and went to Eastern coast of the Aegina gulf, winding at times through the sea side and at times among rocky hills, on which the firtree grows. Here and there one can see the blue water, surrounded from all the sides by shores, as if they were Lake Como. One cannot realize how did the sea reach here. Had it not been so hot, the beauty of the place would be more attractive. For the first time I have the impression of a nature full of grace, as Taine saw it, in the glorious times of the past. I imagine that in winter the shores get green, and maybe then, from the depths of 2000 years, the echo of Pericles' people life reaches us.

Megara!

Written in the train timetable.

Where is Megara? Which Megara? That heap of houses built with clay?...

On the left, on a sunbathed coast, on which the wind has laid the sand of the dessert in the heat of summer a cluster of cabins hide. That was the capital of Megara, the rival of Athens, the first founder of Byzance!

Megara!...

Tears come to my eyes when I think of what it used to be and what I see now. My strongly optimistic nature is penetrated by the morphine of dire thoughts and I feel like lamenting with the poet:

E fieramente mi si stringe il core,

A pensar come tutto al mondo passa,

[9] Duiliu Zamfirescu, *Opere I. Integrala romanelor*, ed. Ioan Adam, Georgeta Adam, Bucharest, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2015, p. 1037–1045.

E quasi orma non lascia[10]

I turn my sight to the sea. Ahead! ... and evviva Roma! There everything stands like a beacon.

We are leaving. The gentleman in the train is silent. And rightly so.

Eleusis!

One cannot see anything. So much the better. The mysteries of Demeter's wandering, who was looking for her daughter Proserpine, stay a real mystery. It is quite strange how this Demeter never got to be Demeter, as it would be right. Is our Romanian saying "The mother of earth" anything in common with ghi-mitir[11]*? Or rather this concept, In the Romanian folklore has nothing to do with Cybelle, and is merely a local image, like the mother of forest?*

The train is running. The clay gets upwards in enormous heaps. The dust is yellow, the field is yellow, the mountains are yellow.

We draw near Athens.

A strange unrest pervades me. Athens. I get crossed with my own self that I am hot and I am not enthusiastic enough. Here are the classical mountains. Which one could be Hymettus, which Parnassus, which Pentelic? Now the train runs in an opposite direction. I cannot understand anything. I get out on the waggon's platformand take my head out of the train's rail, for me to grasp where the station lies…

And…

Please God, free your servant, my eyes have seen the light of your face.

Against the translucent background of the blue sky, the Parthenon profiles its elegant lines, lift on the Akropolis, as if an unknown hand had gradually driven it into light.

Never until that moment something which had resulted of human fantasyhad not moved me so profoundly.

The train made it into the station, a shanty wooden barrack, set in the middle od some sand. A good friend of mine of the Legation, young, handsome and happy, was waiting for me on the quay, and thus with the brilliant image of the Parthenon on my mind and with the full joy of seeing my fiend again, I alighted from the waggon in the strident squeaks of the locomotive, atmámaxa, which looked mad with happiness after reaching its destination.

My friend took me quickly to the coach and off we went to town.

Was I not happy! ... My good and joyful friend seemed more serene than ever; The Parthenon was standing in front of my eyes with all the brightness of his beauty; the couch in which we were flying was elegant. I had the clear understanding of the aesthetic intensity of the moment; youth in our hearts, elegance in our immediate life, the purest classicism in the surrounding contours.

But in that point any suggestion of the Greek antiquity came to a halt.

Today, as I remember the whole impression Athens left in my heart, I seem to understand even better the enthusiasm of my kind English woman: ranking with the esthetic emotions, seeinf the Parthenon may have the same effect a major misfortune or an exaggerate happiness in the order of moral emotions, in the sense that it suddenly sets an opinion that nothing may darken in the whole rest one's life.

Can one though live by an unique impression or a sole opinion? Of course not, and mainly not, for an optimist like myself, who believes that life is interesting; interesting just because variegated, because it is, just like nature of which it is part, for ever new.

Coming back to Athens – with the exception of the Akropolis, and the still standing three temples, the Parthenon, the Erechtheion and the Propylea; with the desolate ruins of Dionysus' theatre resting on its margins; with the temple of Theseus, short and dumped in the ground; with the elegant columns of Jupiter the Olympian's temple, which stand alone on the

[10] A fragment from Giacomo Leopardi, *La sera del di festa.*

gloomy banks of classical Ilissus – the rest is the new town, in which there is no link between the present world and that world. The monuments of the past seem to have recessed far from the actual life, clad in the gloomy clothes of time. In the dry field of Jupiter's temple, a fallen column has spread its marble tambours the one alongside the other, like round pieces of ivory on a chess table. No one dares touch them for fear they suddenly turn into dust.

Here are, in a haste, impressions from Greece and from Athens and Attica.

Teodor Scorțescu (1893 –?)

He was born in Iași as the son of Alecu and Paulina. He read law in Iași and started his diplomatic career in Octomber1921, as an attaché in the Romanian Legation of Istanbul, whence in 1922 he was transferred to the Athens legation. In 1923 he was recalled to the central Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where he functioned up to 1928. He was afterwards appointed in Ankara (1928), Helsinki and Riga (1930–1936), Prague (1937), Bern (1939), Vatican (1940). In 1942 he was general consul in Istanbul. In 1930 he married in Vienna princess Livia Borghese.

In 1944**,** while he was chargé d'affaires ad-interim by the Italian government he was recalled in Romania. He ignored the recall and in 1946 was demitted for insubordination after which he lived in Sicily, and after 1950 emigrated to Argentina.

He was a poet, with a début in 1914, a prose writer and a playwright.

His mission in Athens prompted his novel *Popi*, published in the periodical „Viaţa românească" in 1929 and as a separate book in 1930. Here is its plot summary:

A young Romanian is being sent to Athens on a banking mission in the very moment when the Gounaris government was stepping down and Greece was torn between the followers of King Constantine and those of Venizelos.He meets Popi, a young divorcee, a royalist, who often confronts her own family where there are followers of the prime-minister Venizelos. The Romanian banker is chaperoned by Spyros, a waiter by trade, very gifted in many ways among which a beautiful musical voice Popi accepts the Romanian man's court, but, would like to receive musical tokens. As he lacks any musical talent, the man hires Spyros who falls for Popi and keeps it a secret. His love is almost reciprocated but he Romanian can find an Achilles heel. Spyros was a supporter of Venizelos and the Romanian sets up a scene in which he accuses Spiros to be a royalist. The Greek man protested – Me a royalist? … Long live Venizelos! The whole of Greece are on his side!" Popi, a devout royalist, was disgusted by Spyros' political convictions and fell in the arms of the Romanian lover.

Antoine Bibescu (1878–1953)

In between here we must notice an absence, i.e. that of Antoine Bibescu (born 1878). His début as a diplomat as counsellor of the Romanian legations in Paris and Sankt Petersburg.By 1914 Antoine was appointed First Secretary of the

Romanian Legation in London. In 1919 he married Elisabeth Bibescu, one of the daughters of former British prime-minister Herbert Asquith. Soon afterwards he was appointed minister to Washington D.C. (1920–1926) as Minister of the Romanian Legation and in Madrid (1927–1931). In 1926 he was appointed to Athens only that he refused the position promising he would take it later. Himself a writer, mainly a playwright, he became famous for his friendship with Marcel Proust whom he allegedly told into becoming a writer[12]as well as with Mihail Sebastian the famous Romanian playwright who wrote at least one of his plays (*Steaua fără nume*) at Bibescu's domain at Corcova in the Dolj county .

Eugen Filotti (1896–1975).

He was the son of Nicolae Filotti a military pharmacist and Aurelia, daughter to a famous Jewish doctor, Joseph Felix. Filotti was a diplomat, journalist and literary translator. Between 1906 and 1914 he was a student of the "Gheorghe Lazăr" High School in Bucharest. In 1913, he began work in press where he was covering foreign news. In 1914, for two years he took up pharmacy at the University of Medicine. With Romania's entering WWI in 1916, he interrupted his studies and was employed as a military pharmacist. After WWI he renounced his pharmacy studies and read law at the University of Bucharest and graduated in 1922.

He spent another few years in the press producing articles and essays for the important periodicals *Adevărul* and mainly for the *Cuvântul liber* which among others supported the Romanian avant-garde. In opposition with the leftist radicals, who had an eye for the soviet experiment the important intellectuals of the *Cuvântul liber* envisaged an ideal place of Romania among the European nations. Filotti was a voice:

> *"Under the helmet of orthodoxy and that of tradition some authors brandish the static ideal frozen in hieratic Byzantine-Moskowite forms of a primitive culture, without an evolution and without any horizon. Our own cultural ideal is dynamical, earning for multiplication, novelty, fecundity. Not in hanging to a sterile and in many respects imaginary tradition not in pursuing the local character ... do we see the purpose of our generation's unrest ... The cultural significance we mean to promote is European. Our light comes from the West.*
>
> *In rendering this country more Western ... do we see the salvation... If it were to be a statement, we cannot only see an active and productive one: affirming our genius and our specific way of being in European cultural forms... For us there is no contradiction and no, incompatibility between the European and the Romanian character. Our sole sacred wish is to harmonize the Romanian character with the rhythm of contemporary life... This life... we ask it detached of rustic Balkanism, Asian character, archaism and simplism which unfolds its existence between the church yard and the local tavern...*
>
> *We hold a better opinion about our people than all the traditionalists taken together and that is the reason why we wish to see it making at last an entrance in Europe. There are*

[12] See Marthe Bibesco *Au bal avec Marcel Proust,* Paris,1929. and Mihai Dimitrie Sturza, *Aristocrați români în lumea lui Proust* (Antoine Bibescu, Martha Bibescu, Anna de Noailles, Elene Bibescu), Humanitas Editions, Bucharest, 2016.

ever since the Atlantic up to our borders, many nations which succeeded to be European without losing anything of their specific ethnical spirit. Why would there be need of a irrelevant and useless isolation?[13]

Starting 1927 he was employed by the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He was press attaché in Prague (1927–1930) then a Press Director in the Ministry, minister plenipotentiary in Turkey (1935–1936), in Greece (1934–1936), Bulgaria (1936–1938), and Hungary (1940–1944). During his difficult mission in Budapest where the Holocaust was in full swing he issued transit visas for the Jews. He was secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1944–1945. Afterwards he was forced to retire and focused mainly on literary translations some of which were outstanding. He translated William M. Thackeray, (*Henry Esmond)*, Richard Petzoldt, (*Richard Strauss's life, Haendel's life*) – A.J. Cronin, (*Shannon's Way, The Citadel*), Mihail V. Alpatov, (*Art History*, vol. 2), Kenneth Clark, (*The Art of the Landscape)*, Charles Sterling, (*Still-life Painting: From Antiquity to the Present),* Fritz Martini, (*The History of German Literatur)e*, Georg Lukacs, (*The Aesthetics*, vol. I), Wilhelm von Bode (*Die Meister der holländischen und vlämischen Malerschulen)*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, (*Elective Affinities*, (re-published till 2001) and *The Sorrows of Young Werther)*, Dominique Sourdel, Janine Thomine, (*The Civilization of Classic Islam* (I–II).

Constantin Gane (1885–1952)

He was born in Botoșani and died in 1962, in the prison of Aiud as a political prisoner.

Constantin Gane was a member of one of the oldest Romanian families who came from Maramureș to Moldavia alongside a prince called Bogdan in the 14th cent. He read law in Germany, where he got a PhD in Rostock. Back in Romania in 1910 he was for 15 years a barrister in Botoșani in northern Moldavia and in Bucharest. In 1913 he was a volunteer in the military campaign in Bulgaria, and afterwards in the 1916–1918 war.

He became and stays famous thanks to a pioneering work beautifully written as it concerned the biographies of many Romanian princesses, namely *Trecute vieți de doamne and domnițe* (The past lives of young and older princesses) (vol. I was awarded a prize by the Romanian Academy).

In 1940 and 1941 before the relations were interrupted between Romania and Greece he was the Romanian ambassador in Athens.

Written way before (i.e. in 1926) his mission in Greece was the prose *Intamplarea cea mare* (The big event), a travel account. Much indebted to reality and every day life Gane produced memorable descriptions with a comic proclivity of monuments of the antiquity or on classic education. The text hints subtly to the

[13] Eugen Filotti – "Europeism sau românism" in *Cuvântul liber*, 2nd series, no. 1, p. 2–4 and no. 2, p. 18–19.

so-called Vlach issue by the presence of the guide called Celea, a typical name of that community of which we can say that has lacked and still lacks an established and homogenous ethnic and homogenous identity because of the high degree of mobility which is characteristic for it[14] and as it has been stressed because of its being remote from Romania with which it shares the language.

Why should you be in Athens sir? I am travelling there for our cause, but you, what are you looking for there?

I am going, is my reply, for the other cause. The cause the our minds were imbued in school with old stories that, ooch, as one is a stupid child at that age, they penetrate your mind and would not consider leaving.

– Clasicism, really?... Do you know what you are going to see? Stones!

– Most probably … only they are white. White by the light of the sun in Attica, white out of the dazzling white which has erupted through the centuries from the Hellenic genius.[15]

My heart is beating… and I really do not know whether its beating or the proximity which dissipated the fog. I start construing forms… God! Could one see it from here? As if it were … God, god!... blue from so much blood suddenly twitching in temples, I snatch Celea's arm and ask him in a faint voice…

There … at the foot of the Lycabetus… something is luring…!

I do not dare say the word, I kind of fear a profanation, and he hits my cheek with it.

– The Acropolis.

– Itself!....

– You don't mind in the least, do you, Mr. Celea?...

– I mind human pain. The stones have no heart.

– They have in fact Mr. Celea! The heart of those who carved them. The sight of those who looked at them. Hidden in their pores are griefs, joys, endeavours. Or the common soul of a people!... As for these, they hold a part of each of them. The civilized humankind wrought itself a soul from the hearts of the Athens stones!

– Ba-ba went the sheep.[16]

Francisc Păcurariu (1924–2004)

He was son to Efrim Păcurariu and Maria (born Szabo).

He was a student of the high-school „G. Barițiu" in Cluj and then read medicine in the there University. He stayed in Cluj during the Hungarian occupation of 1940–1944 as a medical student, did graduate but never took a medical practice licence. In 1948 he joined the diplomatic corpse and between (1948–1952) his was a councilor at the Romanian Legation in Belgrade.

Between 1952–1956 he was deputy director then director of the Press Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. At the same time he was a lecturer at the Chair of Romanian and Universal Literature at the Institute for International Relations. Păcurariu was councilor at the Romanian Embassy in Budapest between 1956–1958 i.e. during the Hungarian anti-communist uprising of which he left

[14] See Peter Mackridge, Eleni Yannakakis, *Contemporary Greek Fiction in a United Europe*, Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre University of Oxford, 2004, p. 3.

[15] *Întâmplarea cea mare*, p. 152.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 154.

some impressive reminiscences and in Rome between 1958 and 1959. In the interval 1959–1963 he was extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary ambassador to Argentina. In that capacity he was a deputy member of the Romanian delegation for the jubilee session of UN in 1960. The mission was an occasion to author an impressive series dedicated to South America and its different literatures namely "Introducere în literatura Americii latine"[17] (1965), "Schițe pentru un portret al Americii latine[18]" (1966), "Scriitori latino-americani"[19] (1966), "Nepoții șarpelui cu pene"[20] (1967), "Profiluri hispano-americane contemporane"[21] (1968), "Individualitatea literaturii latino-americane"[22] (1973), "Antologia literaturii pre-columbiene"[23] (1973). Director of the Press Direction in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (1963–1968); Romanian ambassador in Athens and Nicosia (1969–1973), then director for Culture and Press in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Păcurariu was Secretary of the Romanian national committee for the UNESCO. He retired in 1975.

As a student in occupied Transylvania Păcurariu was an editor at *Tribuna Ardealului* (1940–1944), then at the *Înfrățirea* in Târgu Mureș, (1944–1945) then he was an editor for the Transylvania section of *România Liberă* (1945–1946). He was also an editor of the *Lupta Ardealului* issued anew in liberated Cluj (1946–1947).

His debut in poetry was in 1938, in *Luceafărul*, a periodical of the high school he was attending in Cluj. His editorial début in poetry was in an anthology i.e. Gh. Dăncuș, *Versuri din Transilvania Nordică* (Poetry from Northern Transylvania) (1941). In 1944 the copies of his volume were destroyed during a fascist Hungarian action. He was to publish poetry again much later *Priveliștile lumii* (The Sights of the World) (1967), *Ochean simplu* (Simple Field Glass) (1972), *Răzvrătirea desenatorului de cercuri* (The Revolt of the Circle Designer) (1974) and *Solstițiu de iarnă* (Winter Solstice) (1977). A retrospective of his entire poetical work was *Omul bântuit de cuvinte* (The man haunted by the words) (1980).

His prose début was in 1957 then followed a series of novels of which one was called "Ultima călătorie a lui Ulise" (Ulysses' Last Passage) (1976) a crime prose in which the Greek title had no immediate relevance but an ironical one. A criminal was caught and he was walking free for a last time.

In 1988 he published a historical monograph *Românii și maghiarii de-a lungul veacurilor: paralelisme, interferențe, convergențe și contradicții în cursul istoriei*[24]

[17] In translation: An introduction to the literature of Latin America.

[18] (Sketches for a portrait of Latin America).

[19] (Latin American writers).

[20] (The grand-children of the feathered serpent).

[21] Contemporary Hispanic American Profiles.

[22] The individuality of the Latin American Literature.

[23] (The Anthology of pre-Columbian literature).

[24] (The Romanians and the Magyars in centuries; parallel ways, interferences, convergences and contradictions along history) published by *Minerva* Editions, Bucharest, 1988.

Ion Brad (1929–2019)

Born in Pănade, Sâncel, the county of Alba, son to Traian and Cornelia Brad, Ion Brad was a poet, an essay writer, novelist, memorialist and translator. His early poetry (1950–1960), was marked by socialist realism only to become afterwards a neoclassical poetry written in the Romanian Transylvanian tradition.

He graduated from the „Sfântul Vasile cel Mare" high school in Blaj. He read Romanian philology in the University of Cluj-Napoca between 1948–1952. After functioning in Cluj for a few years as a secretary of the Romanian Writers'Union in 1955 he moved to Bucharest as an editor-in-chief of a periodical for children, *Cravata roşie*. In 1958 he became editor of the literary periodical *Luceafărul*. In 1961–1963 he was secretary of the Romanian Writers'Union. Between 1969–1974 he was vice-minister for culture. In 1974 he was appointed ambassador to Greece where he witnessed the re-establishment of democracy. His was a long and fruitful such mission, a good occasion of meeting the Greek literary community and translate from their works[25] His works were also translated into Greek[26]. It was also an occasion to visit Mount Athos which inspired his novel *Muntele Catârilor* published in 1980.

Between 1965–1989 he was a member of the then Romanian Parliament for the district of Bucovina. Between 1984–1990 he was the director of the "Nottara" theatre in Bucharest.

After retiring in 1990 he focused mainly on his memoirs of which six volumes [*Secvenţele începutului* (The Sequences of the Beginning), 2001, *Avatarurile democraţiei* (The Adventure of Democracy), 2002, *Elogiul nechibzuinţei* (Hommage to senselessness) 2003, *În umbra zeilor* (In the Shadow of the Gods) 2003, *Zonă de cutremure* (Earthquakes Zone), 2004, *Final cu prelungiri*, (Ending with extensions) 2005, were dedicated to his mission in Greece. A precis was published in Greece as Μυστικές συναντήσεις στην Ελλάδα[27]].The rest was dedicated to the people and circumstances his generation of writers went through in communism.

[25] See his *Melancolia Egeei, Poeţi greci contemporani*(Contempoaray Greek Poets), Selection, translation, preface and introductions by Ion Brad, *Univers* Editions, Bucharest, 1987, 252 p. The poets translated in the anthology are Manolis Anagnostakis, Kostas Asimakopoulos, Evangelos Averoif-Tossizza, Rita Boumi-Pappas, Maria Karaianni, Dimitris Doukaris, Odyseas Elytis, Anestis Evangelou, Milli Gregou, Lia Hatzopoulos-Karavia, Panayotis Kanellopoulos, Maria Kendrou-Agatopoulou, Dimosthenis Kokkinos, Iannis Koutsoheras, Nikos Kranidiotis, Constantin Lotris, Menelaos Loudemis, Pandelis Prevelakis, Dimos Rendis-Ravanis, Iannis Ritsos, Ilias Simolpoulos, Manos Spyridakis, Mihail Stasinopoulos, Lidia Stefanou, Constantinos Trypanis. Constantin Tsatsos, Ioana Tsatsos, Panayotis Tsoutakos, Leandros Vranoussis, Nikiforos Vrettakos, Lamros Zogas.

[26] *Πύρινα άλογα*, translation and preface Menelaos Loudemis, "Dorikos" Editions, 1975, Ποιήματα, preface by Konstantinos Tsatsos, translations by, 21 translators, Krinos Editions, Athens, 1982 with a review by G.D. Hourmouziades, «Επικαιρότητες.Ανθολογία Ion Brad», in the prestigious Νέα Εστία, tome 1.332, p. 55.

[27] Editions Epikentro, Salonica, 2007.

His prose was dedicated to the convulsions caused by communism to different social and religious categories and communities of the Romanian society such as the peasants (*Descoperirea familiei* (Discovering one's family), 1964 and *Ultimul drum* (The last journey) 1973 or the Greek catholic priests that had to either declare themselves Orthodox or give up priesthood (*Raiul răspopiților* (The Paradise of the former priests), 1978.

His lyricism was imbued by a bias to Greek mythology ever since the 60ies. If we are to think of the way in which the Greek myths were instrumentalized let us remember that in the tragedies they were used to chalenge violent rage and in encouraging values and abilities essential to rational, and compassionate relationships[28]. Ion Brad's approach is of a familiarity with this universe which can get the poet as far as identifying himself with a certain deity as is the complicate *Polyphemus*:

I confront the night which is nevertheless coming
Like a dark forest of destinies
A lonely time pervades me
Advancing embalmed nobody knows whence
A silence of unrest that digs
In my body a cradle or a grave…
I am all eyes of leaves and fear
Myself the blind Polyphemus (Polyphemus)

The appropriation may touch a well-known ancient Greek site as is the Castalia spring:

Are you delved in a mountain or in my ribs?
Do you purify me of demons and noxes
Or just of myself?
Are these just tears or simply stars
In my weeping?

Or a temple:

With old tears I welcome you.
Laughing is not like me.
I am the scoundred temple which rejects
The last beloved priest.
From now on it is the just the width which sings
From the white marbles chips. (With old tears)

Familiarity with the ancient world reminds the Cristian God:

Merciless Zeus is sending
The curse of old age.
I am trembling. I fear
Did he look in our eyes? (De senectute)

[28] See Emily Katz Anhalt, *Enraged, why violent times need ancient Greek myths*, Yale University press 2017, p. 3.

All in all the poet feels part of the ancient world:

Beautiful songs! And plays! And retinue!
When the gods were testing us
A youth in which you were blooming
And I was still descending from heaven
All young people are now trees
Looking north and calling their elfs
But me I am heading with my eyes
Like the bronze charioteer of Delfoi. (Auriga)

Eugen Uricariu (born in 1946 in Buhuși northern Moldavia).

A graduate of the "King Ferdinand" high School in Bacău. He then followed a military school, "Ștefan cel Mare" in Câmpulung Moldovenesc and passed his bacalauréat in 1964. He read literature at the "Babeș-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca and graduated in 1974.

He was among the founders of the prestigious literary periodical as quite anti-establishment *Echinox* and was its first editor-in-chief.

His début was in 1974 with a prose, *Despre purpură*, with asa second title "fantastical prose". Between 1971–1989 he was an editor of the literary periodicals *Ateneu* based in Bacău and *Steaua* based in Cluj.

In 1990 he moved to Bucharest, where he was debuty editor-in-chief of the literary periodical *Luceafărul*.

In 1992 he was appointed cultural attaché of the Romanian embassy in Athens. The mission was short-lived.

In 1992 he was appointed to Rome, as a deputy of the Accademia di Romania, in 2003 State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The fragment chosen from his prose is telling for his take on prose and the role of prose-writing in society:

"Miss Sofie, there is such a close link between me and this war, that I have to assume it, I suppose this is the word, isn't it?, overtly: because of it I have no choice, it has no other choice because of me. As I exist, alike me so many other millions, tens, hundreds of millions, the war is happening, miss. It is being made because we the humans exist. We are superior animals, obviously. I am studying, do you understand; I have studied and go on studying animals. The animals of the same species do not kill each other, they oust each other, they accept the victors, but do not kill each other. Apparently our superiority had as a start the moment when we conscientiously went over this, how should I put it, this psychological threshold – the interdiction of crime. They do not understand that it is allowed, we do. And, for me not to be killed, I take part in the war on the side of my flock. Does my answer satisfy you ?"

Caius Traian Dragomir (born 1948)

Son of Polixenia (née Negreanu), and Coriolan Dragomir, a veterinarian. He attended the "Radu Greceanu" high school in Slatina, graduating in 1956, and read

medicine at the Bucharest University of Medicine between 1957 and 1963. He functioned as a medical doctor and a researcher. He was head of the laboratory at the "Victor Babeş" Institute in Bucharest (1971–1989) and afterwards a director. He was also general director of the Institute for Geriatrics "Ana Aslan" as well as a professor of biopsychology at the "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest (1995–1997). In 1971, he got a PhD in Medical Sciences.

Between 1985 and 1987, he received a Fulbright scholarship to study the philosophy of science at the North Carolina University in the US. In 1998, he was elected a member of the Academy of Medical Sciences.

After 1990 he was involved in an intense political and public activity: secretary of state, head of the Department of Public Information of the Romanian Government (1991–1992), independent candidate for the presidency of Romania (1992), ambassador of Romania to France (1994–1997). Between 2001–2004 he was an ambassador in the Hellenic Republic.

His début in poetry was in 1981 with a volume *The Intimacy of the verb* most telling for his lyric personality and his favourite themes, which roughly speaking are the great themes of philosophy.

His debut in prose, a poetic such prose was *Treatise on the technique of renunciation* (1982).

His five volumes of essays (1992–1997), entitled *The Psychology of Freedom* and the *Psychology of Slavery*, *The Current Political Transition*, *The Indiscriminate Body and Spirit*, *Joseph and Ruben* highlight Dragomir's perspective, i.e. integrative and encyclopaedic blending psychoanalysis, Platonism and the consciousness of evolution, degradation and the division of human identity by the various cultures always suggesting constructive ways of interacting as a tentative therapy.

A fragment from a poetical prose is significant for the way in which ancient Greek myths are re-considered or internalized.

> *It would have seemed that he wanted to bring her from thence.*
> *Make her cherish the here, in his own world, her whole being, rejoice the fact that she is alive, co-present to this world.*
> *Did not stand true.*
> *His world was her.*
> *He had wanted to meet her. Where he could see her again was his motherland. Motherland is always one person. Maybe two or three. To the most five – six persons. Or maybe not persons but the surroundings of their close nature. And these specific persons through their apostle-like light lumina on all those they call compatriots.*
> *– You, beloved compatriot of mine, the compatriot of my only love!*
> *Euridice had made her way on he further side.*
> ***They gave her back to him with no difficulty.***
> *The dim king did not seem dim in the least. He had the light smile of the connoisseur, but leaves the other learn by himself. A real god:*
> *– Is it worth ?*
> *She followed him to the extent they could speak alone to the extent she could identify the actual identity....* (Orfeu in Infern).

Grete Tartler (born in 1948)

A graduate of the Department for Oriental Languages of the Bucharest University and of the Violin Department of the Conservatory „Ciprian Porumbescu". Has a PhD in philosophy with as a theme "The Utopia of estrangement in the Islamic Middle Ages"[29]. She was employed by the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs from 1992 to 2008. Cultural attaché and first secretary in Vienna (1992–1995), worked in 1996 for the Cultural Department of Ministry for Foreign Affairs, was an ambassador in Copenhagen and Reykjavik (1997–2001), finally plenipotentiary minister in Athens (2002–2006).

One of her poems is an eloquent self – portrait in which the Greek experience proper or the Greek part of her vast culture can be retraced:

I could be using ancient Arabic words.
or Persian, or words of the sensual Homeric Greek,
or fragments of Egyptian blue glass German porcelain,
or the Latin snow flakes of Mount Soracte,
fragments of English bricks, Danish oars,
or Charlemagne's velvet coat;
all these are no pretension, I accrued them
in conformity with the sound, colour and form,
I have learnt them a lifelong,
most of them I have used (in dialogues,
monologues – makes no difference).
I am disclosing them... (Parlando)

If the above was a good opportunity for perusals than what would their ultimate sense be? The image of Greece pervading the quotations we have chosen is telling for an admiration of its classical past (Duiliu Zamfirescu, Nicolae Gane, Ion Brad, Caius Traian Dragomir) and the beauty of its landscape. Vigil eyes do not miss a reality near from home. So Turkish remnants (the outlaws in Ollănescu's prose and the impressions of the Greek ports in Duiliu Zamfirescu) and the lasting problem of the minorities of which the Vlachs were a sensitive point in the Romanian Greek relations (as suggested by Nicolae Gane and the semi-fictional character Celea). The dilemma of following the (Byzantine) tradition or go for the more prestigious cultural trends of Western Europe for the Romanian culture to become more world conspicuous is yet another theme linked to the diplomats we have traced (see Filotti). Last but not least was a concern for the preservation of popular culture which was an important problem for the writers of the last decades of the 19th cent. only to become a topos in Romanian literature (Ollanescu was a connoisseur of folklore, Zamfirescu kind of despised it).

Ranging from the late 19th cent. (Ollanescu-Ascanio) up to the beginning of the 21st cent. (Caius Traian Dragomir, Eugen Uricariu, Grete Tartler) taking aboard

[29] Published under the title *Înțeleptul singuratic*, Humanitas Editions, Bucharest, 2006.

a major novelist (Duiliu Zamfirescu), a Romanian born and living mostly abroad diplomat and writer (Antoine Bibescu), a novelist that was forgotten for a long time (Theodor Scorțescu), an important journalist and translator (Eugen Filotti), an author famous for one book (Nicolae Gane), a neo-classicist poet with a debut in the '50^{ies} (Ion Brad), a prolific novelist, poet and historian (Francisc Păcurariu) the cast we have examined have enabled we hope a more nuanced and reflective history of the Greek-Romanian diplomatic relations (which were quite good although interrupted thrice in the course of their history, i.e. in 1892, 1906[30] and 1940–1945) considering the intellectual and artistic configuration as well as the achievements of the protagonists.

[30] See Ionuţ Nistor "Problema aromână şi cauzele ruperii relaţiilor româno-elene", *Analele Asociației naționale a Tinerilor Istorici din Moldova*, nr. 8, Chișinău, 2008.