

## *Ion Vianu's Autobiographical Account. About the (Dis)advantages of a Borderline Condition*

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Ion Vianu (b. 1934, Bucharest), Romanian writer and psychiatrist, son of a distinguished professor of aesthetics (Tudor Vianu), later received undisputed recognition also for his autobiographical volumes *Recollections in Dialogue* (written with his friend Matei Călinescu) and *Amor intellectualis* (first published in 2010). In support of the assertion that the latter represents a paradigmatic instance of an identity-quest narrative, this article attempts to position the narrator's 'in-betweenness' in relation to Jacques Lacan's concept of the Other (perceived as a counterfeit self, contrived at the junction of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real). Special emphasis is put on some of the singularities and paradoxes of *Amor intellectualis* for the purpose of proving that Ion Vianu's writing may rather be regarded as a heterography, pervaded as it is by different spectres of the Other.

### **1. Introduction**

Son of an illustrious Professor of philosophy and comparative literature, Ion Vianu focuses in his autobiographical volume on those circumstances which have led him – after hesitations, uncertainties and detours – to discover his true vocation : that of being a doctor (a psychiatrist).

There are a multitude of aspects that could be mentioned and analysed in the context of what has been referred to as the (dis)advantages of a borderline condition in this particular case. We might, for instance, consider the peripheral position of a Romanian psychiatrist and writer who has spent part of his life in Switzerland, a paradigmatic in-between identity pattern, not so much different from what Stuart Hall has called « the diasporic subject »<sup>2</sup>. Nonetheless, this aspect is not of central significance in *Amor intellectualis*<sup>3</sup>, where one should rather expect finding an

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart HALL, « Cultural Identity and Diaspora », in Bill ASHCROFT, G. GRIFFITHS and Helen TIFFIN dir., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd Edition, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 435.

<sup>3</sup> Ion VIANU, *Amor intellectualis. Romanul unei educații [Amor intellectualis. The Novel of an Education]*, Iași, Polirom, 2010 ; 2nd Edition, Iași, Polirom, 2011.

identity quest pattern, permeated with echoes of Jacques Lacan's theory according to which traces of the Real may be manifest either in the Imaginary or in the Symbolic register. The title, recalling Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei*, makes explicit the psychoanalytical and ethical commitments of this autobiographical account, at the same time foregrounding some of its paradoxes on which this article will concentrate further on.

In Ion Vianu's autobiography, the subject appears to be fragmented and fictionalised. Paradoxically, however, these procedures paint a truer portrait of the author than a straightforward autobiography would. It is as if an unconscious and de-centered discourse parallels conscious narration and intertwines it with the voice of the Other. In what follows, I shall place the notion of 'borderline condition' in connection with the subject's never-ending dialogue with the Other (in Lacan's perspective, a fictitious self, contrived at the junction of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real)<sup>4</sup>, as well as with certain ethical commitments .

*Amor intellectualis* puts the reader in front of a text which recounts the story of a sentimental and, above all, intellectual upbringing, against the background of a turbulent period in the Romanian history (approximately from the beginning of the '40s until the mid '60s) : the war, and subsequently communist seizure of power and the years in which the regime entrenched itself.

The adolescence of the narrator, with all its erotic and bacchanalian initiations, with intellectual explorations and inherent (although unspoken) conflicts with the father (Tudor Vianu<sup>5</sup>), is an

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<sup>4</sup> For details, see Bruce CLARKE-Manuela ROSSINI, *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, Chapter 18, « Psychoanalysis », 203-213, London and New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Tudor Vianu (January 8, 1898 - May 21, 1964), was a Romanian academic, professor of aesthetics and comparative literature, literary critic, philosopher and translator. Known for his left-wing and antifascist convictions, he had a major role on the development of Modernism in Romanian literature. Born in Giurgiu to a Jewish family (whose members had converted to Romanian Orthodoxy), he completed his primary and secondary education in the city. In 1915, Vianu became student at the Department of Philosophy and Law (University of Bucharest). Upon Romania's entry in World War I, he was into the Romanian Army, trained as an artillery cadet in Botoşani. In 1918, he returned to Bucharest, where he was editor of Alexandru Macedonski's *Literatorul* and resumed his studies, graduating in 1919. In 1923, he obtained a doctorate in Philosophy at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, with the thesis *Das Wertungsproblem in Schiller Poetik* [The Judgement of Values in Schiller's Poetics], his first major study in aesthetics. With the publishing of *Dualismul artei* [The Dualism of Art] in 1925 (followed by a long succession of collections of essays and studies), Vianu secured his place in the cultural landscape of modern Romania, and became the titular professor of aesthetics at the University of Bucharest. Through the interwar period, Vianu polemized with the fascist press (becoming the target of attacks serialized in *Cuvântul*). In charge of Romania's National Theater in 1945, ambassador to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946, Vianu was an honorary member of Romanian Academy starting in 1955. He made several concessions to

occasion for pages that are as stimulating as they are picturesque, all the more so as their directness renders them extremely convincing. As far as the adolescent's alcoholic intemperance is concerned, we are provided with abundant 'technical' details :

I did not have any money. Mitia was showing me how to get inebriated cheaply and easily. Thanks to his experience, I had passed through the first stages of initiation and I had been tossed straight into the science of alcohol. Our young and clean bodies were courageously receiving the poison, but were yet to collapse. We switched from awful mint and barley brandies with names like *Bonjour ground, I saw you amongst the graves* and cheap Romanian vodka to other evil combinations that got us drunk in five minutes. A pint of beer in which we poured a bit of rom immediately gave us a sort of euphoric dizziness, a slight levitation. It had become our favourite drink<sup>6</sup>.

If we were to abide by a definition of authenticity as self-exposure, this account could be considered one of the most authentic of its kind, although not necessarily a «truthful» or «sincere» one, since, as Angel Loureiro puts it, « all autobiographies are actually heterographies, pervaded as they are by different guises and disguises of the Other »<sup>7</sup> and, as a consequence, their interpretation has to address « the tight links between issues involving referentiality, rhetoricity, discursivity and address »<sup>8</sup>.

The erotic initiations are also very minutely described :

[...] ...me. Brothels having been banned, we would resort to a few women who, with great devotion and despite great danger (the Militia was said to be unforgiving) were still doing the oldest and most respectable job in the world. The last address we got had come neither from a friend nor from a school mate ; it had come from a mad man. Our paths crossed one night : I was walking out of the bar, alone (I did not remember how I got there) when this man approached me : he was a lanky fellow, huge nose, unshaven, dirty – but he wasn't drunk, like

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the new Communist authorities, which Ion Vianu describes as 'purely formal'. During his late years, he translated several of William Shakespeare's works into Romanian.

<sup>6</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis. Romanul unei educații [Amor intellectualis. The Novel of an Education]*, Iași, Polirom, 2011, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Angelo LOUREIRO, *The Ethics of Autobiography. Replacing the Subject in Modern Spain*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

me – grumbling, threatening tone in his voice. I heard a name in the sea of words, it was his name: Ionuț. And then, I don't know how, I heard an address : a hooker's. The street and number stuck to my brain. It soon became an obsession. The woman worked in the city centre, not far from the Church. I went down there and found a tired creature, much too old for me (she must have been around forty). Her teeth were yellow, she was in a hurry. She proposed to do to me what that old lady from Obor, the one with rubber gums, did to Mironi. I had entered with the 'big blind research bomb' into a dark unworldly space, into Plato's cave. The woman's teeth were delicate, but they could have clenched at any time into an emasculating grip. They weren't, I was grateful<sup>9</sup>.

There are instances where the narrator's gift of narrative invention may function as an instrument of seduction (as occurs in the passage recounting Ion's rather idealistic love affair with one of his school mates) :

[Like Otokar,] I had fallen in love with a boy. A boy younger than myself : Florian. [...] He was the epitome of the top-of-his-class student, but also a refined intellectual, who read poetry and listened to music, the same as we did. I would never have told him my true feelings for anything in the world. In any case, what was it all about ? I did not aspire to be one with him ! Physical contact seemed horrible to me... but nevertheless, I could spend entire afternoons by the lake, watching the sun sink behind the willows in Bordei Park, and thinking about him. I used to experience that yearning, that tenderness of the heart which is the sole proof of being in love<sup>10</sup>.

The hero, unable to dwell in incertitude and torment, decides to write a story on this topic, then to read it to his beloved :

In the end, I invented a stratagem. I reinvented literature, one might say, the art of addressing someone while pretending that you speak to all : I wrote a story. About a boy of sixteen who falls in love with a younger boy. About his beautiful bouts of melancholia. About their walks, about their conversations, about their two dryish hands brushing against each other, vaguely. [...] I had to find an ending for my story. I strode into the future. I made room for fantasy. I imagined suggesting to my lover that we should meet once more. The place was the Museum

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<sup>9</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 98.

of the Village, on the steps of the wooden church from Maramureş. It was there that I declared my love. When I finished the story, I told Florian that I wanted to read something to him. I had written a 'novella'. The ideal place for the reading was the wooden church. I persuaded him to play truant from school. We met on a beautiful summer's day, in the tranquil church porch, and I read him the story. The last sentence was : «Ion persuaded him to play truant from school that day. They met on the steps of the wooden church and Ion read him the story ». The text broke off *ex abrupto*. In that moment, the historic present of the reading coincided with the real present. I was reading to him a scene that took place on the steps of the very same wooden church where we found ourselves at that moment. I looked Florian straight in the eye. What happened next was up to him. He said, «I understand you, but no». Then he said 'no' once more. As far as I was concerned, it was a relief. But this had to remain hidden from him<sup>11</sup>.

Evidently, the father proved to be disappointed by the son's apparently 'unstoried', careless attitude. Anyone who is familiar with the Romanian culture will know that Tudor Vianu (the Great T., as Ion Vianu calls him) was a really remarkable personality in the field of humanities and, viewed from a psychoanalytical perspective, sons of such fathers live under great pressure, and are seldom happy.

Author of many outstanding volumes, among which *Dualismul artei* [The Dualism of Art], *Fragmente moderne* [Modernist Pieces], *Poezia lui Eminescu* [The Poetry of Eminescu]; *Arta și Frumosul* [Art and Beauty]; *Idealul clasic al omului* [The Classic Ideal of Man]; *Introducere în teoria valorilor* [Introduction to the Theory of Values]; *Filosofia Culturii* [Philosophy of Culture] etc., Tudor Vianu may be considered, in the economy of this self-narrative, a figure of the Symbolic register (this latter being, according to Lacan, an organization of subjectivity governed by the laws of exteriority, the laws of the Other, which is essentially linguistic in nature and which re-channels the Imaginary).

Gradually, the narrator constructs his self-portrait – first as a restless, angry adolescent, then (in the second part), as a future (successful) psychiatrist – in order to meet his father's expectations. It becomes obvious that the burden of these expectations is of central importance here.

Although it cannot be stated that the father was patronizing or unkind, he did represent a model of a certain type, and obviously a model not easy to parallel. The narrator's memories of his father consist in him being mainly surrounded by disciples and by close associates, bound to him by ties of *amor intellectualis magistri*, over whom he exercised a magnetic power.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 99-100.

A significant passage defining the father/ son relationship (and, in a certain way, also preparing the narrator's transformation), is that which recounts a tense conversation between the two, occasioned by T.'s discontent with regard to Ion's heedless behaviour :

I became aware that T. was worried because of my behaviour, only one evening when, while we were talking, sitted on the green sofa, only the two of us, according to our habit, without anything to do with our conversation topic, he said to me : « My life purpose was to serve. Doing something good for others, according to my possibilities. That is by conveying all my knowledge. Originality does not matter. For me, the most important thing in life is to disseminate my learning. The rest is vanity ». I was listening, upset. « Of course, your experiences are interesting, but I am afraid you are wasting yourself. Think that, one day, you'll have to serve the people around you. Prepare yourself for that day ». « I don't believe», I answered, « that I'll have to serve anyone ; only servants are ment to serve », I added, insolently. « I believe that originality is the essential value in one's life. Only innovative artists are able to forge something worthy to be remembered by future generations ». « This is nothing but vanity », he answered. His voice, calm for a while, was betraying at that moment a trace of annoyance<sup>12</sup>.

Another obvious point in *Amor intellectualis*, in addition to the narrator's difficulty of coming to terms with his differences from his father, is the idea of transformation. What matters, after all, is the development of an angry young man into an accomplished psychiatrist, with all the intermediary (narcisic) stages, his struggle to surpass the limits of an illusionary and essentially tormenting inside. A recurrent nightmare of his adolescence bears a particular significance in these circumstances :

I had a dream one night. I found myself in a cage. Due to some strange configuration, my own and that of the cage, I couldn't even try to get out through the bars : with alarming fear I realized that the bars themselves were my deformed limbs, belonging to other geometries; so, as I tried, not to get out, I could not desire or hope for this, but only to make my stay in that narrow space a little bit more comfortable, I was caught between the bars made of my own flesh, which twisted and became knots. My own bones, strong like metal, pressed me harder and harder, piercing my flesh, leaving deep scars... I screamed, woke up and ran to the window, trying to catch my breath... It took me a long time to understand that dream (perhaps

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<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, p. 103.

it was one of the constant urges to study psychoanalysis). Not only was I captive in a monster-like state, but I was trapped in my own individuality, both the prisoner and the prison keeping me inside... There was no way out of that, at least not in just one escape ; I needed several escapes... Would I be so lucky and so gifted as to find these narrow escapes ?<sup>13</sup>

What is most striking, apart from the subject's awareness of the narcissic pitfall, is the intuition of the efficacy of certain manifest mental effects or traces. Originating from the Real (in Lacan's terminology), this nightmare points to the unconscious relationship with death (and with whatever lies behind the effects of socialisation), therefore creating perplexity, anxiety and anguish. In other words, the body-cage could be similarly interpreted in relation to the Lacanian *das Ding*, the Object placed *per se* in a liminary realm, wholly inaccessible, since it is situated *hors-signifié*, in a no man's land where primitive and instinctive impulses are entailed.

## 2. The Disguises of the Self

From the very beginning it can be noticed that the narrator's self-portrait progresses in parallel with that of T. (this is also the first letter of the Romanian word for 'father'), and we gradually become aware that these two portraits are in fact more complementary than antagonistic.

There are many passages in which the father is presented as a frail, vulnerable person (when he becomes ill, and he is surrounded by doctors or when he is compelled to face the adversity of history) ; notwithstanding the above, he remains the powerful, central figure and also a catalytic element of this autobiography, which thus finds the ways to link the conscious and the unconscious systems in a polyphonal discourse of the self :

*Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat.* This inscription can be found on old clocks : all (hours) hurt, the last one kills. A saying for T, a *memento mori*. In the middle of existence, signs of fragility gathered, blood was shed, infections devoured the flesh. The death of close young men were other lacerations, moments of deep melancholy. But there are among us not only dire warnings, but also beneficial entities, people or angels. Not mythical angels, superstitions, but human-angels, much more efficient in their spiritual endeavour. These beings are organized according to an eternal order whose core cannot be altered by the modern world. *Amor veteris mundi*, the love of the old world, was the other saying of humanists. The squalor of the world –

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<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 60-61.

the plots, the envy, the anti-Semitism – the academic or literary success which did exceed the former in intensity, were all subjected to a higher order that gave life rhythm and sumptuousness : the love of the old world<sup>14</sup>.

When asked<sup>15</sup> what *amor veteris mundi* meant to him, Ion Vianu defined it as a facet of melancholy, a *nostalgia* of the Paradise, a meditation on the « beauty of the lost object which holds the advantage of not giving it back »<sup>16</sup>, adding that T was fascinated by this representation, as all his other family members were. Ion Vianu confesses his continuous attempt at counterbalancing it by means of an antidote : Rimbaud's urge « il faut être absolument modern »<sup>17</sup>.

As far as professional choices are concerned, it is obvious that it is not the wish of the son, nor is it his strongest of passions, to continue his studies in the field of humanities (he stops attending the faculty of classical languages, and chooses to study medicine instead). The vocation issue is vital between the two. « Fathers choose our stories for us », as Paul John Eakin has remarked, « and if we refuse the choice, we go without »<sup>18</sup>. However, the obvious point in *Amor intellectualis* is less the son's difficulty in fulfilling his father's expectations, and more the attempt of understanding and communicating the complexity of a remarkable father figure, described as being simultaneously majestic and vulnerable, severe and frail, on the background of a tragic history (the disappearance of a world and of a generation, that of the Romanian *intelligentsia* from the period between wars).

Related to this topic, another central issue in Ion Vianu's autobiography comes to the fore : that of the intellectuals' freedom in the context of a totalitarian regime. One of the reasons for which our autobiographer views medicine, a discipline situated between positive sciences and humanities, as a true blessing (« the most beautiful occupation in the world »)<sup>19</sup>, is its capacity of granting more freedom (of thought and action) to its practitioners than humanist disciplines do. Painfully aware of his father's distress when forced to accept some concessions to official ideol-

<sup>14</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, *op. cit.*, p.35.

<sup>15</sup> I. VIANU, *Lucrul cel mai bun în om este cicatricea* [The Most Significant Trace of a Human Being is the Scar], interview by Simona Sora, *Dilemateca*, no. 56/ January 2011, pp. 53-60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ivi*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> Paul John EAKIN, *Living Autobiographically. How We Create Identity in Narrative*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 135.

<sup>19</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.



ogy, the son chooses to enroll in what he calls « the chivalrous order of medicine »<sup>20</sup>, where he finds consolation and comfort :

Belonging to this noble order [...] meant for me not only an extraordinary privilege (for in any society, from the primitive, up to the most sophisticated, *medicine man* is undisputedly a respected person, a gentleman ) [...], but also a huge responsibility. [...] By practicing medicine, I could get the power to help. This strength made me proud, it gave me the feeling of a benefit. In my interior economy, using one's force to cure, not to destroy, represented an enormous profit. Moreover, for me, medicine was not only a field of bare action, but a mixture of action and contemplation, in an optimum proportion. There was no doubt, I had discovered my authentic self<sup>21</sup>.

As we can notice, Charles Taylor's guiding question : « What is good to be ? »<sup>22</sup> becomes central here. Ion Vianu's answer brings along some antidotes against his diffuse feeling of remorse (which was likely to have also been triggered by the 'guilt' of abandoning a philological career) and, above all, an acute sense of responsibility.

While, on the one hand, 'Medice, cura te ipsum !' becomes the autobiographer's favourite device, a miraculous 'weapon' in his identity quest, on the other hand, its ironical connotations indirectly recall the issue of the duty towards others. A 'huge responsibility', indeed, which entails a temporary overlooking of the Self. With it, we tread on the ground of ethics and we understand why the narrator repeatedly quotes Albert Schweitzer's autobiography. Moreover, he considers the latter a huge personality, « humanist, theologian, philosopher, musician and practitioner of medicine »<sup>23</sup> ; in other words, a personality cumulating features of both stories: that of the father, as well as that of the son.

From this perspective, autobiographical narratives appear not only as identity constructing instruments (after all, as Paul Ricœur has demonstrated, only a recounted life deserves to be lived), but they also prove to be modalities of recovering the voice of the Other (seen not only psychoanalytically, as the voice of the unconscious, but also from an ethical perspective, as an « entity

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<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, p. 209.

<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*, p. 274.

<sup>22</sup> Charles TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

that originates as a response to the other's address »<sup>24</sup>). It might not be a mere coincidence, that in English *account*, *to count on* and *accountable (for)* belong to the same lexical family, and that, as Levinas, quoted by Ricoeur, observes, responsibility should be seen as identity's other face, as « the term *responsibility* itself unites both meanings : *counting on* and *being accountable for*. It unites them, adding to them the idea of a *response* to the the question 'Where are you ?', asked by another who needs me. This response is the following : 'Here I am !' »<sup>25</sup>.

And who else other than a medicine practitioner could better understand the actual meaning of this imperative ? A particular concept of *bios* informing this autobiography, as well as a particular use of memory that attempts to capture or recapture life seen in all its complexity and interplays, determine a specific *ethos* or, perhaps a moral philosophy for which the concept of love, seen first of all as *amor intellectualis* is made central.

By conceiving the perfect psychoanalysis which aspires to make its subject not only perfectly self-conscious, but also perfectly detached and free, this narrative also confirms J. P. Eakin's intuition according to which « the first person in autobiography is truly plural in its origin and subsequent formation »<sup>26</sup>. This means that the subject to which the first person pronoun 'I' refers, «is neither singular, nor first »<sup>27</sup>, in contrast to the common opinion. In Eakin's words, « the illusion of self-determination promoted by autobiography »<sup>28</sup>, has led to the overlooking of the crucial role played by all kinds of relational aspects. Moreover, it may not be an exaggeration to assert – as developmental psychologists try to persuade us – that, in important ways, « we learn from others to be the persons we say we are »<sup>29</sup> (and, paradoxically, we even learn by refusing to learn).

If it is true that all identity is relational, and that narrative is the main way in which relational identity is formed and transacted, then Ion Vianu's autobiographical account offers a powerful example, a particular case in which the father-son relationship is characteristically constructed and displayed (as a *magister* – disciple relation, then as an open conflict between an exemplary,

<sup>24</sup> A. LOUREIRO, *The Ethics of Autobiography*, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Otherwise than Being*, apud. Paul RICOEUR, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> P. J. EAKIN, « Relational selves, relational lives. The story of the story », in G. Thomas COUSER and Joseph FICHTELBERG, *True Relations. Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern*, Westport, Connecticut, London, Greenwood Press, 1998, p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> P. J. EAKIN, *Living Autobiographically*, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

Symbolic father-figure and an angry young man, unwilling to accept the postponement of satisfaction and repression of desire and, in the end, as a discursive re-channeling of the Imaginary through writing, regarded not only as a genuine therapy, but also as a moral commitment). As far as the healing function of the self-narrative is concerned, there are many passages that highly confirm the psychoanalytical intuition according to which « to produce a text [...] is also to re-live the process by which an affective charge – a *cathexis* – is released from its generating poles»<sup>30</sup> :

Decades later, after I had completed my psychoanalysis, I remembered an event : I must have been four or five years old, I don't think I was six yet. I entered my father's work study ; I went to his desk. I held his fountain pen in my hand. I can see it now : it was a thick green Pelikan fountain pen. I took the lid off and I started to scribble on a sheet of paper. I couldn't write so I drew random lines, like an annoyed young chimpanzee. For whatever reason, I was overwhelmed by rage. I started to violently push down the fountain pen. The big golden nib, one for grown writers, not for stupid children, split and bent. The useful and elegant objet became a hideous wreck. My father came in (just like God in Heaven when he discovered the original sin). He called me. His voice was choked. He was pale and he said : « What have you done ? You've ruined the tool of my work ! ». He himself was ruined... he couldn't scold me, though he wanted to. I grinned cynically (children's cynicism is terrible), risking a slap that never came. But deep within my soul I felt a true sense of regret. It was on this occasion that I felt what remorse was like<sup>31</sup>.

Discovering 'what remorse was like' actually represents the *primum movens* of Ion Vianu's autobiographical account. The inscribed 'me' of the narrative comes early into some sort of conflict with the Law, embodied by the Father ; furthermore, we progressively understand that the tension between desire, on the one hand, and the law, on the other, is finally neutralised by the life-writing itself ; the latter emerges as an extension and a further playing out of that capacity for narrative understanding which enables the subject to grasp what Charles Taylor refers to as

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<sup>30</sup> Ben STOLTZFUS, « Roland Barthes and Alain Robbe-Grillet : Autobiography as Fiction, Fiction as Autobiography », in Alfonso DE TORO-Claudia GRONEMANN, *Autobiographie revisited. Theorie und Praxis neuer autobiographischer Diskurse in der französischen, spanischen und lateinamerikanischen Literatur* , Hildesheim, Zurich, New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 2004, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

« life-plans »<sup>32</sup>. Thus, identity and morality appear to be intimately connected, while the boundaries between the Self and the Other prove to be less rigid than we would be inclined to admit.

In the narrator's oblique way of fulfilling the father's (great) expectations (by becoming a medicine man, author of an autobiography), we can also discern the signs of the practical intelligence incarnated by Ulysses (the Greek *metis*), so useful in psychoanalytical practice, in crime-investigations or in hunting, as Carlo Ginzburg has shown in a brilliant essay<sup>33</sup>.

In this light, we can better comprehend the autobiographer's ability of finding the middle path between fighting free (symbolically) of his father and obediently following him, as well as the benefits of the 'in-between' condition (as never-ending dialogue with the Other, or with fictitious, disguised selves).

### 3. Meta-autobiographical dimensions

From a different perspective, *Amor intellectualis...* may be considered a meta-autobiographical story, since, as a psychiatrist, in addition to the narrative's therapeutic virtues, the author is similarly aware of its capacity of constructing identity and truth.

Ion Vianu's rejection of autobiographical truth as external and verifiable and its replacement by some sort of heterogeneous, elusive, even fictional truth, can be easily grasped in the following fragment, in which the autobiographer tries to define his creative method. The analogy that he proposes seems quite stimulating :

Some years ago I visited a very interesting exhibition in a small town in Switzerland. Searching in the attics of old houses, in lost archives, the artist had discovered photos from other times, portraits of men, women or whole families, landscapes or street views, *images of death*, after all, not only because, dirty, they seemed taken out of graves. The photographic art of the epoch didn't seem to encourage people to smile, all those faces were sad. Their clothes were shabby, the ladies' dresses seemed to exhale some intense perfume, combined with sweat. [...] Then, the artist had added some details, by drawing them with a pen on the original photos. For instance, between two honourable, well-to-do merchants, husband and wife, he had drawn a younger lady, that could be either an interfering spectre or an intended presence. One could imagine she would be the husband's mistress ; it was hardly possible to decide

<sup>32</sup> Ch. TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Carlo GINZBURG, *Miti, emblemi, spie. Morfologia e storia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1986.

whether she was a phantom or an involuntary recall in the couple's minds. [...] Yet, in other photos there had been added more gracious details, such as trees and flowers, no longer existing, and equally overlooked by the camera's lens in the past. [...] Similarly, in my recollections I've added an invention or two, in order to counterbalance for what was missing, or to make the dead reality alive again ; in any way, my aim wasn't at all hiding the truth, but, on the contrary, making it more vivid than the memory's narrow lens would permit<sup>34</sup>.

Together with the implicit questioning of the concept of (absolute) truth, we can detect the intuition that, at the same time, repeating life facts means transforming, not simply mirroring them. Ultimately, *mimesis* is a work of fiction in itself.

As literary theorists know, there is practically no way of proceeding otherwise, seeing that «any repetition of the past is a repetition with a difference, because life as it is or was (that is life not yet made in language, in art, in autobiography) »<sup>35</sup>, is never accessible. Even those autobiographers willing to be faithful to the memory's narrow lens, inevitably change something, making fiction without being conscious of it, just as Monsieur Jourdain did. For time, being not fixed, is not fully recoverable. For Ion Vianu, as well as for Roland Barthes, what matters is not so much the mimetic dimension of autobiography, but rather its relationship with Time. We are not far from Barthes' concept of the photograph as « a certificate of presence »<sup>36</sup>, providing incontrovertible proof that someone or something has been the referent of the representation.

Likewise, the above quoted fragment is suggestive of the fact that, at a more profound level, what is primary in Ion Vianu's self-account is an existential imperative, or, in P. J. Eakin's words, « the resistance to the idea that consciousness should perish »<sup>37</sup>, the desire of asserting the « distinctiveness and the continuity of one's subjectivity »<sup>38</sup>. He may not state it explicitly, but we become more and more apprehensive of the fact that the reasons which lie behind the decision of writing his autobiography cannot be entirely separated from the reasons which had resulted in him becoming a doctor. In both cases we can easily recognise the same absolute valorising of life, the attempt to save something of the living creature and, in the end, the intuition of

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<sup>34</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>35</sup> P. J. EAKIN, « Referential Aesthetic of Autobiography », *Studies in Literary Imagination*, 23 / 1990, p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> Roland BARTHES, *Camera luminoasă. Însemnări despre fotografie* [The Bright Room. Notes on the Art of Photography], Romanian trans. by Virgil Mleşniță, Cluj Napoca, Idea Design & Print, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, p. 144.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

some sort of redemptive power of autobiography. Deeply conscious of the bitter truth enunciated, amongst others, by Vladimir Nabokov (that self-narrative's *primum movens* is the urge of fighting « the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence »<sup>39</sup>), the author of *Amor intellectualis...* emphasises more than once his urge to place life-writing under the heading of a dialogue with the dead :

Recollections have, by themselves, a weight that, perhaps, could be measured by an apposite device, similar to that imagined by Villiers de l'Isle Adam for chemically analysing the last breath of a dying man. Not only that this weight presses on you, but this pressure breaks through all barriers and subtly pervades soul and body. [...] Later on, after his death [that of T., m.n], I had a recurrent dream : T. had just returned from Paris, for a short time. I had the feeling of not being able to seize the opportunity of his presence in Bucharest. For in my dream, Bucharest was not only our city, but also the equivalent of *our* world, as opposed to the *other* world. T. had on his face a charming, sad smile, that indifferent grin of those who had passed the terrific frontier. The scenery of this recurrent dream was always the same : the black work study from where, between the wooden stair's filigree, as a child, I had glimpsed Alecu, my father's brother, who would die so young. That dark corner, where his photo had been placed, was the realm of the returning dead, the scene of blended dreams and remorse. On the opposite wall, there was the print representing Schopenhauer, the philosopher of suffering and the detractor of the universal illusion. It was as if, in this room, pain would gradually dissolve, intermingled with regrets and dreams<sup>40</sup>.

From this perspective the 'borderline condition' presents itself as a manner of equally transcending the ontological categories, thus neutralising a long series of oppositions (such as real/possible, presence/ absence, before/after, past/ future etc.). In dreams, the lost time comes back once more, thus becoming part of the narrator's present, with T. returning, again and again, from a long journey, similar to Hamlet's father in the first act of the Shakespearean tragedy. In Barthes' words, all is about « that something, somehow terrifying that subsists also in old photographs : the return of the dead »<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Vladimir NABOKOV, *Speak Memory*, New York, Putnam, 1961, p. 297.

<sup>40</sup> I. VIANU, *Amor intellectualis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>41</sup> R. BARTHES, *Camera...*[The Bright Room], *op.cit.*, p. 15.

#### 4. Conclusion

From all these considerations we may infer that, in Ion Vianu's autobiography, the quest for the Self imperceptibly evolves into a dialogue with the Other, revealing the interplays between individual and collective memory, writing as therapy and writing as testimony, alongside other paradoxes, originating in this very conception of the Subject as a plural, fluctuating and heterogeneous entity, situated on the borderline between the realm of Good (governed by the Law, the public Opinion or, in Lacan's terms, by the «Symbolic» principle) and that of Beauty (governed by hedonistic principles or, according to Lacan, by the «Imaginary»).

Constructed as it is on the Imaginary/ Symbolic interstice, the *in-between* condition finally appears as a function of the autobiographical discourse itself, while the main themes and motifs of the book (the father/ son relationship ; *amor intellectualis magistri* ; *amor veteris mundi*, etc.), cohere into a polyphonal composition, meant to reconcile responsibility and desire, autobiography and fiction, memory and oblivion.