

**Translating Mircea Eliade's "Ivan" from Romanian to English:
A Triangular Approach Using the French Translation**

by

Alexandra Guyot

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Translation Studies

Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies

University of Alberta

© Alexandra Guyot, 2018

Abstract

This thesis proposes an English translation of the Romanian short story “Ivan” by Mircea Eliade. Eliade is a renowned scholar and author, best known for his work *A History of Religious Ideas* (1978-1985). Part of his literary repertoire is the short story “Ivan” (1968), one of the few—if not the only—short stories by Mircea Eliade that have been translated into French, but not into English. The initial purpose of the French translation by Alain Paruit (1981) was to act as a relay translation for the defence committee. However, during the process of translation and commentary, the French version started acting like a first translation for my English *retranslation*. Mainly using Antoine Berman’s “Esquisse d’une méthode” (1995) as a theoretical framework, the commentary draws parallels between the process of translating “Ivan” into English and retranslation. As advised by Berman, the commentary presents the literary work and the people involved: it includes biographies for the author and the two translators, with focus on their literary *horizons*. The commentary focuses on three major translation categories, as identified during the process of translation, namely, the translation of proper names, the translation of the *mots clefs*—words that Eliade favoured in his Romanian original, and an analysis of the characters of the short story, which illustrates the importance of proper representation of the protagonists as directed by the original story’s themes.

Acknowledgements

A wholehearted “Thank You” to my defense committee: Anne Malena, Lynn Penrod and Micah True.

Special thanks to my family and friends: hooray! We survived my academic adventure!

Very special thanks to Adrien Guyot and Anne Malena: This thesis is yours just as much as it is mine. I may have laid the words on the page but, without you, there would be nothing.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 : Mircea Eliade, the Author.....	9
Biography	9
Literary Style.....	12
Chapter 2: “Ivan”, the Short Story	17
Themes	18
Protagonists at First Glance.....	25
Chapter 3: English Translation of “Ivan”	29
Chapter 4: English Translation Commentary	74
Antoine Berman’s Esquisse d’une méthode	74
À la recherche des traducteurs.....	74
Les horizons des traducteurs	77
English Translation Relevant Categories	81
Proper Names.....	82
Mots Clefs.....	87
Character Profiles.....	107
Conclusion	138
Bibliography	146
Appendix A: “Ivan” (Romanian)	152
Appendix B: “Ivan” (French).....	171

List of Tables

Table 4.1: “Eviden-”	88
Table 4.2: “Curios”	95
Table 4.3: “Adevărat”	104
Table 4.4: Romanian Second Person Singular Pronominal Forms.....	110

Introduction

As the title illustrates, in the present work, I will be presenting an English translation of the Romanian short story “Ivan”, whose French translation I used as a reference point. Mircea Eliade’s popularity as a writer earned him translations in several languages, leaving a limited amount of works untranslated. “Ivan” is one of the few—if not the only—short story yet to be translated in English. However, above all, it is the French translation of this story that made the project possible, since the French translation of “Ivan” by Alain Paruit could act as relay translation for my defense committee, who are not Romanian speakers. Yet, during the process, I discovered that the French translation could also act as an anchor, thus connecting me to retranslation practice and theory.

In spite of being pushed into exile, Eliade was fond of Romanian culture and literature. Much of his literary production is set in Romania or handles topics related to the Romanian people. The short story “Ivan” was first published in 1968 and republished in 1977 as part of the collection of short stories *În curte la Dionis (In Dyonisus' Court)*. It opens with three Romanian soldiers finding a wounded man, whom they nickname “Ivan” due to his Soviet uniform. They are between cornfields in Ukraine, in the summertime, during World War II. Since the beginning, the atmosphere is tense; two of the Romanian soldiers, addressed as Zamfira and Iliescu¹, are fairly devoted Christians and they insist on carrying the dying Russian soldier to the nearest village. They are convinced that bringing “Ivan” along with them to a village is the perfect opportunity to receive the blessing of a dying man, which would bring them luck in their escape from Ukraine. The third man, cadet second lieutenant Constantin Darie, who appears to be the story’s protagonist, is opposed to it, yet he does not pull rank to stop them. This difference in mentality shapes the story. The Romanians, determined to have the Russian soldier bless them in his final moments, are at a loss when it comes to communicating with him. To get their point

¹ The names used in the story are surnames currently in use in Romania.

across, they use a variety of strategies, from simple words (“Christ”) and gestures (making the sign of the cross), to complex philosophical ramblings in Romanian and other languages. As expected, Ivan dies soon after he is found and it remains unclear whether he gave them his blessing. The religiously inclined Zamfira and Iliescu, again, insist on following the religious custom of burying the body. Thus, they begin the risky task of digging a grave in enemy territory. As Darie is on the verge of falling asleep, he notices that Zamfira and Iliescu are digging a hole that was considerably larger than what can be expected for a single-person grave. At this point in the narrative, time and space constraints start to disappear: for the rest of the short story, the setting and the participants change back and forth in a distracting series of clashing episodes. The action is interrupted by Darie’s conversations with seemingly different interlocutors—who turn out to be figments of his imagination—in which he shares his perspective on the initial encounter with Ivan. Troubled, he analyzes various aspects but focuses on the unpolished philosophical claims that he proposed to the dying Russian soldier. While the shift between the main story and the conversations are first introduced in new paragraphs with the help of an asterisk, the distinct sequences begin to collide and fuse, impeding the reader from differentiating between narrative levels², and between dream and reality. Even though Darie never becomes the auto-diegetic narrator, his fever infects the third-person omniscient narration. As new episodes unfold, Darie discovers clues that lead him to finally discern the present reality. Thus, although unclear for a large part of the story, the opening sequence turns out to be real. The events in Iași³ in the wintertime and those in Piatra Craiului⁴ during a warm season are dream settings that Darie put together from memory. The participants in these episodes are inspired from reality, yet they are largely productions of Darie’s imagination as well. In his last return from dream to reality in the Ukrainian cornfield accompanied by Zamfira and Iliescu, Darie is gravely injured. Having lost a lot of blood, he is barely able to walk or even just to remain conscious. The story

² Narrative levels, also referred to as diegetic levels, is an analytic notion developed by Gérard Genette (1972) that describe the relations and boundaries between diverse narrating instances within a narrative. In “Ivan”, the contamination of the narration relies on a crossing of boundaries (a concept analyzed by Marie-Laure Ryan (1991)).

³ Large city located in the north-west of Romania.

⁴ Mountain peak in central Romania.

closes with the image of Darie attempting to return from death to give his blessing to his loyal fellow soldiers Zamfira and Iliescu.

In translation, the similarities between Romanian and French are much greater than English with either of the two. “For languages having the same origin, it is impossible to assert that there are literary forms that cannot be rendered into another language” (Durdureanu 54). This is true in the case of Romance languages, which share a strong bond, but it is not the case for English and German, although they are both considered Germanic languages. Romanian inherently translates better in French than in English and there are several major changes needed for the English version. As it often happens in translation and, of course, moreso between languages whose “kinship” is not as strong, the English translation had to simplify by cutting down detail, thus causing a qualitative and quantitative impoverishment. As a translator, as many others, I avoided adding any new information into the text, which sometimes led to cutting out certain subtle nuances present in the original. For example, to indicate who is speaking in dialogue, the English translation often used the verb “to say”, while the Romanian original uses “a spune” (to say), “a zice” (to say), “a vorbi” (to speak) and “a face” (to do). Similarly, the English “to grumble” is a simplification of three distinct expressions “a izbucni printre dinți” (to burst out through teeth), “a repeta printre dinți” (to repeat through teeth) and “a șuiera printre dinți” (to whistle through teeth). English cannot render the verbs and simplifies them into a mere “to say” in the manner of “printre dinți” – to say through their teeth, to grumble. Instances of this shortcoming are listed later in the commentary, in the section entitled “Mots Clefs”. Moreover, English lacks certain distinct verb modes (gerund, supine) and tenses (imperfect), which resulted in having to rely on other tenses to fill those gaps. At times, this lack of diversity weighed quite heavily on recreating the temporal axis and it forced me to rearrange elements to reproduce the elegance of the original. In that respect, unlike Romance languages, English does not enjoy endless chains of subordinate sentences which meant that I had to not only reorganize but prioritize elements within a sentence, and rework entire paragraphs, often drastically changing the punctuation. As Mona Baker asserts:

English generally prefers to present information in relatively small chunks and to signal the relationship between these chunks in unambiguous ways, using a wide variety of conjunctions to mark semantic relations between clauses, sentences and paragraphs. [...] English also relies on a highly developed punctuation system to signal breaks and relations between chunks of information.

(Baker 192)

Nevertheless, these are not just elements expected to change between Romanian and English, but these modifications happen in all translation, modifications that Antoine Berman called “deforming tendencies” (Berman 1985: 280). Indeed, these tendencies are inevitable in all translation to varying degrees, some “linguistic-cultural systems”, as Berman calls them, are more susceptible to deformations than others (Berman 1985: 278). The present translation, as expected, displays a greater majority of Berman’s deformations. *Rationalization*—the reorganization of elements via punctuation, *qualitative and quantitative impoverishments*, as mentioned, are quite prominent in the English translation as opposed to the original. Yet, even more deformative, are elements that are discussed in the following sections, namely, *the destruction of underlying networks of signification*—failure to transfer the author’s word obsessions, their *mots clefts*, and *the effacement of the superimposition of languages*—“the relation between dialect and a common language” (Berman 1985: 287). These last two bermanian categories are especially important for the symbolism in Eliade’s prose.

Aside from the unavoidable linguistic differences between Romanian and English, the short story presents a number of thematic issues. First, there is the obvious temporal difference between the original audience and the current one. The vocabulary of the translation cannot be too current; above all, colloquial expressions must allude to the middle of the twentieth century, rather than the second decade of the twenty-first. Second, important historical details about the past events mentioned in the story are not readily available for a non-European audience. On the one hand, WWII, the Germans versus the Russians, and the Ukranian front are part of an international collective memory. On the other, there are markers that may not be picked up by a current audience that is not part of one of the parties involved. For example, the story must take place during a 3-year

window, between 1941 and 1944, when the Romanians fought alongside the Germans before changing alliance, a fact that, not only is not readily available, but that also does not carry the same emotional weight for a non-European audience. The timeline can be narrowed down to the summer of 1943 once the Battle of Stalingrad is mentioned. The emotional value that comes with this detail will be lost in translation. Third, since the names used are specifically Romanian—and are part of Eliadean symbolism, as I will show in my commentary on “Proper Names”—a non-Romanian audience will have trouble putting a character together. Having spent my childhood in Romania, I am able to draw fairly specific portraits of each of the soldiers just by looking at the names of the characters. Of course, my knowledge may not be completely accurate, as it was not in regards to Cadet Lieutenant Constantin Darie, yet, this knowledge gives me the peace of mind to plunge into the story without struggling to imagine the characters. Lastly, the topics that the short story tackles—God, afterlife, the Christian Orthodox religion—may be uncomfortable for certain audiences. To better understand these issues, and thus to make educated choices in the English translation, I dug into Eliade’s person and scholarship, looking at his literary corpus as well as his theoretical work; of course, I was only able to scratch the surface of the latter, considering the vast amount of work that he produced, as well as the specificity of his theory on religion and spirituality.

Although a Romance language itself and, thus, quite similar to Romanian, French was very useful in combating lexical dilemmas. During my first draft of the translation into English, I went back and forth between the three languages; it was a tedious process, which did not manage to cover all the holes in my translation. Yet, during this process, the original purpose of the French translation changed. Indeed, I had initially thought of the French version above all as a relay translation—an informal translation into a third language that could serve as a connection between the original and target-language translation for speakers unfamiliar with the source language (St. André 230). Of course, the French translation of “Ivan” is not a mere informal rendering of the original, but part of a Gallimard-published volume of short stories produced by esteemed French-Romanian translator, Alain Paruit. It was clear, from the onset of this project, that this *relay*

translation would exert a power that a traditional relay translation cannot possess. I was aware and embraced the idea of using Paruit's work as a reference point but I had underestimated the influence of the French version, since, as I later discovered, it completely shaped this project. The presence of the French translation conditioned avenues of reflection both figuratively and literally. It acted as a two-sided mirror: on one side it would reflect my difficulties with the original, sometimes emphasizing a detail I had overlooked and occasionally answering questions that arose from my process. On the other side of the mirror, the French translation's own difficulties surfaced. Conclusively, the combined findings from both sides of the mirror resulted in problematics that I did not initially identify: this sort of triangular translation is at the heart of retranslation, a concept we have always considered it as involving only two languages, the original and the target. In fact, it is very possible that the bilingual approach to retranslation has become outdated. Globally, we are growing out of bilingualism and growing into multilingualism; dialects are likely causing most of this change, yet, having met many polyglot scholars, I can attest to the fact that many bilinguals are using their language-learning skills to expand their language repertoire into other major languages. That said, I can only imagine that literary translation is already being produced in retranslation conditions, although not being regarded as such. For the translation studies field it can only be a problem: underestimating these retranslation practices as relay can impede new translation theory and methods that could help better exploit the riches of multilingual translation—a translation process that proposes a collaboration between the original and translations of the original, not excluding translations in languages other than the two that are referred to as *source* and *target*. Through this work, I want to present my process in translating the Romanian short story “Ivan” into English while using the French translation as a reference point, in order to emphasize the value and importance of translating literary works from a multilingual stance rather than a bilingual one.

I am uncertain whether it was Antoine Berman's “Esquisse d'une méthode” that influenced my discovery of the concept of retranslation or if my intention of using the French version in such a manner that led me to Antoine Berman, yet his input had a major

effect on how I treated the French translation. While we have not considered Berman's work in his *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne* as having any sort of value for retranslation, it is clear that the technique he proposes for evaluating a translation can be a technique for producing a retranslation. In his chapter titled "Esquisse d'une méthode", Berman enumerates his steps in producing a translation critique, a process that cuts very close to how to produce a retranslation. Berman proposes beginning with the translation, contrary to the natural tendency of starting with the source text, and reading the original after, to notice details that perhaps eluded the translator. Next, while reading the original, he suggests paying close attention to words and expressions that seem typical to the author—their *mots clefs*—words that are indispensable to the original text and that should have appeared in the translation in question. These steps illustrate how the critic must trace the outline of their own translation of the original text in order to evaluate the existing translation, thus retranslating the original. Berman's process starts with getting to know the author—their literary production and the criticism attached, as well as "recourir à de multiples lectures collatérales, d'autres oeuvres de l'auteur, d'ouvrages divers sur cet auteur, son époque" (Berman 1995: 58), thus building the "author's horizon". Berman did not consider it an impossible task, given that a translator should already be a well-read individual who has an idea where to start this not-impossible-yet-still-difficult task. Berman repeats this process in his evaluation of the translator. He searched to uncover any interference of the translator's personal self with the author's (Berman 1995: 58). What Berman may have unknowingly achieved is a method—or a starting point—for retranslation. In reversing the order, that is, starting with the existing translation and moving on to the original, and then investigating the translator as well as the author, Berman set the stage for a retranslation.

The creation process of the English translation of "Ivan" was much more intricate than the traditional language equivalence found in the dictionary. It came to be under the careful surveillance of more complex parties, as Berman would suggest: the original story's sublayer provided by Mircea Eliade's personal history and academic work, the French translation by Alain Paruit and Alain Paruit himself, and, finally, my own history. In the

present work, I will show the most important aspects of my process in *retranslating* Eliade's short story "Ivan" into English, by considering the French version as a first translation. It will be a trilingual comparative approach, as informed by Antoine Berman's "Esquisse d'une méthode", my commentary will start with the Author's Horizon: Eliade's bio, literary style and the themes in the short story as dictated by his theoretical work. I will move on to the Translators' Horizons for Alain Paruit and myself: biographical details and significant work that could affect our respective translations. Lastly, in terms of practical examples found during my triangular translation process, I will focus on three major elements. First, I will discuss the translation of proper names, which I identified as one of the main issues in translating this short story into English. Second, I will extract and discuss terms that I have identified as Eliade's *mots clefs*. And, third, I will create profiles for each of the three main characters, to point out characteristics that are vital in the development of the story and that must be transferred in translation. In my conclusion, I will draw a comparison between the two translations, French and English, to illustrate how the translation process that I underwent is very similar to that of a retranslation.

Chapter 1 : Mircea Eliade, the Author

Biography

Mircea Eliade remains, to this day, not only one of the most celebrated novelists of Romania, but also a very common name in philosophy, theology and theory. This dichotomy tells the story of a man living parallel lives; famous as a scholar *and* a novelist, he occupied two distinct scenes: Romanian and global. Yet, in spite of fulfilling a different role in a different context, his philosophy and theory of myth informed his prose and vice-versa. Born in 1907, Eliade witnessed both World Wars. The first one, which he interpreted as a story, inspired him to create and marked the start of his career as a fiction writer. Two years into WWI, as a nine-year old whose bourgeois life was reduced to sewing paper shirts for the Romanian soldiers, young Eliade gave into the propaganda spread in schools. He was fascinated by the soldier narrative, and craved to be part of it. When “Boy Scouts were ready to retreat with the troops, he suffered deeply for not yet being ten years old” (Eliade 1990: 26). Eliade was nothing short of a prodigy, considering that, in 1925, at the age of eighteen, he was already celebrating one hundred articles published (Eliade 1990: 94). Not only was Eliade extremely prolific but he also published in various languages early in his career: Romanian, French, English, Italian and German, as illustrated the annotated bibliography compiled by Douglas Allen and Denis Doeing. He started out as an avid reader, developed an active imagination, which led him to writing. He kept a journal his entire life, and, although some of his records were lost when he was forced into exile, he re-documented his recollections into his work—fiction and non-fiction. He pursued his post-secondary studies at the University of Bucharest in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy where he completed first, a master’s thesis surveying Italian Renaissance Philosophy from Marsilio Ficino to Giordano Bruno, and second, a doctoral thesis outlining a history of Yoga techniques. For the former, he spent two months in Italy, and for the latter, he spent a little less than two years in India, studying under Surendranath Dasgupta, an accomplished professor at the University of Calcutta,

and under several yogins in the Himalayas. His experience in India was the onset of his scholarly research and, implicitly, inspiration for his literary prose. Daniel L. Pals enumerates the three discoveries in India that changed Eliade's philosophy: 1) "life can be changed by what he called "sacramental" experience", 2) "*symbols* are the key to any truly spiritual life" and 3) there is "a deeply felt form of spiritual life that had been in existence since time beyond memory" (195). These conclusions completely and single-handedly shaped Eliade's world- and life-views, "persuad[ing] him of the relativities of the absolute and the absolute's presence in history and through culture" (Cave 9). Upon his return to Romania in 1931, he taught courses in relation to his discoveries in India at the University of Bucharest and published a great deal of articles. He also became the research assistant of his idol, Professor Nae Ionescu. Eliade venerated Ionescu for teaching him "the importance of structures, intuition and broad experiences for understanding religious and historical phenomena" (Cave 7). This admiration and friendship, however, had Eliade imprisoned as World War II broke out. Ionescu was a Legionary, a partisan of the Iron Guard (previously known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael)—"a mass nationalist movement, anti-Semitic and xenophobic, differing from other versions of European Fascism only in that it had a strong religious, Eastern Orthodox, component" (Călinescu 2010: 105). Ionescu's death shattered him; Eliade recalled feeling "spiritually orphaned". Yet, he also felt liberated, claiming that his affiliation to the Iron Guard was now severed (Eliade 1988: 6). Immediately after, in 1940, Eliade's connections made it possible for him to escape, first to London and then to Lisbon, as a cultural attaché. Fearing for his life, Eliade never returned to Romania after 1942. As the Nazis plunged through Europe, anti-Nazi movements sought out and expunged their local associates—the Iron Guard included. Partisans and sympathisers of the Iron Guard were followed, questioned, detained, and risked being assassinated. As Eliade explains, King Carol II and the Iron Guard had started a trend of killing each other's associates as early as 1933 (Eliade 1988: 6). Even further on in his life, Eliade did not advertise his Romanian roots "so much that his readers and even many of his students, ignored his ethnic origin or considered it irrelevant" (Călinescu 2010: 107). In exile, Eliade felt ever more determined to live a scholarly life; Andrei Pleșu quotes Eliade's diary:

Since I belong to minor culture in which dilettantism and improvisation are almost fatal, I entered scholarly life full of complexes, permanently terrified at the thought that I do not dispose of “up-to-date” information.

(Pleșu 67)

He first found refuge in Paris, along with other Romanian literary figures—Emil Cioran, Eugène Ionesco, Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca, etc. In Paris, he continued to teach, but, his focus was to publish and, in turn, polish his philosophy of myth. He became a “French” philosopher and theoretician, a renowned historian of religions. Yet, while his scholarly work was generally written in French—at least originally—, he continued to write his prose strictly in Romanian, reinforcing his Romanian identity (Călinescu 2010: 125). His English translator explains, “[t]he lack of success in France of the French translations of *Maitreyi* (*La nuit bengali*) and *Noaptea de sânzien* (*Fôret interdite*) in the 1950s discouraged him from promoting himself in the French literary world” (Linscott Ricketts 1988b: xvii). In addition, contributing to Romanian literature was central to Eliade’s prose. He did not trust that Romanian literature under communism could produce anything worthy enough to be seen abroad. He argued that “a nation of peasants” needed not produce a literature *for* peasants (Maftai 80, my translation)—he was determined to set higher standards. Eliade published most of his short stories and essays in literary journals for exiled intellectuals unable to return to the motherland: *Destin* (destiny), *Revista scriitorilor români* (magazine for Romanian writers), *Cuvântul în exil* (the [written] word in exile), *Ființa românească* (Romanian being), *Caete de dor* (notebook for longing), *Românul* (the Romanian [person]) etc. In spite of his geographical situation, he quickly became “chief of the young generation” in Romania (Călinescu 2010: 104). This generation of intellectuals crafted their own flavour of existentialism that they called “trăirism” from the verb “a trăi” meaning “to live”. “Trăirism” has been defined as:

[U]n courant de la pensée roumaine d’entre-deux guerres qui proclamait la primauté des instincts et de l’inconscient sur la raison et qui soutenait qu’on ne peut parvenir à la connaissance des différents aspects et phénomènes de la vie que par le biais de l’expérience mystique [...].

(Dorobanțu and Kretz 115)

Eliade elaborated this concept of *the mystical source giving meaning to human existence* in his scholarly work, a concept that became ever more obvious in his post-World War II prose, including the short-story “Ivan”. To name a few works that illustrate this concept: *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétition* (1949), *Traité d'histoire des religions* (1949), *Images et symboles. Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux* (original French: 1952), *Naissances mystiques. Essai sur quelques types d'initiation* (English 1954, original French: 1959), *Le sacré et le profane* (German: 1957, English: 1959, original French: 1965), *Mythes, rêves et mystères* (1957). In 1956, he left Paris for the United States, responding to an invitation to teach at the University of Chicago Divinity School within and represent the Department of the History of Religions. He was appointed Professor and Chairman of that department in 1957. He spent the rest of his life at this university, in spite of being offered similar positions with more renowned universities (Linscott Ricketts 1988b: xi). His scholarly work eventually crowned him as “the world’s foremost interpreter of myth and symbolism” (Allen and Doeing vii) and his prose enriched Romanian literature. He died in 1986.

Literary Style

Having always kept a journal, Eliade eventually published his autobiography, *Amintiri* (published as *Autobiography*), in 1966—recounting his life from 1907 to 1960. He created a habit of recording his activities in adolescence and he constantly weaved these memories in his prose; from personal events to historical milestones, Eliade’s epic universe generally coincided with reality. While most works contained only a few biographical details, some of his novels were clearly autobiographical, most memorably *Romanul adolescentului miop* (*Diary of a Nearsighted Adolescent*)—a memoir of his early adulthood, and *Maitreyi* (*Bengal Nights*)—a love story between him and the daughter of his professor in India. To his dismay, much of his early journaling was lost, as mentioned, when he started moving around to escape imprisonment and even death. As a prolific writer, he continued journaling for the rest of his life. Since he always wrote with the intent to publish (Cave 8), he regarded “the diary as a literary form”, thereby showing great interest in “the novel based on authentic facts” (Valmarin 197).

During his adolescence, Eliade suffered “prolonged attacks of melancholy” (Eliade 1990: 7) whose origin was a truly spiritual discovery. As a small boy, no more than four years old, he experienced a sort of trance while visiting a room in the house that was generally locked, reserved only for entertaining guests. This room was quite particular; it felt like “a fairy-tale palace”. As soon as he stepped in, “he was transfixed with emotion” (Eliade 1990:6). He couldn’t put into words what he had just experienced at the time, yet, the pure, tangible details of this episode marked him. His interest in discovering the self *on the other side* started here:

Această experiență descrie una dintre primele experiențe ale sinelui, experiență care se centrează în jurul descoperirii lui *dincolo*, a trecerii unei limite care, odată lăsată în urmă, conduce la o inițiere într-o taină.

[This experience describes one of the first experiences of the self, an experience that is centred around its discovery *on the other side*, experience of crossing a limit which, once abandoned, leads to initiation into a mystery]

(Gheorghiu 10)

Subsequently, during these “attacks of melancholy”, he was transposed back to “the golden light of that afternoon” (Eliade 1990: 6). The practice of remembering details to repaint the events at a later time fuelled his imagination and he became able to expand into endless realms; this style—endless descriptive passages—is quite easy to achieve and common in Romanian. In translation, however, in addition to the usual struggle for semantic equivalence, conjunctions and syntax become the translator’s worst enemy. Eliade’s prose is categorised as “definitely modernist” (Lincott Ricketts 1988a: viii). Since he was an adept of the fantastic, descriptive passages fulfill a key role in his prose work; they create and maintain that eerie atmosphere.

The Formula

Exploring “the ways in which the supernatural both hides and reveals itself in everyday reality” (Linscott Ricketts 1988a: ix), Eliade usually starts with an unpretentious situation: A man in a hotel room eaves dropping on the conversation happening in the other room in *Noaptea de sânzienne* (*The Forbidden Forest*); a piano teacher on the

tramway on a hot summer's day in "La țigănci" ("With the Gypsy Girls"); three soldiers finding a wounded man in a cornfield in "Ivan". Distortions become noticeable in these simple settings and the story turns into an allegory of death. Most importantly, before meeting their end, the protagonists experience something out-of-this-world – they escape the confines of historical time. Especially in his short prose, Eliade explored the "unpredictable fantastic" (Călinescu 1988: x). For Eliade, there are two sides of reality: the sacred and the profane⁵.

The profane is the arena of human affairs, which are changeable and often chaotic; the sacred is the sphere of order and perfection, the home of ancestors, heroes and gods.

(Pals 199)

Eliade explains the concepts underlying his prose in his scholarly work. *The Sacred and the Profane*⁶ is the work where Eliade outlines his "concept of religion" and, which is pertinent to Eliade's literary work. The sacred and the profane are two sides of the same coin: while people *live* in the profane, the sacred *lives* in people. "The person encounters the sacred through symbols" (Cave 17), and these symbols are, for the most part, universal; they are "transspatial" and "transtemporal" (Cave 39). The sacred is a spiritual concept rather than a religious one and, as Eliade adds, "at one time or another in their lives [...] most people encounter something truly extraordinary and overwhelming" (Pals 199). This is precisely the journey of his protagonists, a journey to encountering and accepting the sacred because, "without the sacred, human existence is meaningless" (Cave 68). Eliade's protagonists are often city folk, who do not feel tied to the land and who no longer believe in destiny, yet they are destined to die.

Eliade truly masters his literary style after 1945 as Sorin Alexandrescu points out. Sorin Alexandrescu reviews Eliade's most renowned short-story, "La țigănci" ("With the

⁵ Eliade explains the concepts underlying his prose in his scholarly work. *Le sacré et le profane* (*The Sacred and the Profane*) is the work where Eliade outlines his "concept of religion" and, which is pertinent to Eliade's fantastic and, implicitly, the short-story "Ivan".

⁶ *The Sacred and the Profane* was originally written in French, yet the French version was not published until 1965, after the German (1957) and English (1959), which were translated from the French manuscript.

Gypsy Girls”), in his preface entitled “Dialectica fantasticului” (the dialectic of the fantastic) in 1969. He evaluates Eliade’s short-story style pre- and post-World War II and signals a significant shift in his post-WWII short prose. Whereas pre-WWII the fantastic explodes in mundane reality—the supernatural violently imposes on the natural—post-WWII, the intrusion becomes subtle. The supernatural no longer overwhelms logic and reason because it *disguises* itself in the real and mundane. Thus, the sacred is *camouflaged* in the profane. As a reader, Alexandrescu continues, one notices the presence of the supernatural not because the events recounted are strange, but because of a lingering and, eventually, an agonizing ambiguity. The connection to what is real fades slowly and quietly. Eliade is keen on releasing the supernatural little by little, in turn creating an awkward gap between the reader and the story. Matei Călinescu points out a similarity to Carl Gustav Jung’s theory: “modern rationalism [...] has managed to push [myth] out of the sphere of consciousness”, but it has been “unable to eradicate myth from the human psyche” (Călinescu 1988: xv). Eliade, as opposed to Jung, is interested in the large scale effects of denying the sacred.

His post-WWII short stories adhere to a particular style, a universe that Eliade created for his short stories in particular:

The novellas of the fantastic that followed [WWII] are mostly, if not exclusively peopled by Romanian characters [...]. The historical time frame in which their action is set is that of the twentieth century, with insistent returns to the 1930's and with frequent extensions well into the postwar period (many take place in Communist Romania). Reading attentively, one can discover in them hidden puzzles, very subtly and carefully put together, puzzles that contain other puzzles, ultimately unsolvable, amphibologies, plausible allegorical meanings.

(Călinescu 2010: 124)

In his autobiography, Eliade remembers that, while recounting the plot of the story he was working on at the time, he realized that “any kind of summary would betray it, annulling that which constituted the essence of the story” (Eliade 1988: 71). The story that he is referring to is *Nuntă în cer* (*Marriage in Heaven*), yet this can be said about all of his fiction. A summary of the story cannot do justice to the intricate manner in which he communicates the message. For Eliade, *how* the plot develops is most important: the

setting of the plot, the characters, the way it is written, are all secondary to the order of events. He creates a world where elements from different physical locations and times intertwine, and the result is a discomfort between the profane and the sacred. Reality starts to be questioned when, time after time, events fail to follow a linear way and protagonists teleport from one landscape to another. The shifts have to be subtle, so that the reader sets them aside, or the ignores them. As changes continue happening, the scenery starts looking severely altered—this is where his stories end.

Chapter 2: “Ivan”, the Short Story

The short story “Ivan” made its second appearance in the collection *În curte la Dionis* (*In Dyonisus' Court*) in 1977, but it was first published in 1968 in *Destin*, the Madrid-based publication for exiles. It was written in Romanian and translated into French by Alain Paruit in 1981.

As mentioned in the biography, Eliade was a child during World War I. He was fascinated with the narrative of a boy becoming a soldier as WWI reached Romania. In his *Amintiri*, he explains that, in addition to living in a military family, the streets were always crowded with Boy Scouts wearing a red cross on white armbands. He was proud of his father and the meaning behind his captain’s uniform and he yearned to be a Boy Scout too—sometimes even pretending to be one. In his journalistic style, he enumerates his impressions of the incidents in the fall of 1916, when Romania entered the war. News of the disastrous Battle of Turtucaia (also referred to as Tutrakan) reached young Eliade’s household at the time when a woman from another city was staying with them.

[S]he had just lost her husband, a retired colonel. Her son, recently made second lieutenant, was at the garrison in Turtucaia. One day, the news came that he was dead. [...] She stayed with us for a few more weeks, then she moved to the other side of Bucharest. But she often came to see us and she continued talking about her son, the second lieutenant: “Now he would have been twenty-four. Now he would be on leave. Now he would have found a girl, he would have been engaged. Now he would have been promoted to the rank of lieutenant...”

(Eliade 1990:24)

As Matei Călinescu remarks “Eliade's novellas retained only rudiments of autobiography [that he treated] as points of departure for unpredictable fantastic (symbolic) developments” (Călinescu 1988: x). From the story of this young officer-to-be, Eliade draws the portrait of second lieutenant Darie.

The day after the news of the Battle of Turtucaia, the Austro-German troops marched into the capital of Romania. The Romanians did not support this in spite of the fact that Romania, at the time, was ruled by a King of German descent, Ferdinand I. Eliade was furious.

That afternoon, I discovered that I could be consoled and could even get revenge. It happened this way. I imagined that a few Romanian soldiers were hiding in a cornfield near Bucharest. At first they were unarmed, or nearly so: they had a single carbine, a few bayonets, and a revolver. But I soon gave up this image, and I armed them to the teeth. In the beginning, there were only three or four soldiers and an officer. But very quickly I discovered that in the same cornfield others were hiding too. I started to bring them together, to organize them. [...] I kept discovering hidden soldiers, making their way with great care toward the place of assembly [...] and they were becoming better and better equipped. The former second lieutenant was now captain; and a few other young officers had come to help him.

(Eliade 1990: 27)

Obviously, Eliade, in his late fifties, at the time of writing the short story, had shed his nine-year old self's naiveness. While using these vivid memories to illustrate the setting, he does not improve the situation of his heroes by assigning them more guns or more people; instead, Eliade gives them invaluable knowledge of rural surroundings. Moreover, the Romanian soldiers are not planning an offensive, but they are retreating from a failed attack in enemy territory, a situation more vulnerable and more realistic. Eliade also brings the story closer to his audience⁷; now in the 1960s, his readers would be personally marked by World War II, thus, it would only be fitting that he modernize his childhood story and have his soldiers fight in this more recent war.

Themes

Eliade's fantastic, as described by Sorin Alexandrescu, depicts the unacknowledged presence of one world into another, that is, the sacred within the profane (Alexandrescu 1969: vii). Eliade's work on the topic encompasses years of study and theorization, which he compiled and condensed into the 1959 publication *The Sacred and the Profane*. As it was "one of his life's purposes to point out the sacred sense that is camouflaged in the profane" (Linscott Ricketts 1988b: xi), he devoted his prose to illustrating it. His post-WWII literary production is characterized by a subtle presence of the fantastic. The supernatural does not make a grand entrance, as it is already present in mundane reality. Matei Călinescu summarizes Eliade's work:

⁷ It is evident that the story takes place in WWII because of the fact that the Romanians were fighting alongside the Germans, the mention of the Battle of Stalingrad and the type of mortar—Brandt, invented in the 1930s,

The mixture of myth, folktale, and reality is always there, and the logic of *coincidentia oppositorum* is used to bring about unexpected but often intriguing, reversals of situations, mysterious changes of identity, magical metamorphoses, sudden ruptures and displacements in chronological time, irruptions of the supernatural in the banality of day-to-day life. Astronomical symbolism, numerology, and esotericism play a major, if rarely obvious, role in their construction.

(Călinescu 2010: 124)

This is precisely the landscape in "Ivan"—the sacred disguised in profane and revealed through a paradox.

The sacred

Eliade's fantastic is his definition of reality. This reality is very similar to that depicted by magical realism—a realism that "encompass[es] the burden of unreality behind the reality" (Arargüç and Asayesh 34). What is uncovered by reading and interpreting the external physical world, as the "inner structure of things" (Arargüç and Asayesh 27) yet not tangible is *unreality*. Unlike magical realism, however, Eliade's fantastic is not just a literary genre but an empirical theory where the magical and the mystical are *real* and they are designed to prove that human beings are literally more than meets the eye:

Pentru Eliade fenomenele oculte, fie magice sau mistice constituie o *evidență* incontestabilă, o dovadă experimentală de cea mai mare importanță pentru relevarea adevăratei *naturi* umane. Ființa umană este mai mult decât biologia și psihologia care sunt vizibile.

[For Eliade, occult phenomenae, whether magical or mystical, constitute an undeniable *certainty*, an empirical proof of the utmost importance for revealing the true human *nature*. Human beings are more than the biology and psychology that are visible.]

(Gheorghiu 241)

In Eliadean terms, reality is composed of the profane—the world that we see, which can be physical, but most importantly, that which is logical, and the sacred, the irrational, likely spiritual and impossible to prove in the confines of the profane. But, in spite of the fact that the sacred cannot be *proven*, it is the sacred that "provides humans with meaning and

order" (Cave 34). The sacred is a "source of conscience"⁸ (Gheorghiu 20), intangible, yet *real* and clearly observable from the *outside* in. The sacred universalizes identity and unifies humankind—the residents of the profane (Cave 17). It surfaces in the profane through symbols, which are established through hierophanies⁹—"manifestation[s] of the sacred whereby meaning and perception of the cosmos breaks into everyday existence" (Cave 35). Once observed, hierophanies create these symbols that are then passed down from generation to generation through rituals. Symbols, as "modes of knowledge and vehicles of meaning" (Cave 34), help humans "orient themselves and acquire meaning in the universe" (Cave 33). Symbols cannot be eradicated; they disseminate quickly and they continue to be rediscovered through the profane occurrences that initially produced them. Symbols are drawn from paradoxical events within the profane, signs that there is an intangible side to the world—the sacred. Thus, symbols tie the sacred to the profane and, for Eliade, anything in the profane can become a symbol at the right time (Pals 204). Consequently, the sacred and the profane are mutually dependent and mutually complementary (Valk 33). Their relationship is not dualistic but paradoxical (Valk 33). The sacred negates the profane, since humans assign a superior value to the profane (Valk 34); yet, despite its value, the intangible nature of the sacred cannot be rendered tangible in the profane. Through paradox—the fact that the sacred only appears as a rupture of palpable existence—it is implied that "the sacred [can] never [be] fully revealed, nor [can] the profane ever [be] completely transformed into the sacred: the profane never *becomes* the sacred" (Valk 40). As Matei Călinescu points out, Eliade uses the (non)logic of *coincidentia oppositorum* (coexistence of opposites) to create symbols and to call upon the sacred. The instance of *coincidentia oppositorum* is "one of the most archaic manners by which the paradox of divine reality expressed itself" (Valk 32), where *divine* does not necessarily refer to the universal God as observed by any one religion. It is an instance where elements of the profane clash, summoning that intangible side of the world to explain the irrational occurrence of opposites. Instances of *coincidentia oppositorum* condition the understanding that the world that we see cannot be as *logical* as we expect. The sacred creates two opposing situations. First, given its unexplainable and unexpected nature, its emergence or appearance can be powerful enough to negate the profane, but this can have an opposite result: "when reason is prioritized over intuition, the totality and paradoxes of symbol[s] are compromised" (Cave 46).

⁸ The original Romanian reads "izvorul conștiinței", which literally translates to "the river of conscience" (Gheorghiu 20).

⁹ *Hierophany* is composed of the Greek *hieros* and *phanien*: "sacred appearance" (Pals 201)

Eliade autorul și Eliade naratorul sunt amândoi convinși că lumea funcționează astfel, că metafizic lumea apare și dispare în acest joc al identităților și contrariilor.

[Eliade the author and Eliade the narrator are both convinced that the world functions this way, that the world metaphysically appears and disappears in this game of identities and opposites.]

(Gheorghiu 126).

In his short prose, Eliade illustrates instances where the modern character's existence is disrupted by an instance of an archaic symbol whose vocabulary they no longer possess. In essence, according to Eliade, discovering the sacred involves an archaic symbol that connects the sacred to the profane being imported into a modern landscape. The sacred is finding the truth, a truth that can only be translated to the modern man by an archaic man (Gheorghiu 10).

The Ambassador: The Archaic Man

The archaic man of Eliade's writing is not necessarily part of a distant past, but someone whose mundane reality is pierced by symbols, which coordinate their correspondence with the sacred. *Archaic*, in modern times, is a "structure of the mind" (Cave 71) that subscribes to the same *archetype* as prehistoric people. People "who live today in tribal societies and rural folk cultures" (Pals 198), with occupations tied to nature, like hunting, fishing, farming, read symbols the same way and follow the same rituals. The archaic man is a *free* man, who never stops growing, readjusting.

Este omul cel mai liber, omul care se regăsește neîncetat pe sine și regăsește lumea ca pe o lume a sa.

[[The archaic man] is the freest man, a man who is always rediscovering himself and rediscovers the world as his own world.]

(Gheorghiu 30)

Freedom for Eliade is *truth* and *escaping time* or *history* (Gheorghiu 11). Eliade "focuses mainly on the implied rejection of all that is profane, including time and history" when he

evaluates the “archetypal lifestyle” (Valk 37). The archaic man considers the profane evil and believes that “human history prevents full apprehension of the sacred” (Valk 40). Archaic people imitate gods because they want to live among them in the sacred. They yearn “to return to the realm of the supernatural,” they feel a deep “nostalgia for paradise” (Pals 203). The archaic man has a “hopeful and optimistic view of existence: death is a provisional change” (Cave 50); the archaic man is eternal, indestructible.

In contrast to the archaic man, the modern man is a slave to modernity and needs to resolve his issues with freedom by discovering the sacred (Gheorghiu 23). The modern man must strive to reach the *archetype*. Eliade's theory of the archetype is close to that of Carl Gustav Jung, that the archetype is experienced in the collective unconscious, yet, for Eliade it is a product of reality itself (Gheorghiu 591). Eliade's archetype is ever-growing, always adjusting to the changes in the profane world via ritual (Gheorghiu 591). The modern man's journey to achieving the archetype is really a “restoration” of “the perfect form”¹⁰ (Gheorghiu 592). To do so, Eliade's protagonist, a modern man, “must step out of modern civilization, [...] and enter the world of the archaic man” (Pals 198).

Portrait of Eliade: The Modern Man

[V]ocile lor sunt fragmente din prezența autorului, o prezență autoritară, care își impune ideologia, spaimile, angoasele.

[[T]heir voices are fragments of the author's presence, [...] who imposes his ideology, fears, anxieties.]

(Gheorghiu 56)

Eliade's protagonists are prominently tied to his own personality; at first, they are “weak”, yet the omniscient narrator behind them acts as a guide to finding their way into a space that is completely surreal. Ștefan Viziru, protagonist in *Noaptea de sânzienne*, is a 34-year old married man who is unsure of his life choices. He laments loving another woman that he claims he loves in parallel to loving his wife. Having realized that they are destined to love one another, he meets this other woman in the forest where he first encountered her. They find a car that had disappeared twelve years prior, marking their exit from historical time; they drive this car into a truck and likely to their death. The story

¹⁰ The original Romanian reads: “restaurarea *forme perfectae*” (Gheorghiu 592).

ends before or during the moment of collision. In *La țigănci*, Gavrilescu is an unachieved 49-year old music teacher. Discovering that he has forgotten his briefcase, he tries going back to the residence of the student he tutored, yet, along the way, he is hypnotized by the aura of a gypsy brothel. The three prostitutes that he is assigned taunt him into a guessing game, which he loses as he is not able to identify the gypsy girl. When he wakes up, he discovers that twelve years have passed and everyone that he knew had moved away, including his wife. He returns to the brothel where he can only enter if he pays for a girl. The young girl that shows up happens to be the one he loved in his youth while studying in Germany, who had been waiting for him to show up at the brothel.

"For the modern person, the sacred has become lost or meaningless. [They] are too often "swallowed up" by the multiplicity and diversity of human unfolding in time and history" (Valk 39). Yet, as established, humans yearn for what is true and what is real, "[t]hey cannot cease from questioning life's mysteries and narrating stories about them" (Cave 66). According to Eliade, at one point in their lives, humans do experience "something truly extraordinary and overwhelming [as if] they are gripped by a reality that is wholly other than themselves" (Pals 199) and it is these "existential" encounters that "illustrate the meaning of being a human being" (Cave 17).

People become aware of the sacred through their own concrete (profane) situation. But the sacred mode is not an additional dimension, nor is it distinct from or unrelated to one's "ordinary" way of being in the world: life 'is not merely human, it is *at the same time* cosmic"

(Valk 33)

Coincidentia oppositorum invite the Eliadean Man, a modern man, to investigate the sacred. All of Eliade's protagonists search for meaning *on the other side*, through the archetype. The Eliadean man is someone who always returns to the *archetypal*, to the original (Gheorghiu 29).

Mirroring Reality: Dreams

Eliade's preoccupation on April 17, 1966 was an experiment carried out in several universities analyzing sleep physiology and psychology. The study entailed preventing subjects from reaching the Rapid Eye Movement phase during sleep, thus deterring them

from dreaming. They were dream deprived for as long as the researchers deemed necessary and, as soon as they were allowed to dream again, participants engaged in a prolonged and amplified REM phase. In cases where participants were prevented from dreaming for long periods of time, they felt increasingly irritable and melancholic (Eliade 1982: 279). "Ivan" first appears in 1968, thus a connection between the two is probable considering this timeline. Moreover, while Eliade's friendship to and fascination with Jung, the most famous dream philosopher, undoubtedly contributed to his interest in dreams, but Eliade drew most of his conclusions prior to meeting Jung in 1950 (Cave 69). Eliade associates *dream* to *mythology*.

What fascinates me in these experiments is the organic need that man has to "dream," that is, for *mythology*. For whatever judgement one makes on the structure and content of dreams, their mythological character is indubitable. On the oneiric level, mythology signifies narrative, that is, viewing a sequence with epic or dramatic episodes. In any case, it seems that man needs to be present at these narratives, to view them, to listen to them.

(Eliade 1982: 280)

Eliade considers all human imagination as having a mythological structure, as in a narrative built with *real* representations of reality, that seeks to uncover *real* meaning. Unlike Jung, who believes that "the *collective* unconscious, the collectivity of human creations since the beginning of time, gives rise to myth" (Cave 69), Eliade claims that "mythic consciousness antecedes human history itself and, hence, the collective unconscious"; "[m]yth is informed by the cosmos" (Cave 69).

A combination of the two aforementioned definitions corroborates the storyline in "Ivan", where the episodes are marked in *dreams*; it is in dream that the sacred starts extending into the profane. Ultimately, as the borders between episodes collapse and the dream becomes reality, it becomes obvious that the dream announces imminent death. A death that is revealed by dream is the kind of death that is slow and punishing, where the human body decomposes, humiliating the spirit (Gheorghiu 27). Yet, as mentioned, Eliade believes that in the world of the archaic man death has a positive connotation as it announces a new beginning.

Protagonists at First Glance

Eliade, the novelist, looks to illustrate the human condition, archetypes, long-lost root through symbols and epiphany (Gheorghiu 100). A “stubborn exchange” between the modern—the “rationalistic, suspicious, authoritarian,” and the archaic—“creative, meaningful, imaginative” (Cave 65), takes place in much of Eliade's fantastic. This is the case in “Ivan,” where the modern way of living of the academically educated urban dweller, Darie, clashes with the wild rural landscape native to Zamfira.

Darie is a twenty-two-year-old recent graduate of philosophy, who speaks four languages—Romanian, French, German and English. He has a rigid personality as he is trapped in literature. He speaks not from experience in the natural world but in the safe universe of books. His academic background makes him seem somewhat arrogant and suspicious, claiming that he understands life and he does not fear death while the reality presented is quite the contrary. He likes speaking about himself but he is not devoid of respect for his peers; he reflects on the actions that he knows would have affected them. All in all, he fits the description the modern Eliadean man, someone who is confident *in theory*, yet completely lost *in practice*. Darie prioritizes reason, which has him stuck in profane and, while the sacred can exist without the profane, the profane cannot exist without the sacred. Although not clearly stated in the story, it is evident that his rank of cadet second lieutenant has not been granted to him on account of his leadership skills. According to the lieutenant, in one of the dreams, the battle that the three protagonists had just survived was Darie's first experience on the battlefield—he had been commanding only for six days. Moreover, Darie himself asserts that his command of the platoon is what ultimately caused its failure, that is, his poor decision-making resulted in three survivors and thirteen casualties. While he yields to reason, he too has an unexplainable belief in fate. He claims that his inability to obtain positive results as a leader is due to the fact that “bad luck” and “evil spirits” pursue him, therefore endangering the safety of those around him. He initially fully trusts Zamfira and Iliescu because the two already have a year of war experience on the front and because they seem

to know their way around the surrounding landscape. As reality collapses, he begins to lose trust in their instincts and gives in to his own; this is his personal narrative and they are mere participants.

Zamfira appears to be Darie's opposite. Zamfira is unspoiled by the modern city life, he only follows what he understands by experience in nature. His replies describe someone honest and innocent to the point of immaturity. As he laments the fact that Ivan cannot understand him and his peers, or when Darie stumbles into a hole in the ground, his reactions are candid and exaggerated. He is completely devoted to his faith and insists on honouring it. He almost begs his commanding officer, Darie, to allow the completion of the ritual to commemorate the soul of the dying Ivan. For his devotion, he is *granted* the ability to interpret signs in nature and to use the tools that nature has to offer. He understands the rural landscape and can adapt to the region. It is unclear what part of Romania he comes from, yet, he is able to say with confidence that he knows herbs and roots that can help them survive. Considering that Romania has such a diverse climate, his comfort within the cornfield is proof of an existing strong relationship with the natural world. Out of the three, Zamfira is the most intuitive. His ability to read subtle signs ensures their survival. This is not to say however that he refrains from using reason altogether. He too uses his experience on the front to predict what the Russians will do next, and it is he who points out that they will have changed direction after the German air strike in the cornfield.

Iliescu is in between the two extremes Darie and Zamfira. He can acknowledge and sometimes read symbols, yet, he does not do so with the same ease, naturalness and dedication as Zamfira. Often, he does not initiate the interpretation of a symbol, but rather supports Zamfira's. He shares some of Zamfira's knowledge of the rural landscape, in addition to the experience on the front. He is the strategist of the group, thus he looks for optimal ways to achieve his goals. Although Darie is the commanding officer, it is Iliescu who decides when to keep quiet, how they should proceed through the cornfield, or how to approach the enemy. He uses Zamfira's knowledge to make the best decision for the

group. In combination with Zamfira, Iliescu completes a survival team, whose purpose in the story is to guide and protect Darie.

Initially, the role of the archaic man can be assigned to Zamfira, and that of the modern man to the protagonist, cadet second lieutenant Constantin Darie. Iliescu, as established, is in between the two but he leans more towards Zamfira archaic world skills and belief system. Zamfira and Iliescu are not looking for signs, but the symbols connecting the profane to the sacred are always present and at their reach. Reading them gives meaning to their lives and provides them with the strength to survive. As representatives of the archaic, Zamfira and Iliescu translate symbols for Darie, therefore familiarizing him with the sacred, a world to which he had not had access prior to this encounter. Zamfira and Iliescu do not have a logical explanation for their beliefs, nor does it seem to their advantage to honour them, but they adamantly insist on obtaining the blessing of the dying man for a stroke of good luck and then on burying the body to protect it from alteration—symbols are indeed internalized in time. While Darie eventually comes to terms with these symbols, he retains a great part of his disbelief in the sacred because he relies on reason only. Darie does indeed adopt the sacred but he does so gradually. The sacred first becomes clear when Arhip tells Darie that *this time* he is neither dreaming nor is he about to wake up from a dream; this, after a drastic, swift and unexplainable change of scenery from a mountain hike to a city apartment. This episode ends with Darie chanting "nous sommes foutus," which leads him to return to the profane—in the cornfield with Zamfira and Iliescu. Ivan, once they finally meet, bearing his seemingly true identity, confirms more than his resemblance to both Procopie and Arhip: he clearly identifies himself as Procopie and Arhip. Darie, completely blinded by his own rigmarole of remembering and philosophical logic, ignores the association and ends up returning to the profane only to find himself gravely wounded. As he crosses through a limbo of dreams, he eventually reaches a point where there is no more discernable reality, and, although not fully convinced by the sacred, he embraces it. When he reaches the bridge of light to go *home*, he has accepted the connection Ivan-Procopie-Arhip, a connection suggested to him both by Arhip and Ivan, and he re-establishes the archetype. The story ends with Darie trying to return to the profane to bless his companions for good luck, thus reinforcing the archetype that he has just restored.

Ceea ce lipsește unora dintre nuvelele lui Eliade, în bună măsură, deși atât de fascinante uneori prin subiect, prin fabulă, prin forța unei anume ideaii, este

capacitatea de a interesa numai prin desfășurarea logicii interne, prin dizolvarea tezei în substanța epică și intelectuală a prozei [...]. Din acest punct de vedere [...] [unele] ratează deplina corespondență între scenariul mitico-fantastic și epică.

[What some of Eliade's short stories wholly lack, although so fascinating in subject, in imagination, in the force of a certain ideation, is the capacity to interest solely by unfolding the internal logic, by dissolving the thesis in the narrative and intellectual substance of the prose. [...] From this point of view, [...] [some] fail to create a full correspondence between the mythical fantastic and the narrative.]

(Gheorghiu 157)

Eliade's determination to illustrate his theory in his prose sometimes hinders complete literary mastery. "Ivan" is such an example, an *exercice de style* where the focus on the theoretical message eclipses the plot. Since the story does not sustain itself fully through the storyline, the symbolism is vital, a symbolism accessible only through Eliade's theory. In addition, another factor that severely affects the ability to follow the plot is the level of comfort the reader has to this type of fantastic—a world that is almost real yet far from it. The Romanian reader, unlike Gabriel García Márquez's Colombian reader for example, is not accustomed to this type of magical realism. As Lucian Strochi points out:

Pentru un sud-american, obișnuit să-i traverseze camera un pește înotând leneș prin aer, Ivan poate fi o povestire perfect realistă.

[For a South American, accustomed to having a fish lazily swimming through air across his room, "Ivan" can be a perfectly realist story.]

(Strochi 163)

Chapter 3: English Translation of “Ivan”

by Alexandra Guyot

The first person to see him was Zamfira¹¹. He transferred his rifle to his left hand and approached the man. He poked him with the tip of his boot.

“He’s dying,” he said, without turning away.

The wounded man was looking at them with his eyes wide open. He was young, fair-haired and full of freckles. His lips were trembling, as if he were forcing himself to smile. Zamfira let out a deep sigh and kneeled beside him.

“Ivan!” He yelled. “Ivan!”

He took out his flask and brought it to the wounded man’s lips. Darie¹² stopped in front of him. He took his helmet off to wipe his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt.

“He’s dying. It’s a waste of water.”

In a sudden, frightened movement, the wounded man’s arm broke away from his body and struggled in the air as if he were looking for something. It fell to the ground, lifeless, and his fingers clenched on to a clod of earth. It had fallen too far from his pocket. Zamfira reached into the pocket, fetched a revolver and smiled.

“It’s for you, sir. Maybe you can keep it as souvenir...”

¹¹ "Zamfira" is a surname currently in use in Romania, derived from the word *zamfir*, which is an old mispronunciation of *safir*. *Safir* is the word for the precious stone *sapphire*. *Safir* is also a Muslim name meaning *ambassador*, *mediator*, *intercessor* in Ahmed, Salahuddin. *A Dictionary of Muslim Names*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.

¹² "Darie" is a surname derived from Darius the Great, considered the first of the true Zoroastrian leader. Zoroastrianism is an ancient Iranian religion worshipping the spirit of good, Ahura Mazdhā, as preached by the prophet Zarathustra. Zarathustra’s revelation as opposed to other religions built around Ahura Mazdhā was that man is free to choose between good and evil. See Eliade, Mircea. *A History of Religious Ideas. Volume 1. From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, and Moulton, James Hope. “Preface”. *Early Zoroastrianism. Lectures Delivered at Oxford in London. February to May 1912*. London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1936.

Darie had put his helmet back on. He grabbed the revolver and weighed it in his hand.

“It’s out of bullets. It’s good for nothing.”

He was getting ready to throw it in the cornfield, but changed his mind. He went on weighing it in his hand, undecided. Iliescu¹³ had caught up with them.

“He’s dying,” he said slowly, shaking his head. “Without a candle, like a dog. Like the others,” he added in a low voice.

He turned to the side and spat. Darie looked at the revolver one more time before letting it drop. The sound was muffled by clods of earth near the wounded man’s arm.

“If you pity him, better shoot him, to end the pain...”

He took a few steps towards the cornfield and looked around as if to find shelter from the drought to rest. He turned back, disappointed, with an unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

“Let’s get going,” he said to the others.

Zamfira had stood up, but his eyes were still locked with the wounded man’s.

“If we knew Russian, we’d ask him to bless us,” he said in a low voice, as if he were speaking only to himself. “That’s what they say where I come from, that it’s good luck to be blessed by someone who’s dying.”

“That’s what I heard too,” interrupted Iliescu. But it’s only good luck if you’re blessed with a good heart... and this guy’s a Bolshevik...”

“Whatever he might be, he only needs to bless you by his own faith, in his own language...”

¹³ "Iliescu" is a combination of *Ilie* and *-escu*). *Ilie* is the Romanian *Elias* or *Elijah*, and the ending *-escu* is *son of*. Eliade writes that Elijah represents a period of transition during the first century B.C., when Israel was about to accept the existence of multiple religions. Elijah opposed and maintained that Yahweh is the only God of Israel as he is the only one that could end the draught and fertilize the soil. See Constrantinescu, Nicolae A. *Dicționar onomastic românesc*. Bucharest: Editura academiei republicii populare romîne, 1963, and Eliade, Mircea. *A History of Religious Ideas. Volume 1. From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

He turned towards Darie.

“Maybe you, sir, you know so many languages...”

Darie had lit his cigarette. He shrugged, discouraged, while trying to force a smile in vain.

“I don’t know. Now I feel bad about it. I should have studied Russian...” he stopped suddenly. He looked at the wounded man and took a long drag from of his cigarette. “But maybe he understands, maybe he speaks other languages...”

He hesitated for a couple of moments, and then he shrugged again.

“Try it, sir,” he heard Zamfira whisper. “Try it, maybe he gets it...”

Darie flung his cigarette, approached the wounded man and searched for his eyes. Still in doubt, he burst out in a rigid, muffled voice:

*“Nous sommes foutus, Ivan! Nous sommes des pauvres types! Save our souls! Bless our hearts, Ivan! Car nous sommes foutus!...”*¹⁴

The wounded man let out a soft moan and, in that moment, his face lit up as if he were smiling. He gave each of them an inquisitive look.

*“Blagoslovenie!”*¹⁵ Zamfira shouted, kneeling beside him. *“Boje¹⁶, Christu! Bless us, Ivan...”*

He made the sign of the cross, as slowly as he could, then he looked at the sky, put his hands together and closed his eyes for a moment, as if he were praying. Then he gave the man a long, anticipative look.

“Do like me, Ivan!” he shouted. “Make the sign of the cross! *Boje, Christu!*”

He stopped talking and the three stared, silently, at the wounded man. They waited.

¹⁴ Italicized, in French and in English in the original.

¹⁵ Italicized in the original. From the Russian “blagosloveniye” (“blessing”).

¹⁶ Italicized in the original. From the Russian “boge” (“God”).

“He doesn’t understand,” sighed Zamfira. “If only we could talk to him in his language...”

“This damn Bolshevik!” Grumbled Iliescu. “He’s pretending he can’t understand us...”

Darie turned around, forcing a smile.

“How is he going to bless you if you curse him?”

“It doesn’t matter. Dying men don’t understand anything and forgive everything.” He knelt and bent down to the man’s ear. “Forgive, Ivan, forgive!” He whispered.

He realized that the wounded man was not looking at him anymore and, when he turned his head, he saw the dog a few meters away, by the edge of the cornfield.

“He’s from the village,” said Iliescu. He got up and whistled the dog over in a friendly way. “The village has to be close.”

It was a weak, scrawny dog, his copper pelt discoloured by dust. It slowly approached them, without wagging its tail. The wounded man had been looking at him, waiting. His lips had stopped trembling all of a sudden and his face was different now, frozen.

“If he’s a Bolshevik and nobody taught him, he can’t know,” said Zamfira getting up. “But he must’ve heard of God and of Jesus Christ and it can’t be that he doesn’t know how to make the sign of the cross.”

He took a step back and called out to him: “Ivan!” Then he put his arms out as far as he could and stayed like that, motionless, looking straight at the wounded man.

“*Christu!*” he yelled again. “Christ on the cross. Make the sign of the cross. Lift up three fingers and bless us...”

The wounded man’s face had lit up again, softened by a big smile. The dog had come closer and he was licking the wounded man’s hand, the hand that was clenched around the clod of earth.

“He’s pretending he can’t understand us,” said Iliescu while angrily spitting to the side.

Zamfira had gone in the cornfield and come back with two corn cobs just moments before.

“Ivan!” he yelled, searching for the man’s eyes. “Look over here, Ivan!” he continued, placing the corn cobs one on top of the other in the form of a cross. “Look here and remember. This is the cross of Jesus Christ, our savior; Christ who was crucified. You understand?” He asked, approaching the man with the cobs. “Do you remember?”

The wounded man had followed his movements with an unexpected interest yet still with fear. He tried to lift his head but the moaned in pain and closed his eyes. He opened his eyes a few moments later and smiled at the sight of Zamfira with the cobs crossed together in front of him.

“Christu! He said a good while later. Christu!”

“My God! It’s a miracle,” whispered Zamfira. He kneeled beside the wounded man and laid his hand on the man’s forehead. “You understand what we asked you. Bless us!...”

“Bénis-nous, Ivan!” cried Darie with passion. *“Bénis-nous! Bless our hearts! Tu t’envoies au ciel. Au Paradis, Ivan, auprès de Dieu Père. Auprès de la Vierge; Virgin Mary full of grace,”* he added in a suddenly unexpected tired voice.

The wounded man listened to him, shivering slightly. Then he stared at them one by one. He did not dare to lift his head again but he was moving his fingers as if he were trying to point at something.

“Maria!” he managed to finally say. “Maria...”

“He understands,” whispered Iliescu. He followed the man’s eyes and saw the dog slowly walking away with his head down. “Maybe he knows the dog,” he added. “Maybe he’s from the village.”

The wounded man started to whisper, nervously wiggling his fingers, closing his eyes from time to time, then opening them suddenly. Each time, he seemed more frightened to find them there, beside him.

“I think we should try to take him to the village,” said Zamfira.

Darie, taken aback, gave him a long look.

“He’s got to be heavy. He’s dying.”

“It’d be a pity, now that he understands,” said Iliescu, “and if he makes it another hour or two till we get to the village, maybe he’ll bless us...”

The dog had stopped a hundred metres ahead, by the cornfield; he was waiting for them.

*

They were carrying him on their rifles. Darie took their knapsacks and hung them on each end of his rifle, which he rested across his shoulders. The wounded man shivered and moaned, constantly closing and opening his eyes. Once in a while, Zamfira would yell:

“Bless us, Ivan, we’re taking you home!... We didn’t leave you for dead on the side of the road.”

“Just say ‘Christ,’ suggested Iliescu. “Christ! Maria!”

After a hundred metres, they stopped to catch their breath but they didn’t drop the load. The wounded man, whimpering, was tossing about. His imploring gaze locked with Zamfira’s.

“You talk to him, sir. Tell him something, we want what’s best for him...”

Darie, frustrated and hopeless, repositioned the knapsacks on his shoulders.

“What can I tell him? And in what language? I don’t speak Russian; how is he going to understand me?”

“Say anything,” encouraged Zamfira, “so he can see that we’re trying hard, that we’re not letting him die like a dog. Talk to him in whatever language, because you, sir, are a philosopher...”

Darie could not help but sigh and pulled his helmet forward.

“A true philosopher!” he exclaimed, trying to force a smile. “Ivan!” He turned toward the wounded man and searched for his gaze. “Do you remember *Faust*?”

Habe nun, ach! Philosophie, Juristerei und Medicin.

*Und leider! Auch Theologie Durchaus studiert...*¹⁷

“This is me, Ivan, talking to you now. *The philosopher*. Can you hear me?”

“Keep talking to him, sir,” encouraged Iliescu as they started walking again. “Talk to him, he’s listening, and that’s enough.”

“If he’s listening to you, he’s not dying,” added Zamfira.

“...I could tell you many stories, Ivan, like any other fresh graduate of philosophy. How many thoughts cross through our minds. How many adventures in two or three books, even twenty-two – Proust, for instance, has twenty-two books, does he not? Maybe I’m mistaken, maybe I miscalculated and counted his early works; you know what I mean, *Pastiches et mélanges* and the others...”

“Keep talking, sir, it’s going good,” encouraged Iliescu, before he turned to the side and spat vigorously towards the cornfield.

“Ivan!” shouted Darie excitedly. “I could talk to you all night about the proof against God’s existence! And about Jesus Christ, whom you probably haven’t heard about since grade school, yours and our Saviour, everyone’s Saviour, and about his enigmatic historic presence, or about his political inefficiency, I could talk to you for days. Only the two of us, no officers or theologians; because you can feel it too, Ivan, *nous sommes foutus*, *nous sommes tous foutus*! Our people and your people too. But ours more than yours, we’re descendants of good ol’ Trajan... And if I were to regret dying now, soon after you or,

¹⁷In German in the original.

maybe, before you, at the age of twenty-two, it would also be because I won't get to see your people build a statue of good ol' Trajan. He had the bright idea to spawn us here, at the end of the world. It's as if he knew specifically that, one day, your people would show up, tired of wandering through the prairie, and come across these beautiful, smart and rich people that we are, and that you'd be hungry and thirsty like we are now..."

"Keep going, sir, he's listening," encouraged Zamfira seeing that Darie had stopped mid-sentence and was uncontrollably wiping his cheek with the sleeve of his coat.

"And how much more I could tell you. I wonder if I would ever dare tell you about the events of March 13th and November 8th and everything after that? These events are too intimate, Ivan, they made me and unmade me and remade me again, as you see me now, a wandering philosopher, keeping you company for as long as God and your Brandts¹⁸ will allow it, *car nous sommes foutus, Ivan, il n'y a plus d'espoir. Nous sommes foutus!* Like in a famous short story that hasn't been written yet but that will surely be written one day. Because it's too *real*, if you know what I mean; it's too much like what's been happening in our times and what's happening to us right now. And I wonder how will the author be able to face his wife and his children, even his neighbours, how will he manage to go out on the street? Because, you know what I mean, every one of us will identify with the main character of that short story. And how can anyone live after that, how can they enjoy life after understanding that he is *doomed*¹⁹, that there is no escape, that an escape *cannot* exist because every one of us has had an emperor Trajan exist long before him, whatever his name may have been, a Trajan in Africa, one or more in China; anywhere you look, you can only see people, who are doomed because some emperor Trajan, long before them, thousands and thousands of years before them, decided to spawn them in wrong place..."

He stopped all of a sudden and ran his trembling hand across his face.

"Keep talking to him, sir," whispered Zamfira, "but slowly, slowly so that he understands you."

¹⁸ A Brandt Mle 1935 is a type of mortar invented by French designer Edgar Brandt.

¹⁹Italicized in the original.

Darie smiled at him, as if he had suddenly recognized him. In a spur of youthful hopelessness, he repositioned the knapsacks on his shoulders.

“...So let’s start from the beginning, Ivan. Let’s start with March 13th because that’s where the whole beginning began. Had I died on March 12th, I’d have been a happy man, because I’d have gone to heaven, *au Ciel, Ivan, auprès de la Sainte Trinité*, where you’ll soon find yourself with the help of a priest—if there’s any left. But if I’m meant to die today, tomorrow, or the day after, where will I go? In any case not to heaven because, after March 13th, I found out that heaven *simply does not exist*. It doesn’t exist anymore, Ivan! From the moment you start to understand, like I understood on March 13th, that heaven is just an illusion, it’s over. There is no heaven anymore, not above, not below. Because the Universe is infinite; it has no beginning and no end. And so, I ask you, what about me, *where will I go?* I know it’s pointless to ask you, because you have decided not to answer. But I’ll answer for you. And I’ll answer with November 8th, with the second beginning. Because on November 8th, I think you figured out what happened; I understood something perhaps even more important, I understood that there is no need to go somewhere because *you are already there*. Against infinity, Ivan, I raise another infinity. Because, listen closely, I, like you and everyone else, I, we, people, are *indestructible*. Neither your Brandts, nor the German planes can destroy us. We’ve been around since the beginning of the world and we’ll persist even after the last star in the last galaxy dies. And then, you realize, Ivan, *nous sommes foutus, et sommes foutus pour l’éternité*. Because, if I am indestructible, where can I go, today, tomorrow, the day after, if it’s my turn to go? I can’t go anywhere because I’m already there, and I’m everywhere at the same time. But it’s terrifying to be everywhere and, still, in a way, to *not* be because you’re no longer alive. It’s terrifying to never be able to rest like our fathers and forefathers were able to rest. Because they went where they were destined to go, some up there, some down underground, others at the edge of the Earth. And, you see, they were able to rest. But what about *us*, Ivan, what will happen to *us*?...”

He repositioned the knapsacks on his shoulder and picked up the pace again.

“...And now, if you were to finally decide to break your vow of silence, surely, you would ask me: but, *after* November 8th, what happened *after* November 8th? And, because the laws of war demand that we be honest and open with each another, I would be compelled to answer. But will you understand me? Because we suddenly run into *a series of mutually contradicting certainties*, so to speak ...”

He heard someone calling him and turned around only to realize that he was advancing alone, with the dog by his side. After dropping off the wounded man in the sparse shade of a black locust tree, the other two took off their helmets to wipe their faces. Darie came back embarrassed, forcing a smile.

“He’s been mumbling in his language, in Russian,” said Iliescu.

“It’s like he’s asking for water,” clarified Zamfira, “but we don’t have any more. And when I showed him the sugar cubes, he closed his eyes, he doesn’t want any”.

He grabbed a cube and started sucking it.

“He may look young and slender, but he’s heavy,” continued Iliescu, “and we got tired. We thought we should rest here, in the shade. We still can’t see the village.”

“Maybe he’ll get his strength back,” added Zamfira.

Darie dropped the knapsacks on the burnt, dusty grass and kneeled next to the wounded man. Listening to the man’s heavily laboured breathing made him tense.

“I wonder how he’s still alive, he said a good while later. He’s barely catching his breath...”

He reached out to grab a knapsack and started looking for something. The wounded man followed him with his eyes. He would shiver from time to time, as if he were taken over by a cold.

Darie turned towards Zamfira and asked in a low voice:

“What are we going to do with him? We can’t carry him any longer and it’s getting late. Should we leave him here to suffer or should we help him die?”

Zamfira hesitated and looked away.

“We worked so hard to bring him all the way here... Maybe God will take pity and give him the strength to bless us. Because, I’m thinking, now he *wants* to bless us...”

“I heard him too,” interrupted Iliescu. “I heard him say *Christu*. If we keep talking to him, maybe he’ll last another hour. The village isn’t far.”

Darie lit a cigarette and smiled at all three of them.

“You can’t see anything,” he said. “Wherever you look, only cornfields, corn everywhere...”

The dog had stopped a few metres away. He yapped at the sight of the sugar cubes. Zamfira sighed.

“Let’s tell him more about us. Maybe he understands more of that. As long as we rest here, let’s keep talking to him. Let’s tell him about the village.”

Iliescu turned towards the wounded man and said, in a new voice that he had never used before, as if he were talking to a sick child.

“Ivan, it won’t be long now till we get to the village. And it’s going to be great in your village, just like in our villages.”

“Tell him about what we’ll give him,” interrupted Zamfira. “Fresh water, plenty of it...”

Iliescu went closer to his face and continued.

“Ivan, in your orchards, there’s all sorts of fruit trees, prunes and pears and many others, and we’ll get you as many as you want...”

“And girls will wash your face and lay you to bed,” interrupted Zamfira.

The wounded man closed his eyes. His lips trembled increasingly faster, yet with great effort, it seemed.

“But don’t forget about us and what we asked you,” he added.

“He’ll remember,” said Iliescu, “there’s no way he’ll forget. We broke our backs for him, like for a friend. *Comraditch* Ivan, *comraditch*!” He shouted, smiling with his whole being. “You’ll remember, Ivan, and you’ll lift your arm towards us and you’ll bless us.”

The dog started to whimper all of a sudden. Frightened and trembling, it looked around, raised its hackles and took off on the side of the road. The wounded man opened his eyes but did not have the strength to turn his head to watch him go. He now stared straight at the sky, with such determination that nothing could disturb him, not even the harsh light of that August afternoon, nor the fine powder that floated above them like an endless cobweb. They were quiet for a moment. Darie approached the wounded man, placed his hand on his head and looked deep into his eyes.

“I’m afraid he’s died,” he whispered. “May God rest his soul,” he added, struggling to get up.

Zamfira put his hand on the wounded man’s forehead, pat his cheek and shook his hand.

“May God rest his soul,” he said while making the sign of the cross. “God will rest his soul because he blessed us and it’ll bring us luck.”

“That’s what he was doing just now, when he was moving his lips,” said Iliescu. “He was blessing us...”

Darie picked up his knapsack. Weary, he looked in the direction the dog took off.

“Let’s get going,” he said. “We’re late as it is.”

“Please sir, just a tiny bit longer,” whispered Zamfira shyly while untying a small shovel off of his knapsack. “We can’t leave him here for the ravens to butcher him. We’ll have his grave made by the time you finish smoking another cigarette.”

Darie looked at him, astonished, as if he could not understand him.

“Please, sir,” added Iliescu, “the earth is barren; the grave will be done in no time.”

“Fellas, are you crazy?” Said Darie a good while later. “You’re crazy for sure, but that’s my fault too,” he said, more for himself than for the others. He turned towards the cornfield and repeated: “It’s my fault too...”

He turned around after a while and saw them digging. They were moving quickly, breathing heavily, without saying a word. And, in that moment, he felt as if he was dreaming because they were shoveling at a distance of more than two metres away from each other, as if they had decided to dig a grave for several bodies. At the same time, he heard the sharp whistling of German aircraft flying very low. And behind him, past the cornfield that they dove into that morning, perhaps off the road where their whole company had retreated the night before, he heard the short, muffled pops of Russian Brandts.

*

“...Evidently,” he continued while opening a new pack of cigarettes, “that’s when I realized that I was dreaming and I woke up. But I’ll tell you one more thing, even if you may not believe me: what struck me the most, what woke me up, were neither the German planes, nor the Brandts, but that inconceivably large grave that Iliescu and Zamfira had started digging. Essentially, what I’m wondering is: what were they thinking? Digging a grave like that. As I told you, we were all thirsty, hungry and exhausted. Why did they want to complicate things?”

“In any case,” interrupted the lieutenant, looking at him with compassion, almost with warmth, “the fault was yours to begin with. You shouldn’t have let them take him. You were retreating; any wasted moment could have been fatal. If they pitied Ivan, they should have shot him on the spot...”

“You don’t think he could have been saved?” Asked Laura.

“No. As I said, when we found him, he was already dying. I wonder how he survived for as long as he did. Evidently, in a dream state, things happen differently...”

“After six days of fighting,” interrupted the lieutenant, “you had enough experience. You couldn’t use the excuse anymore that you couldn’t order around some soldiers, who had been fighting at the front for a couple of years.”

“That’s true,” said Darie, smiling absently. “But on the other hand, every order I dared to give during those six days, didn’t work out. We left with a platoon and, some orders later, there were three of us left.”

“I know what you’re alluding to,” interrupted the lieutenant, “but it was not your fault. Ukraine was swarmed with partisans and well-camouflaged special squads. As soon as a unit separated from the division, they risked being surrounded and decimated. You were lucky that three out of sixteen got away.”

“In any case,” continued Darie, “this time I didn’t want to take responsibility for it. Now, since we’re among friends, I’m going to tell you something else. Since I believed that I was ridden with bad luck and evil spirits, and I was afraid to lose them too, the last two, I had decided to give them one last order: to part ways. I wanted us to head to the village on different paths—the two of them together and I, alone... Perhaps, that’s why I fell into the temptation of their absurd hope, that Ivan, while dying, would bless us and that this would bring us luck...”

Mrs. Machedon came out from the kitchen with a large plate, still steaming, followed by Adela, who carried a tray of small glasses and a bottle of brandy²⁰.

“Grab them while they’re hot,” whispered Mrs. Machedon, having stopped in the middle of the group.

“I keep thinking,” started the judge, “who was Ivan really? What type of man was he? And, especially, I keep wondering, did he understand what you wanted from him? And did he end up blessing you?”

“There’s no doubt about it,” continued Laura, “he understood and he blessed them. That’s why they had the luck to survive.”

²⁰ The original “țuică”, is a common plum eau-de-vie in Romania.

“There have been even more extraordinary cases” said someone leaning against the wall, a man Darie hadn’t noticed up until then. “Soldiers who managed to escape Stalingrad and got back into the country on foot after so many months. And I wonder if it wasn’t some other dying Ivan who blessed them...”

Darie had listened very closely, examining him with a surprised look on his face.

“I don’t believe we’ve met,” added the guy, a bit embarrassed, as if he were trying to apologize. “My name is Procopie. I’m a doctor, but I had a taste of philosophy back in the day, when I was a student. I liked philosophy...”

The lieutenant looked at them both surprised, almost revolted.

“But how is it that you two never met? You were in the same regiment...”

Darie turned towards Laura and gave her a peculiar smile, as if he were waiting for her to encourage him to continue.

“What’s more interesting,” he started all of a sudden, “is that, since the beginning, I’ve had the impression that we’ve met before. But I didn’t dare admit that this impression came from the event that I’ve just recounted. Indeed, the more I look at you, doctor, the more I realize you resemble Ivan...”

A few people burst out laughing and looked at both of them, acting surprised. Darie continued to smile.

“It’s interesting in any case,” exclaimed Laura, “because this is not how I pictured Ivan. I saw him as a young blonde, freckled boy, eighteen or nineteen years of age. And the doctor is, as you can see, dark-haired, no freckles and with two boys already in school.”

Darie started to rub his forehead as if he were trying to remember some detail that, in that moment, seemed critical.

“But, anyway, this doesn’t matter,” continued Laura. “What matters is that you think he resembles Ivan. So, then, we can ask him what was going through Ivan’s mind as you were carrying him on your rifles. Do you think he blessed them, doctor?”

Procopie, taken aback, shrugged.

“How can I put this? From what I can tell, I’d say yes and no. It’s hard to imagine that Ivan couldn’t figure out what they wanted from him. That’s why he said the word *Christu*. So then, he probably said, in whisper, words that they didn’t understand because they didn’t speak Russian. But these words were most probably words of friendship, maybe even of love, Christian or otherwise, anyway, of love between humans. Evidently, that’s not what Zamfira and Iliescu were expecting from him; essentially, it wasn’t a blessing in the true sense.”

Darie suddenly raised his head and looked around in a frenzy.

“I just remembered!” He exclaimed. “I just remembered why, at one point, I implored him “*Bless our hearts, Ivan! Save our souls!...*”²¹ Rattled by Zamfira’s faith and confidence, I told myself: if it is *true*, if Ivan, as he is, paralysed, unable to talk, dying on the side of a road, if Ivan *can truly save us*, then he holds a mystery, impenetrable and astounding. Because, in a way that I cannot fully comprehend, he represents, or expresses, the Unknown God, *Agnostos Theos*, that Saint Paul talked about. But I’ll never know whether that was the case or not because I’ll never be sure whether his blessing or his love had an impact on our existence...”

Mrs. Machedon went to the wood-burning stove and opened it carefully to throw what was left of the log they had chopped that afternoon.

“It got cold all of a sudden,” she said.

“The bathroom window is open,” explained Adela. “There was too much smoke and I opened a window...”

“Don’t interrupt us!” Yelled Laura, turning her head. “Let’s see what the doctor has to say. This idea of the Unknown God brings about a new element, one that we hadn’t considered until now. What do you think, doctor?”

Procopie shrugged again and covered his mouth as if he were trying to hide a smile.

²¹In English in the original.

“Interestingly, I, too, was wondering what this whole occurrence resembles. Because it resembles something that I know, but I can’t remember what. In any case, if it were a new epiphany of the Unknown God, it couldn’t be *Agnostos Theos* from Saint Paul’s Athens. It doesn’t resemble at all the God imagined by the Greeks.”

Darie impatiently shook his head.

“Certainly. Certainly. But there are all sorts of unknown gods and divinities...”

“Enough of that,” interrupted Laura. “I only regret one thing – that you didn’t get the chance to explain to Ivan what you meant by that mysterious expression: “a series of mutually contradicting certainties...””

Darie snapped out of it and gave her a smile hiding a great fervour.

“I think that it was the most profound, but also most unforgiving self-analysis of all that I had attempted in my life. I felt then that I had intuited something that had always been out of my reach. I had figured out – how should I put this? – the very principle of my existence; maybe even beyond my own,” he added lowering his voice. “I felt that I had figured out the very mystery of any human existence. And that approximate formula – “a series of mutually contradicting certainties” – was the first attempt to translate that mystery that I had just unlocked and I was on the verge of analysing and defining it. But, evidently, as it almost always happens with dreams, now I cannot remember anything...”

He looked around and felt that except for Laura and Procopie, people listened more out of politeness. They had been called to the dinner table just as Laura was asking her last question and they were compelled to listen – most were standing and some were by the living room door. He should have stood up as well, to clearly mark the end of the discussion, but a weird yet pleasant fatigue pinned him there, in the armchair. He was smiling absently, trying to understand what was happening to him. He felt Laura’s hand on his arm:

“Let’s go, we’re the last ones,” she whispered. “It’s late...”

*

He got up only when he felt his arm being pulled vigorously.

“It’s late, sir,” said Zamfira with a smile. “It’s getting dark...”

Darie looked around in a daze and rubbed his eyes. Then he looked again, blinking fast, trying to wake up. They were in the cornfield. He felt that he had never heard so many crickets at the same time. Above them, the sky had turned pale, but there were no stars yet.

“Where’s Ivan?” He asked.

“He’s resting in the ground,” answered Zamfira. “We just didn’t have a cross for his grave.”

“He brought us luck,” added Iliescu. “What a show you missed! Worse than the day before yesterday, by the bridge. You were fast asleep. And we were going about our business...”

Zamfira pointed above the cornfield.

“The German planes were flying so low that I was scared they’d get their wings caught in the corn. They were shooting the cornfield because they thought the Russians were hiding in there. They left us alone, to get the work done... Maybe they thought we’re burying one of our own.”

“And over there,” interrupted Iliescu as he pointed in the other direction, “the Russians started with their Brandts. Lucky, they didn’t get up to here. They dragged it on for a while but then we couldn’t hear them anymore. Maybe they got shot down by the hunter planes – there were about twenty – or maybe they changed direction. Because, if the Germans sent so many planes, surely, what’s left of their division’s retreating through here too... It would’ve been better to send them the day before yesterday, by the bridge, he added and spat angrily. There wouldn’t have been such a slaughter...”

Darie leaned over and grabbed his knapsack.

“And now, we’re at God’s mercy,” said Zamfira while helping him put it on, “because if the Russians changed direction, they’ll cut us off and we have to sneak behind them again till we run into our battalion.”

“Don’t you be worried,” interrupted Iliescu, “we’ll manage to get through this too...”

They came out onto a wide rough path that seemed to go on forever through the cornfield.

“I dreamt,” started Darie without looking at them, “I happened to be in Iași, it was winter, and I was telling my friends about Ivan...”

“That’s a beautiful dream,” said Iliescu noticing that the silence persisted.

“If you dreamt about Ivan, it’ll bring luck,” added Zamfira.

“What’s funny is that the lieutenant was saying that we were wrong to carry Ivan, that we wasted too much time. Because, if we pitied him, we should have shot him, to put him out of his misery. We shouldn’t have taken him with us.”

“That’s how the orders are,” said Iliescu. “But you saw it too, sir, he brought us luck.”

“To be fair, we broke a sweat,” interrupted Zamfira. “We talked to him, we told him stories.”

Darie stopped suddenly and looked at them both, one after the other.

“Fellas, is it just me or are there millions of crickets here? They’re killing me...”

“They’re just crickets, sir,” answered Zamfira. “There’s a lot of them but that’s how it is around this time of year... Maybe you haven’t been in the countryside during the summer in a while,” he added smiling.

Darie had taken his helmet off and looked at them for a while, undecided. Then, all of a sudden, turned around and started walking again.

“Interesting dream,” he started again after a long silence. “I can't make sense of it. Why did I think, *in the dream*, that what I was about to tell Ivan a few hours ago, *here*, when you guys called me, was so important? It's interesting, isn't it?” He asked, turning towards Zamfira.

“The dreams,” answered Zamfira, “who can figure them out?”

“Dreams have a message if you know how to read them,” said Iliescu.

Darie nodded, still contemplating, and picked up the pace.

“No, I was thinking about something else; that's why I said it's interesting. It's interesting because, *in the dream*, on the one hand, I was convinced that the few words that I had started to tell Ivan entailed something truly profound that I did not get to say because you guys called me; on the other hand, still in the dream, I could not remember those ideas that were so important. I could only remember the beginning: ‘a series of mutually contradicting certainties.’ What an extraordinary revelation this expression entailed, but it now seems quite trivial and stylistically problematic! Because I know very well what I was referring to. And if you guys hadn't called me, I'd have given Ivan a few instances of ‘mutually contradicting certainties’. For instance, Laura, that girl from Iași, had, and still has, her own way of being *obvious*. But it wasn't just her. There was, for instance... There was... There was, for instance, let's say, my passion for philosophy...”

He stopped talking all of a sudden, combed his hair back and started rubbing his forehead absently.

“It's hard,” started Zamfira, “philosophy's hard.”

“It's the hardest,” added Iliescu. “It's the hardest because you can't figure it out.”

Darie put his helmet back on, absently, and continued on a serious tone, almost severe:

“What's stranger, is that, *then*, in the dream, I was right. *I forgot*. I forgot what I was about to tell Ivan. What probably inspired me was, to put it this way, his presence, his extraordinary agony, as he was withering away, walled in, absolutely alone. Ivan's case

probably revealed to me my own human condition; although, evidently, I didn't see this at the time. I wanted, simply, to do what you guys had told me – to keep him talking, to tell him *anything* really, to keep him from dying...

He stopped abruptly, realizing that he had left the path and was now struggling to get through the corn. He turned towards Zamfira, who was a few steps behind.

“Fellas, do you know where we're going? We're diving back into the cornfield.”

“This is the way, sir,” confirmed Zamfira. “On the path, we might run into a Russian patrol. We'll keep going through the cornfield till midnight; and only after that, God willing, we'll get out on the road behind the Russians. We'll follow them till daylight. After that, we'll drive back into the cornfield and rest.”

Iliescu stopped a few metres away on the left and signaled them by raising his arm.

“We better watch out,” he whispered. “Let's spread out so we don't shake the corn too much. At least till it's really dark. After that we can loosen up a bit... Sir, you stay in the middle, between us.” He added getting closer to him. “Look to your left and to your right to see how the cornstalks move. When you want to stop and rest a bit, whistle softly; we'll stop to wait for you...”

Here, Darie noticed that there weren't as many crickets. Or maybe they had stopped as they felt something near. It was getting dark, yet, there was no breeze piercing through. The air was still hot and the dry corn leaves that he touched emanated a suffocating, bitter dust. He was trying to sneak around the cornstalks without shaking them too violently, but his knapsack and rifle were getting tangled. He kept running into clods of dry earth, and when his boot got caught in a weed, thin and twisted in many stems on the ground, he would yank it out of its roots with his foot. Rattling the corn dispersed a bitter dust that enveloped him and small dark moths kept running into his face.

After about a quarter of an hour, he heard a whistle and he stopped. He looked to his right and to his left but could not distinguish anything. He took a deep breath and leaned his head back. He found a starry, bright sky. He waited, taking deep, slow breaths. Then he heard that whistle again and Iliescu's voice:

“Let’s get going, sir.”

*

“We walked till after midnight. It didn’t matter so much that we were tired, hungry and thirsty, I couldn’t stop wondering what was going to happen to us in the morning, or the following day, or, at best, the day after that. As soon as we stepped into the cornfield, I had a feeling that we were walking backwards, that we were returning to the bridge where we miraculously got away the day before. I understood that going into the village was no longer an option if Zamfira’s hypothesis was correct – that the Russians had changed direction after the German attack. The bigger part of the Russian army had left the main road and scattered into the villages nearby. But I didn’t understand why we had to go back to the bridge. Evidently, I trusted their sense of direction. They were both sure that we were going the right way. Zamfira had warned me that we had to sneak behind the Russians, but, instead of following their trail, I felt that we were going in the other direction... Should we wait for the others or keep going?” he asked as he glanced towards the pine trees that had grown freely along the cliffs. “I don’t see anybody.”

“I say we wait for them,” said Arhip, resting his head on his backpack. “To be honest, this last wall wore me out. I haven’t been this way for a few years now. I hike Piatra Craiului²² through Omul. I forgot how steep this climb is... But I’d like to hear the end of your story, he added. You’ve sparked my interest...”

Darie looked for his pack of cigarettes.

“Obviously, Laura’s convinced that, in some way or another, Ivan blessed us and his blessing brought us luck.”

“Don’t light that,” interrupted Arhip. “Wait a minute. You’re still tired. The climb tired you out too.”

“What’s stranger,” continued Darie as he complied and placed the cigarettes back in his pocket, “is that not even once did I wonder what Ivan was doing there, so badly wounded, alone in the middle of a cornfield, where there hadn’t been any fighting, and

²²Mountain peak in central Romania.

which German planes hadn't had the chance to shoot. Who wounded him so badly that he could no longer move and barely talk? And how did he not lose more blood? The ground around him was barely moist. And where was his rifle, where was his knapsack? He only had a revolver in his pants' pocket, and even that was empty. Nothing else; Zamfira searched him. He was hoping to find some identification papers, a letter, a photo. Since he was sure that Ivan had blessed us, he wanted to find out his name and let the family know and tell them where we buried him. But he didn't find anything. And, he added after a short pause to pull out his pack of cigarettes again, none of us wondered: *What was Ivan doing there?* How did he get there?"

"Every world has its own structure and logic," said Arhip. "As you well know, sir, there are two kinds of contradictions, or inconsistencies: those that are obvious even from the *inside* of their system of reference and those that unravel as such, those contradictions or inconsistencies that reveal themselves only when we look at them from *outside* the system."

Darie listened to him, lost in thought, smoking absently.

"It's interesting," he added a good while later, "now that I look at you better, I realize how much you resemble Ivan. Although, at first glance, you share nothing with Ivan. But, let me be clear: only *at first...*"

Arhip lifted his head off his backpack. As if for the first time, he was serious and captivated.

"I could say I was expecting this remark", he started with a smile. "In a way, you are still obsessed with Ivan's mystery. Consciously or not, you try by any means to uncover his secret, to decipher his message. But, since Ivan is out of your reach – not because he died, but because, while alive, he could barely speak and the few words he said were sealed with seven seals because you didn't speak Russian – since Ivan is out of your reach, you try to find him in every new person you meet. The last person you met recently, some five-six hours ago, is me. So I understand very well: you were about to ask me what I think went through Ivan's mind. I don't mind. Ask me and I'll try to answer."

Darie let out an awkward laugh and shrugged, then turned to find a rock to put out his cigarette.

“You technologists, sociologists, psychologists are odd people. But I don’t think things are always as simple as you see them, sir. To be quite honest, when I told you that you resembled Ivan, what troubled me more in this sudden discovery, wasn’t the hope that, through you, sir, I could figure out what went through Ivan’s mind, but the hope that this symbolic homology of you and Ivan would allow *me* to recreate the context of that mysterious formula: “a series of mutually contradicting certainties”. The formula that I had given Ivan to explain what happened to me after November 8th. It seemed to me at the time that I had discovered the secret of the human condition in this simple first degree equation...”

“Are you two still talking about Ivan?” Laura asked, as she came up from behind them. “How far did you get?”

“But where did you come from?” Replied Darie, surprised. “How is it that I didn’t see you?”

“We went shopping,” answered Laura. She sat down with a sigh of relief. “I’m completely drained...”

“But the others, where are they?” He asked.

“They’ll be here in a minute. Adela stopped by the kiosk to get papers, while the doctor with mother and the others are going from door to door to see if anyone can spare some more firewood. It got cold and it looks like it's about to snow.”

Darie noticed that he was stroking both armrests of the chair and smiled in secret.

“You’ll have to tell me the story of this armchair one day. I’m under the impression that every time I remember Ivan, or, more precisely, every time I remember him *in this armchair*, I’m either dreaming or waking up from a dream...”

“This time, it’s neither,” replied Arhip.

“What do you mean?” Asked Darie staring at him with a troubled look on his face.

Arhip shrugged.

“How else can you put it? You tried the expression “a series of mutually contradicting certainties”, but you didn’t seem too enthusiastic about it. So let’s keep looking,” he said while leaving.

As Darie watched him disappear, he was both upset and angry that he could not add anything else.

“Alors, nous sommes foutus!” He whispered. *Il n’y a plus d’espoir. Foutus pour l’éternité !...*”

*

“Nous sommes foutus!” He grumbled just as Zamfira signaled them to go. *“Foutus pour l’éternité!”*

They came out onto a side road that winded through the cornfields. It was rough and riddled with holes. The noise of the crickets was loud again and it blasted from all sides. Now that they were out of the cornfield, they could take off their helmets; Darie was holding his helmet in his hand, while the others hung them on their knapsacks. Stars had started to appear but they couldn’t feel the night’s chill yet.

“You shouldn’t be talking, sir,” said Zamfira. “You got to be worn out...”

“Now that it’s past midnight, we can speak more freely,” added Iliescu. “Till we run into the main road. There, we’ll have to be careful again...”

Darie found his handkerchief in the top pocket of his coat and, absent-minded, he started to wipe his face.

“Fellas,” he said a moment later, “are you sure this is the way?”

“This is the way,” said Zamfira. “Look at the stars. We went around so that we don’t end up in the village, but we’re on the right track. We’re behind the Russians...”

Darie glanced at the phosphorescent face of his watch.

“It’s twelve thirty-five. If we get to the main road soon, and everything works out, we can march till around four. After that, as you were saying, we have to go back into the cornfield. But what if, in ten, twelve kilometres, we run into wheat fields, or oat fields, or rape, or whatever else... how are we going to hide there?”

“Don’t be worried, sir,” said Iliescu, “I passed by here in the spring, when the grains were sprouting. All of Ukraine is as you see it, corn for a few kilometres, wheat or rye or whatever else further on. And then corn again.”

“It’s water that’ll give us trouble,” added Zamfira. “Maybe we won’t find any, in an abandoned well or a puddle in the field. Maybe we won’t find any for a couple of days. It’ll be hard at first, but with God’s help, we’ll make it. I know some weeds and there are roots too, and now and then maybe we’ll even run into raw milky corn... We’ll make it, don’t be worried.”

“As for food,” added Iliescu, “we’ll eat what we ate tonight – corn. Too bad it’s a bit stale and we can’t smoulder it. But it’s good just the same. It calms the hunger.”

Darie was tucking his handkerchief back in his pocket when he stepped into a hole. He was about to fall, his knapsack pushing into his neck. Zamfira grabbed him by the arm.

“Oh my God, if you twisted your ankle just now, wouldn’t be good.”

“When you slip in a hole and not fall, they say it’s a good sign,” remembered Iliescu.

Darie stuffed his handkerchief back in his pocket.

“Speaking of holes,” he started with a smile on his face, “I’ve been meaning to ask you two why you struggled so hard to dig Ivan such a sumptuous grave, I mean – so big.”

“It wasn’t big sir,” said Zamfira, “it was a Christian grave like all graves.”

“When you started digging,” interrupted Darie, “you were at least two metres apart. You’d think you were trying to bury a whole patrol...”

Suddenly in a good mood, he started laughing as if the thirst and exhaustion had miraculously disappeared. The others had a good laugh too but Darie understood that they laughed only to please him.

“God forbid,” started Zamfira a good moment later, “but you know it wasn’t two metres long...”

“Come to think of it,” continued Iliescu, “you wouldn’t have been able to see it, sir, you were already in the cornfield.”

“That was later, when we saw that the German planes were getting close. As soon as I saw them in the yonder and heard the Russian Brandts, I saw you two digging. I remember it very well.”

“Zamfira will tell you,” said Iliescu a good moment later. “He’ll tell you how it was. We had barely started shoveling, and when we saw the German planes, we signaled them, because they had started to shoot the edge of the cornfield. We looked for you to make sure you didn’t get hit. We found you right there where we woke you up later. We let you rest. And only *after that*, we came back and dug the grave. When the second wave of planes passed, a quarter of an hour later, the grave was almost done. We signaled them from afar, with our shovels, but they had seen us too and shot around us... Isn’t that right Zamfira?”

“That’s right; just like Iliescu told you,” confirmed Zamfira.

Darie started laughing again.

“That’s even better. That means that I started dreaming before I even fell asleep. That happened to me before,” he added.

Then he stopped talking, walking absently. A quarter of an hour later, Iliescu ran in front, bending over slightly because the corn stalks here were shorter and spread out. He signaled them to approach carefully.

“We reached the open field,” whispered Zamfira. “The main road must be right in front of us, and not too far. Let me go first, sir...”

For two hours they walked, spread out, through the field. They had found the main road quickly. They crossed in a hurry because they could hear an endless row of Russian trucks behind them, advancing with their headlights off. The night was clear and cold here. The sky seemed suddenly too close, sparkling with stars, with a single transparent cloud, floating afar towards the west, in front of them. From time to time, they felt a slow breeze carrying the scent of burnt grass and fuel.

He saw the lonely tree from afar and whistled them over to rest there, but Zamfira signaled him to continue following them.

“Nous sommes foutus!” Grumbled Darie.

He wanted to spit, like Iliescu, but his mouth was dry and in that moment, all of a sudden, he felt a surprising and almost frightening chill. He tried to pick up the pace but he almost couldn't tell how fast he was going anymore. He found himself running, holding his rifle in his right hand and using his left to hold down his knapsack on his back. He stopped, exhausted, and took a few deep breaths.

“What were you afraid of, Philosopher?” Whispered someone.

He turned around in a panic and saw Procopie. He was waiting by the tree with the dog by his side. He was smiling.

“What were you afraid of?” He repeated seeing that Darie was just staring at him.

“But what are you doing here, doctor? How did you get here?”

He was suddenly no longer exhausted; even more so, he was rejuvenated. He rushed over to Procopie.

“Where's your unit?” he asked again, as he got right in front of him. At that moment, he realized that he had confused him. Embarrassed, he tried an awkward apology. “It's dark, I didn't recognize you. I know you are Arhip. But I still don't understand what you are doing here. You're still looking for the formula? Are you still looking?”

The other guy was looking at him with the same smile, friendly yet ironic.

“I asked you a question, Philosopher, and I see that you don’t want to answer. You said that we are indestructible. So then, what were you afraid of?”

“Ivan!” whispered Darie.

“That’s not my name, but I don’t mind. Call me what you wish; call me Ivan.”

Darie took a step forward.

“So then, you knew Romanian and you didn’t say anything. You let us torture ourselves...”

“Now, we can understand all languages,” interrupted Ivan. “But it doesn’t matter; we don’t need them anymore... Still, you said that we’re indestructible. You shouldn’t have been afraid.”

Confused, Darie started rubbing his forehead.

“I wasn’t afraid. I got cold all of a sudden and I didn’t know why. So I started running... That’s all...”

Ivan gave him a long and friendly look and smiled again.

“You spoke to me kind words just now, yesterday, the day before, whenever that was. I liked, above all, that you understood – at such a young age! – that we are indestructible.”

“So then, *you understood everything*,” whispered Darie.

“What I didn’t understand,” added Ivan, “was your disbelief, Philosopher, your fear that you will never rest again. But why would you want to rest? We’ve only just started. What do we have behind us? Maybe not even a million years. If we start counting from *Homo Sapiens*, only a few thousands of years. And look at what’s to come: Billions and billions of years!”

Taken aback, Darie listened to him attentively.

“Billions of years,” he repeated in whisper. “I know, I know, but what can we do with them, with the billions of years?”

“We breathe life into the Earth, then into the solar system, and into the galaxies, and everything else that’s out there that we don’t know of yet. To breathe life into them is to say to bring them to life, to awaken the soul that rests in any life, alienated; to bless the entire Creation, as some of you like to call it.”

“So then, Zamfira was right. You blessed us.”

“Yes and No. As doctor Procopie said very well...”

“But how do you know of doctor Procopie?” Interrupted Darie.

Ivan gave him a strange look, almost surprised, then he smiled and shrugged.

“Now we know everything; more exactly, everything we want to know. And you interest me because you took pity on me and you spoke to me. And Zamfira and Iliescu interest me too because they went through the trouble of carrying me to the village and then they buried me. Not that I care about being buried but I was moved by their intention.”

Darie started rubbing his forehead.

“The guys!” He whispered. “Where could they be?”

“They’re a bit farther away, in the field, waiting for you. Don’t worry, they’re just resting. In any case, I’m not going to keep you long; soon, I must be on my way. But I wanted to chat some more. We haven’t been seeing each other a lot lately – at the edge of the cornfield, but we didn’t recognize each other then so we couldn’t talk, at Mrs. Machedon’s place, hiking Piatra-Craiului... There were times when we would see each other more often...”

Darie could not help but laugh, confused by the statement.

“I’m sorry to contradict you,” he started, “but I’m sure that you’re wrong. I only met Procopie and Arhip recently; and you, I’ve only met yesterday or two days ago at the edge of the cornfield, as you said.”

“We’ve known each other for a long time,” Ivan interrupted, “I can’t even tell you how long. But we always recognize each other when it’s too late.”

Darie listened closely, focused and, as usual when a discussion piqued his interest, he automatically reached in his pocket to look for his cigarettes. This time, the gesture sufficed.

“I think I understand what you are trying to say,” he whispered while nodding. “As a matter of fact, life, a complete human existence can develop and fulfill itself in a few months; maybe even less.”

“And, interestingly, the same topics always resurfaced in our discussions, added Ivan. For instance, the series of mutually contradicting certainties. How many times and in how many different languages you spoke to me of that...”

“What’s worse,” added Darie melancholically, “what's worse is that I don’t remember what I wanted to say with that. More precisely, I don’t remember what *followed*. I had started this sentence and I was about to uncover a whole system but the guys called me and I lost my trail of thought.”

“You said what needed to be said. What needed to be said *for now*,” he emphasized. “You’ll say the rest later. You said it to me before and you're going to like it too when I discover it again...”

Darie looked at him with warmth, yet not without an almost provocative irony.

“When I listen to you Ivan, I have the impression that I’m listening to Arhip. The last time I spoke to him...”

“When was this?” Interrupted Ivan. “Some hundred years ago, or months? In what life?”

“Don't take this the wrong way,” he added seeing that Darie was starting to frown, confused, “it’s not *time* but the intervals between the mutually contradicting certainties, as you like to call them. I apologize for interrupting you,” he added a good while later, seeing as Darie was silent. “I’ve interrupted you before, you may not remember now; the interval between these certainties is far too long. I interrupted you as you were about to explain how you use the expression *Agnostos Theos*. You saw it in front of you, like through an

internal projector, the image of Ivan somehow buried inside his own body. And you meant to say that this is how God appears sometimes, the Supreme Spirit, captured and closed within Matter, blinded and alienated, ignorant of its own identity. But what God was this? In any case, not the God of Paul, nor the Greek one. You were thinking of the gnostic myths, of the Hindu conceptions of Spirit and Matter.”

“Certainly. Certainly. That’s what Procopie remarked as well.”

“And, still, there was some truth in your comparison but only if we adopt a new perspective. The Spirit is *always* camouflaged in Matter but its purpose there – if it’s a prisoner or it’s there temporarily because it’s active and so on and so forth – its purpose you’ll understand later. This is, in fact, the Enigma – Enigma with an uppercase – the Enigma that confronts us all. This is the riddle that arises relentlessly in every man: How can I recognize the Spirit if it’s camouflaged in Matter? That’s to say that it’s *unrecognizable*? And that’s how we all are, Philosopher: Not only indestructible, as you said, but also unrecognizable... But I see that they’re waiting for you,” he added looking behind him.

In the twilight that announced the sunrise, Darie saw a familiar silhouette about twenty metres away, in the field. Somewhere very far away, towards the main road that they had crossed that night, he could discern scattered groups, advancing slowly, as if hesitating.

“And I have to go too,” Ivan added. “They are waiting for me too, there.”

He pointed east. Darie searched the yonder but couldn't discern anything. The dog had started walking away, in no rush, with his head down, and Darie recognized him. He smiled with happiness and pointed to him.

“He recognized you,” he whispered. “He was the only one to recognize you...”

“You try it too, Philosopher,” said Ivan looking Darie straight in the eye, severely. “Try it next time – when will this be? And where? In some parlor in Iași, in Tokyo, in the mountains, or in a hospital, or on another planet? If I were to recognize you first, I’d let you know, but I won’t recognize you either. But if I do recognize you and I let you know,

you won't understand. That's the truth, Philosopher, we're unrecognizable to ourselves and to others..."

He was slowly walking away, as if lost in thought, but stopped suddenly, having realized that Darie was following him.

"No, he added with a smile. That's our way. Your way is in the opposite direction," said Ivan pointing west. "Hurry. They are waiting..."

He waved a short goodbye and he turned around to head towards the open plain, advancing slowly with the dog in front of him.

*

He suddenly remembered Zamfira and Iliescu and picked up the pace. He sensed that daylight was fast approaching because the plain was fairly visible. It was endless in all directions. The sky was murky, without stars, looking more like a mountain fog. Suddenly, as he approached the tree, he ran into the lieutenant.

"I didn't recognize you just now, lieutenant, sir," he stammered. "It was still dark."

"I'm not in a hurry. I was listening to your conversation because it interests me. You learned a lot from Ivan. He might've also been a philosopher once, he added with a smile. But now we have to hurry, the others are waiting."

They started walking towards the main road.

"Indeed, why was I afraid?" he said out of the blue. "I've known for a while that we're indestructible. And still," he added after a pause, lost in thought, "and still..."

At that moment, he recognized his platoon and stopped, afraid that his emotions might take over.

"So, you're coming too, sir?" Started Manole with a smile. "As you can see, we've gathered almost everybody..."

Suddenly, he remembered Iliescu and Zamfira and turned around.

"The guys!" He whispered in a panic.

“They’re in front,” reassured the lieutenant. “Everyone’s returning home as best they can,” he added melancholically. “We’re going to the river first, that’s where we’re gathering...”

Darie realized that they had been walking for a while, but he couldn't remember when they had started. He shrugged, in a good mood, and picked up the pace. He found himself at the front of the platoon. He couldn't hear their voices, but he knew that they were talking because he could understand what they were saying. The sky was still murky, but there was enough light that he could see wherever he looked: in front of him, on the left, on the right and behind him, he could see more scattered groups, advancing quietly, at the same steady pace, which seemed unusually fast to him. He stopped several times to look behind. The field stretched out as far as he could see under the foggy and murky sky, with a few solitary trees here and there. Suddenly, it felt strange that there were no birds or planes, not even the muffled rumble of the Russian trucks that he'd recently seen passing on the road.

“That’s Ukraine for you,” he heard the lieutenant say. “Must be beautiful to them because it’s their country. But you’ll see how it’ll look when we arrive.”

“Is there still a long way to go?” Asked Darie.

He realized it was a pointless question because he knew, in some way, that they were already there. He would have wanted to laugh and apologize, but he was interrupted.

“It’s a long way and still quite close. It’ll be hard to reach the river, that’s what they say. But, you know, our division is Oltenian²³. People want to go home, each to his village... to rest,” he added with a smile.

“But what about after that, lieutenant, sir”, he asked with an uncontrollable passion. “What happens when we get home? Some in Iași, others in Bucharest, in Oltenia. I told you, we’re indestructible. I was telling Ivan and he was agreeing with me. And I told Zamfira, and Zamfira, in his own way, Zamfira and Iliescu...”

²³ Oltenia is the western half of Wallachia – historical province of Romania; located in the southwest of Romania.

He stopped all of a sudden, seeing them about twenty metres away marching slowly, with great difficulty, as they were carrying the wounded man on their rifles. And the road by the edge of the cornfield was riddled with holes and the hot dust of summer afternoon was choking them. He ran after them and yelled:

“Fellas, you’re nuts, completely nuts! You’re starting over? Wasn’t Ivan enough; you found another one?”

He got closer and froze, seeing himself hanging off their rifles. He had a bloody handkerchief on his face and his shirt was torn and bloody under his open jacket.

“What happened?” He whispered. “What’s happened to me?”

They stopped and set him down carefully on the side of the road. Zamfira made the sign of the cross.

“Thank God, you’re coming to, sir,” he whispered under a heavy breath.

“It’s as I predicted,” interrupted Iliescu, “it’s Ivan’s vodka...”

“A stroke of good luck,” continued Zamfira. “We ran into them while they were asleep, drunk. We took everything we could: water, vodka, tobacco...”

“But what happened to me?” Whispered Darie, frightened. “Did someone hurt me?”

“In an evil hour,” added Zamfira, “you tripped and fell on your rifle. It went off and the bullet went straight through your underarm. No big deal but you fainted and by the time we found you, you had lost a lot of blood. If we tied up your arm on the spot, it would be like nothing happened...”

Darie looked around. They were between cornfields on the side of the road. The same fine, harsh, suffocating dust floated atop. It felt like he had known this dust since forever, but it burned more than ever. Using his able hand, he reached inside his pocket for his pack of cigarettes. He found it torn and flattened. Iliescu held out the Russian ones to him, waited for Darie to choose one and lit it for him.

“Fellas,” he started after a few drags, “you’re good people, devoted, but you’ve gone through enough trouble for me. Now, you have to follow my order; you have to follow it because it’ll be my last order...”

He stopped abruptly and took a drag, quickly, so that he could hide his emotions.

“We’re soldiers,” he continued, “we’ve all seen death. I, for one, can say that I saw it with my own eyes. I mean it when I say: I’m not afraid of death. On the other hand, I have to confess: I’m not lucky, I’ve never been. I’ve always been ridden with evil spirits.”

“Yes,” interrupted Laura, “it was enough for him to talk about bad luck and evil spirits so that they both stop him, arms flailing, as if he’d just blasphemed. And they were right to do so,” she added while turning around to look at him. “We had met one another three years earlier and we were, in a way, engaged. If our dear Philosopher here calls that bad luck...”

“The truth is,” continued Darie, “they didn’t want to listen to me when I asked them to shoot me or to load my rifle and give it to me. I told them that if they really wanted to, I’d give them my permission to dig me a grave like they did for Ivan. And many other things I proposed: To talk till sundown and I’d explain what to do in Iași, whom they need to speak to first... all in vain. And then, I’m afraid, I lost my cool and started threatening them.”

He had grabbed a second cigarette, which Iliescu lit for him, humbly, with tears in his eyes.

“The court-martial will eat you alive,” he started in a surprisingly stern voice. “If we catch up to the battalion, I will ask that you two be court-martialed immediately for disobeying an order and insulting a superior officer.”

“In God’s command,” said Zamfira, too afraid to look up. “There are good people at the court-martial. We’ll tell them we just did our duty.”

“That you had lost a lot of blood and you had a fever and maybe you asked us to reload your rifle because you are out of it and you were weakened and hungry and tired.”

Darie looked at them in a silent desperation. He threw his cigarette and went to the lieutenant, determined.

“What are we going to do with them, lieutenant, sir, now that they’re not following orders anymore?...”

The lieutenant gave him a long look, as if he were trying to recognize him. He then shrugged and walked away. Darie picked up the pace to catch up to him.

“It’s Darie, sir, cadet second lieutenant Constantin Darie from your company. You know me well. We even had a chat last night in the field, after I saw Ivan.”

The lieutenant stopped. He gave him a warm yet stern look.

“Darie,” he started slowly, emphasizing every word, “after *six days of fire*, you should already know what an order is.”

“And this is the hardest line to understand, I think,” intervened Laura once more. “What did he mean that you should know what an order is?...”

*

“...Toamnei Street Number 11, Iași. Toamnei Street Number 11! How many times I repeated this address, afraid that they’d forget it, or confused it with so many other addresses that other wounded men, dying men, whispered to them in the last few months. Because they were in their second year on the front and had been part of countless platoons that were decimated one by one until July. That’s when the platoon that I commanded was formed from the remnants. This one was decimated after only 6 days of fire, as the lieutenant mentioned. Iași, Toamnei Street Number 11, Number 11.”

“That’s Miss Laura’s place, said Zamfira smiling and nodding. Don’t worry, sir, if we get there before you, that’s the first place we go to. And we’ll tell her that you’ll be coming back soon, soon, and that you’re coming back with second lieutenant stripes.”

“Don’t tell her that,” interrupted Darie, “don’t tell her about the stripes. Tell her what I’ve asked you,” he added.

He suddenly felt completely drained of strength and looked at his wounded arm. It felt like it was constantly bleeding. At times, it felt like the wound had been hemorrhaging for a while and that he was soaked in blood under his coat. And he kept expecting to see rivers of warm blood pouring on the ground.

“If you don’t remember everything,” he started later, almost whispering, “tell her the essential at least. That, even though we only met three years ago, we’ve known each other forever and we were happy since the beginning of times and we will continue to be happy until the last star in the last galaxy dies off. Remember what I tell you now because this is the most important: tell her that the linden tree we know, the one in Iași, that linden tree *was enough for us*. The first night that we stopped there stayed with us and it will forever be our night till the end of times. The linden tree will never lose its flowers. *It cannot lose them anymore*. It’s ours and nothing of ours is tied to time.”

“We’ll tell her, sir,” said Zamfira dampening his handkerchief and carefully wiping off his mouth, his face, his forehead. “But now you rest because the stars are lighting up and soon after midnight we have to get going again...”

As usual, they were hidden in the cornfield with the bitter dust floating above, smelling like smoke. They were whispering, only allowing themselves to raise their voices when the noise of the crickets would become too loud.

“It’s extraordinary how they survived so many days,” intervened Laura. “And it’s unbelievable how they managed to tip toe around Russian troops, how they managed to find water, even vodka to wash the wound, and they always had food...”

“Dry corn, roots, a few crackers,” started Darie. “On the fifth day, a chocolate that Iliescu found in the pocket of a dead German soldier. Convoys of prisoners were passing on the main road and a lot of them were wounded. Some would fall on the side of the road and would wait until God or some sentinel from the next convoy would take pity on them and end their suffering. Iliescu learned where to look for useful things: water, crackers, matches and tobacco. He just couldn’t find bread.”

“How did they not get lost?” Exclaimed Laura. “How did they manage, for so many days, to avoid bumping into people from the village? The corn harvest had started.”

“We were lucky, of course,” answered Darie, “but Zamfira had the instinct of a wild beast. It’s like he could feel people getting close and we would hide on the spot. We even spent a whole day in a haystack, listening to some women working not even a hundred metres away... But what bothered me most was my accident. I don’t know how they managed to carry me so many nights. Sometimes on their rifles, or in a Russian cape. I can’t remember. I’d probably faint or, since I was so exhausted, I’d be completely out of it. But I’d think of Ivan, of our discussion, which left such an impression on me. Where was his blessing? They carried him for less than an hour, but they carried me night after night following the luck that Ivan’s blessing brought us. I remember asking myself once if maybe Ivan *willed* the accident on me so that he’d be able to meet me and tell me what he had to say. But what fault did Zamfira and Iliescu have in this whole philosophical controversy?”

“It wasn’t philosophy, sir,” whispered Zamfira. “It was in an evil hour...”

*

“Ravens are starting to gather again, said Iliescu after a while. What sort of omen is that?”

Darie shielded his eyes to take a look. The sky was burning and the sun's glare was blinding.

“Those are planes,” he said.

“There are planes too; but they fly high, very high,” added Zamfira. “The ravens are here, close by...”

Darie got lost in a thought and smiled.

“In a way, that’s what we’re doing. We’re following them, our guys, but from afar, getting farther... How many hundreds of kilometres away do you think the front is? Because, for a few days now, we haven’t heard the Russian Brandts, nor our artillery...”

“If the German counter attack breaks out,” said Iliescu, “we’ll find ourselves in the middle of the front in a day or two.”

“*Nous sommes foutus!*” Grumbled Darie. “*Foutus pour l’éternité!*”

He tried to fall asleep again, but the intense heat felt more suffocating than ever and, no matter how he laid between the corn stalks, his wounded arm throbbed, flooding his wound with blood, and the blood throbbed in his temples as if to burst into his ears. The others had fallen asleep, handkerchiefs covering their faces, holding their rifles. They woke up often, one after the other, just for a few moments to visually check on him. Later on, after sundown, Darie figured out why he couldn’t sleep. They were in the same cornfield where they had gone a few days earlier; he couldn’t remember how many. They were a few hundred metres away, or even less, from where they had buried Ivan. He had recognized it at dawn, when they cowered into the cornfield, exhausted, short of breath, making their way through the corn with great fear. He recognized it, but he was too exhausted to speak. That night, he had tried walking for the first time. He held himself up using a sort of a cane, a piece of a strong tent pole that Iliescu had found. He walked with difficulty, on the side of the road, afraid of the following step. From time to time, one of them would help him and they stopped every five, ten minutes. In almost five hours, they had not even walked ten kilometers; but that was still more than what they had walked the previous nights, when they carried him.

“We’re back where we started,” he whispered as quietly as he could, not to wake the others. “We’re back with Ivan.”

He almost wanted to laugh; their adventure suddenly felt so absurd. If he could be sure that he wouldn’t wake them, he’d sneak through the field and wait for them at Ivan’s grave.

“Anyway, it’s not important,” he continued whispering. “Nothing matters. *Nous sommes foutus!* From every point of view. I knew this from the beginning. Everything that happened after November 8th.”

Another evening in the cornfield – but when: *when?* – He was startled by Zamfira asking:

“What happened after November 8th, sir?”

“All sort of things,” he answered with a smile. “Things that put me together and pulled me apart and then put me back together again...”

“Admit it, you were afraid to tell them about *me*. You spoke to them about Petrarch’s Laura and, I wonder, what did they understand from that long and laborious phenomenology of the Muse, especially since you had a fever. Not that they couldn’t understand but why would they care about some romance at the beginning of the Italian Renaissance? Had you spoken of *me*, of Iași, of Toamnei Street number 11, it would’ve been different. They’d have cared because, very likely, that was their story too...”

“Let’s get going, sir,” whispered Zamfira.

He had trouble getting up, even with Iliescu's help but, although he felt more tired than ever, he was determined—almost impatient—to walk. Right in front of him, Zamfira was clearing his way through the corn. For the first time there were no stars in the sky and you couldn’t tell one cloud from another. An ashy breeze floated atop, high in the sky. And for the first time, they couldn’t hear the crickets. From time to time, the corn leaves, rustling, made dull, metallic sounds, as if they were startled by a light wind that the soldiers could not feel.

Determined, Darie rushed towards a clearing in the cornfield marked by two lonely trees.

“Not that way, sir!” said Zamfira seeing that Darie was rushing with determination towards a clearing in the cornfield marked by two solitary trees. That leads into the side road we were on this morning.”

“That’s what I wanted to show you,” he answered without stopping, “that we’re back where we started ten, twelve days ago or whenever that was. Look ahead, a few

metres to the left, by the tree, that's where you dug his grave, Ivan's grave," he added as he felt Zamfira's strong grip on his arm.

"That's not the grave, sir," he whispered. "Ivan's resting kilometres away, east of here, at least forty kilometres."

"And still, that's where I saw you digging," added Darie. "Come with me, I'll show you, it's not far."

A few metres away, they all stopped. The hole was shallow, as if those who dug it realized it was too big and gave up on it. Or maybe they had run out of time.

"This is not a grave, sir," whispered Zamfira a good while later. "This was dug for something else. I can't tell for what. But, can't you see, it's longer than three metres; and, over there, there's another one. But that one doesn't seem straight; it's like it's turning into a cross. And there are others that we can't see from here".

"Let's get going," whispered Iliescu, looking to the sky. "Let's not get caught in the rain."

*

It only started to drizzle when they reached the main road and crossed it so that the Russian trucks wouldn't catch up to them. They started walking on a narrow road that ran parallel to the main road about two hundred metres away.

"If it starts raining harder, we won't need luck finding some water," whispered Iliescu when they stopped. "But if it rains for a few days in a row, the waters grow and it'll be harder to cross the river."

The rain was in no hurry, drizzling lightly, calmly, and Darie was advancing slowly, clenching his teeth to hold back the moans. Zamfira was beside him and Iliescu, about twenty metres away. Late in the night, at around three, he signaled them to stop. He turned around in a rush and ran back.

"We're going in the village. We have to cross the main road again and try from the other side," he whispered as he was pointing in that direction.

Darie allowed himself to take deep breaths but he continued holding back his moans with a furious will.

“We’ll tip toe to the main road,” continued Iliescu, “and we’ll wait for the right moment. There’s a turning point behind us. When it’s our turn, between two trucks, we’ll run across the road. I’ll go first, he added as he walked away.”

They were on their knees, waiting, under the rain, a few metres away from the road. They were hiding in some stunted shrubs. In front of them, trucks passed with their headlights off, seemingly less and less. About ten minutes later, all of a sudden, Iliescu rose from the ground and ran across bent down. They lost him in the darkness.

“Be ready, sir,” whispered Zamfira, “it’s going to be your turn. Let’s wait for this truck to pass... Now!” he whispered again a couple of moments earlier. “Now! Jump, sir!...”

With great effort, moaning in pain, Darie got up quickly and started running as fast as he could towards the main road. He clenched his cane in his hand, ready to lean on it if need be, but he soon dropped it, realizing that he could run and he took off at full speed across the field. He saw the river from afar and he would have continued running had he not heard the lieutenant calling his name. He stopped to turn around and saw the lieutenant.

“We’ve arrived, lieutenant, sir,” he said as he walked towards him. “We’ve arrived just in time. But where is the bridge?”

The lieutenant smiled and pointed at the river. The river was peaceful, majestic, quiet, and it was a couple of hundred metres away. You couldn’t see the other shore because the drizzle weaved a curtain of fog that the hesitant pale light of morning couldn’t pierce. Behind them, scattered groups kept appearing, standing still for just a moment, then heading towards the shore. The convoys that formed stood by the river as if they were waiting for the signal to cross.

“Where is the bridge?” asked Darie again. “I can’t see anything...”

The lieutenant shrugged.

“Look closer, Darie. There are many kinds of bridges in the world. The one that’s in front of you leads us us home.”

“Home,” repeated Darie. “It leads home. And after we arrive home, *what will happen to us*, sir? I asked you before and you didn’t answer. What happens after we arrive home? It would be horrible if we could never rest again...”

He went down to the shore with the lieutenant where he realized that the silent crowd whose conversations he could hear, the convoys that seemed to be waiting for a signal, were already walking across the river, at a fast pace even, as if on an invisible bridge. He was now on the bank of the river.

“Are you coming, Darie?” Asked the lieutenant.

He then walked towards a group that was waiting for them. They did not try to hide their impatience although they greeted them with warmth and excitement, smiling. The first ones started to cross and, right then, the sun seemed to rise from every direction because he was blinded by light. He saw the bridge that they were advancing on, a bridge seemingly made of the golden light that had blinded him. At the same time, he heard an unnatural vibrant explosion of sound, as if made up of gigantic crystal bells, and cymbals, and flutes, and the buzz of the crickets.

He felt Laura’s hand on his forehead and he heard his name called but he didn’t open his eyes.

“Don’t wake me, Laura,” he whispered. “Let me see them, let me see them crossing the bridge...”

“It’s not miss Laura, sir. It’s Iliescu and Zamfira from your platoon.”

“So then it’s real?” asked Darie with his eyes closed. “This time it’s *real*?...”

“It’s real, sir,” whispered Zamfira choking with emotion. “What should we tell miss Laura?”

“Tell her not to be afraid. Because everything is as it should be, and it’s beautiful. Tell her it’s really beautiful. There’s so much light. It’s like on Toamnei Street...”

He got up suddenly and, without looking at them, he started walking away again, almost running. The golden light from the bridge had disappeared and the river did not seem so close anymore, but he could see it, he could perceive in front of him far away towards the west. He was running with a childish happiness that he had forgotten about. He felt overwhelmed with a total and unexplainable euphoria. And then, he remembered: *I didn’t bless them...*

He stopped, but not without feeling regret. He felt his heart beating faster and faster. He looked towards the river one more time and it seemed to have started melting into the fog. He stood there for a moment, then turned back with determination and rushed into the cornfield where they had hidden – *but when? When? In what life?...*

Chapter 4: English Translation Commentary

Antoine Berman's *Esquisse d'une méthode*

It is often said about translation that it is the most thorough form of editing—it exposes instances where the message is intentionally or unintentionally unclear. This, along with understanding the limitations of both languages in play, constitute the translator's task at the micro level. The first attempt always somewhat clarifies the blurry edges, correcting peculiar sentences and adapting foreign references. “Ivan”, as Mihai Gheorghiu points out, is not a literary story that can sustain itself only on literary tropes; on the contrary, the story on its own fails to captivate the reader (Gheorghiu 157)²⁴. Thus, in translation, the Eliadean theoretical sublayer proves ever more important for the process of interpretation. Faced with the task of evaluating not only my own translation, but the French version as well, I turned to Berman's proposed list of the key elements about the translator's person that can—and, very likely, will—influence a translation.

À la recherche des traducteurs

As it is first in Berman's list, it can be assumed that it has the most potential to affect the translation. Are the translators authors as well? And what kind of literary texts do they produce? Naturally, the kind of creativity that an author imposes on a text is dangerous for translation, especially during the production of the first draft. While I am not an established writer, I do engage in poetry and short prose as a leisure activity, which, did, in fact, have an impact on my first rendition. As mentioned previously, I planned on using Berman's “*Esquisse d'une méthode*” as a guideline prior even to my first draft, yet, this first draft was unavoidably visceral. As someone who enjoys creative writing, I had the tendency to use more intricate and sonorous terms. Having Berman in mind, conscious of

²⁴ Gheorghiu enumerates exceptions: “La țigănci” (“With the Gypsy Girls”), “Pe strada Mântuleasa” (“The Old Man and the Bureaucrats”), *Les trois Grâces*, *Un om mare* (“A Great Man”) (Gheorghiu 157).

the risks of contaminating the text with my personal creative preferences, I tried taming my impulses in subsequent drafts. Therefore, any semantic choice that could not be readily justified by the context had to be reverted to the most direct equivalent. Ultimately, whether I wholeheartedly agree with the product, the probability of translator interference was diminished.

Next, Berman proposes the argument that a translator's affinity to a certain language will have a tremendous impact on the translation process. He asks for an inventory of languages at play: What languages does this translator use? And what is their relationship with these languages? While it may seem common sense, it is important to point out that a translator's personalized approach to language indubitably affects their semantic choices. This personalized approach to language is largely conditioned by the language-specific relationships between *signifiers* and *signifieds*:

The diversity of languages often thought to indicate a falling away from one original language (as in the story of Babel) indicated to Saussure not a story but a principle: the principle of the "arbitrary" (purely conventional) nature of sign. [...] Saussure went on, but *language is not a nomenclature*. Rather than the world consisting of things that need names (the Adamic conception), each language brings into being, by describing, a world that it then knows as external. To be sure, the external world exists—but its reality remains quite nebulous until language articulates it. The way lines divide concepts and phrases, the way even concrete items are viewed, is specific to each language; each covers all that needs to be said, but in its different way.

(Leitch 957)

Multilingual speakers can certainly attest to the shortfall of signifiers in one language as opposed to another, yet, what is truly important for a Bermanian translation production and critique, is the importance assigned to some target-language signifiers as opposed to others that are possible equivalents to the source-language original. While the "kinship of languages"²⁵ is explainable in structural linguistic terms, the sociolinguistic aspect of translation is translator-specific. Between four languages, I often find that it is not only my native language, or even my strong one, that can *best* illustrate a concept. In my case,

²⁵ The "kinship of languages" is an expression coined by Walter Benjamin to describe the similarities between words and modes of expression (Benjamin 77).

Romanian has the benefit of the first language, acquired as I spent the first eighteen years of my life in Romania. However, I spent my formative years in English, which I currently consider my strongest language. While English provides me with the comfort a native tongue, Romanian's musicality permits my English to be more colourful, as Romance languages tend to do; French and Spanish further reinforce the Romanian influence.

Berman proposes that the critic find prefaces and articles that might contain statements of the translator's ambitions, their vision of translation. This is precisely what I tried to achieve to discover the French translator. Alain Paruit appears in several sources as the most prolific Romanian-to-French translator (Adameşteanu 2002 and 2009, Anghelescu, Muşlea, Nicolaev). In Romania, his fame was due to his "unmistakable voice"²⁶ (Adameşteanu 2009, first paragraph, my translation) from several talk shows on the Romanian branch of Radio Free Europe in Paris. Many Romanian intellectuals were exiled in Paris during the Communist rule of, first, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and then Nicolae Ceauşescu; among these: Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Eugène Ionesco, Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca, Paul Goma, Dumitru Țepeneag etc. Still, the community was small enough that they managed to keep close contact and condition the integration of any newly expatriated anti-communist Romanians. Alain Paruit returned to France in such conditions, at the age of thirty, after a twenty-year stint in Romania. He was born in France in 1939 to a French mother and a Romanian father. Expulsed from France, his father moved the family to Romania when Alain was ten years old. He learned Romanian perfectly (Muşlea, third paragraph), maintaining his proficiency in French thanks to his mother, a French teacher by trade. He did not state having studied it, yet, his mother did try her hand at translation as a way to learn Romanian (Muşlea, third paragraph). He started translating in Romania, but was able to pursue this career only after his success in translating Paul Goma's *Ostinato* (*La cellule des libérables*) for Gallimard. From his translation corpus, we gather that: 1) out of the 78 titles in his repertoire, 5 seem to be reprints or revised translations, 2) his earliest published translation appears to be Paul Goma's *Ostinato* in 1971, 3) he translated from Romanian to French exclusively, works of

²⁶ The original Romanian reads: "vocea sa inconfundabilă" (his voice unmistakeable).

20 Romanian authors, 4) Eliade's work is clearly his primary focus having translated 26 works (5 reprints or revised editions can be added to this total). He translated every type of writing that Eliade produced: fiction (novels, short-story collections), non-fiction (diary) and scholarly (philosophical and theoretical). The short story "Ivan" is part of his first translation of Eliade's work, a compilation titled *Uniformes de général* in French published in 1981. Not surprisingly, a composite commentary of the French translation has not been made or, at least, has not been published.

Les horizons des traducteurs

Next on Berman's list are "la position traductive" and "le projet de traduction", which constitute the "horizon du traducteur". Berman envisions "la position traductive" to be a combination of the translator's appeal to translation and the societal norms in place. As Gideon Toury asserts, translation norms are "a prerequisite for becoming a translator within a cultural environment" (205) because they ensure "social order" (207). Yet, pinpointing them proves to be much more difficult—norms can change, no matter their importance—and it is quite possible that they are not even written. Translators, as persons-in-the-culture, abide by what they know to be "right", as they are experts in what their audience considers to be familiar. Still, Toury recognizes a choice in direction: "adequate" source-oriented or "acceptable" target-oriented (208). Currently, translation norms demand that the translator "strike a balance between accuracy and naturalness" (Baker 196)—i.e. adequacy and acceptability in Toury's terms. Parallel to this practical stance, Berman has a more philosophical outlook: the "projet de traduction" is not something that is pursued, but something that is discovered: a compromise between the "position traductive" and the difficulties imposed by the text.

[L]a traduction, n'est jamais que la réalisation du projet: elle va où la mène le projet, et jusqu'où la mène le projet. Elle ne nous dit la vérité du projet qu'en nous révélant *comment* il a été réalisé (et non, finalement, s'il a été réalisé) et quelles ont été les *conséquences* du projet par rapport à l'original.

(Berman 1995: 77)

The present English translation of “Ivan” subscribes more to Baker's definition. My goal for the end-product was to achieve that balance between adequacy and acceptability as much as the two languages in play allowed; yet, it is unlikely that I managed to ignore the true purpose of the translation, namely that this project prioritizes the process to the result. The project is to demonstrate my ability to translate, reflect and research. Part of the process was evaluating the French translation to a certain degree, which contributed to my “pulsion de traduire”, the Bermanian concept for “ce qui “pousse” [le traducteur] à traduire (1995: 74). I believe that many bilinguals—students, in particular—find themselves at an eerie crossroads of meaning that inspires us to seek equivalence between languages. My interest in translation started from interpreting for others, translating songs—to know what they said—and, ultimately, from writing. As multilinguals, we are always forced to make compromises, but, the desire to achieve equivalence does not disappear.

In Paruit's case, although having not declared it, it is very likely that he loved his career as a professional literary translator. While I cannot confirm his “position traductive” from the information that I have gathered, I can assume that he too felt a “pulsion de traduire”, which led him to this career without him having consciously chosen it. On the one hand, the sheer amount of Romanian texts he translated points in that direction; he invested more than forty years into translating more than seventy titles. On the other, he took pride in his competence in both languages. He described his choice to pursue French as his focus in Romania as a “convenient solution”²⁷ (Adameşteanu 2002, section “Liceul ‘Caragiale’ în anii 50”, first paragraph, my translation), since he mastered them both so well. Paruit's translation practice was strictly literary. His early success with Goma's *Ostinato*, demonstrated that he was a reliable and productive translator, thus putting him on the map for other publishing houses to find him—Folio, Albin Michel, Julliard, Robert Laffont etc. In 1981, when *Uniformes de général* was published, Eliade was mostly known for his academic work—as he is still today—yet, translations of his fiction into French had already appeared: *Maitreyi/La nuit Bengali* by Alain Guillerrou

²⁷ The original Romanian reads: “soluția de facilitate” (solution of convenience).

in 1950, *Noaptea de Sânziene/Forêt interdite* by Alain Guillerrou in 1955, *Pe strada Mântuleasa/Le vieil homme et l'officier* by Alain Guillerrou in 1977, *Domnișoara Christina/Mademoiselle Christina* by Claude B. Levenson in 1978²⁸. Nonetheless, Paruit had an advantage—he was part of the Parisian community of Romanian intellectuals, along with Eliade.

My first research of Paruit was severely incomplete, such that, I assumed that he must have not been very familiar with Eliade's work. However, his ties with the Romanian exile community in Paris were forged some ten years before this translation in 1981. He also had a very close friendship with Emil Cioran and, through Cioran, he had access to Eliade's way of thinking, since Cioran and Eliade maintained a close relationship. Thus, instead of assuming that his choices were geared towards producing a linguistically sound French text, I started considering these choices as somewhat informed by Eliade²⁹. Furthermore, Paruit explained in a 2009 interview with Marc Semo:

[Emil Cioran] et plus encore son ami Mircea Eliade écrivait souvent en un mauvais roumain, ce que leur reprochait Eugène Ionesco. En revanche, dès qu'ils utilisaient le français, qui était en Roumanie la langue de la culture et de l'élite, ils étaient attentifs à s'exprimer avec la plus grande clarté, ce qui transformait totalement leur façon d'écrire.

(Samo, second paragraph)

Paruit goes on to explain that, once Cioran and Eliade moved to France, their Romanian started showing signs of that strong presence of the French language. Thus, according to Paruit, much of the confusion within the text may be the Romanian original, specifically the *form* of the Romanian original, rather than the French translation underestimating or misinterpreting the text. However, I believe that he faced the same difficulties in translating “Ivan” as I did, and that these difficulties are a combination of Eliade's style, the Romanian standards for literature and the intricacies of Romanian linguistics. On the one hand, even though the “kinship” (Benjamin 77) between French and Romanian is much stronger than either of these to English, the long descriptive passages setting the

²⁸ As stated in Allen and Doeing's *Mircea Eliade: An Annotated Bibliography*

²⁹ It is possible that Paruit and Eliade spoke about this project, yet, I found no information indicating this.

stage and Cadet Second Lieutenant Darie's philosophical ramblings are difficult even in intralingual translation—translation within the same language (Jakobson 139). As mentioned, Eliade's prose sometimes lacks the literary tropes for the stories to be self-sufficiently captivating (Gheorghiu 157), which is likely in part due to the demonstrated linguistic skills. Yet, Eliade had a very clear goal in his prose—to show that the sacred is camouflaged in the profane, a goal which could be compromised by the language itself.

While I am not looking to discredit Paruit's experience with Eliade's text—by all counts, his experience with translating Eliade's work is quite vast—in my commentary, I tried to point out details of the original that are not obvious in the French version; from using the French as a guide, I wound up in the sphere of retranslation. My overall goal for the English translation was to produce a version that is not necessarily better than the French, but not worse either. Yet, it encouraged me to look into retranslation to understand the relationship between the texts in play: the 1968 Romanian original, the 1981 French translation and the fresh English translation.

In accordance to a history-as-progress model, it is widely presumed that subsequent translations [retranslations] will succeed in bringing forth more appropriate, more “faithful” texts, “closer” to the “original”, or texts which will be more suitable for the needs and competence of modern readers: in short, they will be in one way or another “better”, than the previous translations.

(Susam-Sarajeva 2).

Paul Bensimon agrees with this statement in his introduction of an edition of the academic journal *Pamplisestes*, entitled “Retraduire”. Bensimon describes the initial product as “naturalized” and “integrated” (ix), terms that are generally frowned upon in translation nowadays. Berman agrees as well, again, in philosophical terms: “C'est dans l'après coup d'une première traduction aveugle et hésitante que surgit la possibilité d'une traduction accomplie” (Berman 1990: 5).

Revisiting translated literature can surge out of a need to correct, which is the famous case of Milan Kundera, who became a self-translator following the discovery of his mistranslated text, or, out of a need for “réactualisation” (Gambier 413). Yet, the

consensus is that, whether sought or not, improvement is an inevitable consequence of retranslation. Evidently, the end-product of my work in relation to the French translation is not a retranslation—the intended monolingual reader can never experience it as a retranslation, but the process of using a translated work in the same language to produce a new version is strikingly similar. In the following section, in addition to disclosing my thought process, I will present quotes from the text which demonstrate that the production of my English translation subscribes to the process of retranslation.

English Translation Relevant Categories

My initial intention for this commentary was to create categories based on Antoine Berman's "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign", which provided a simple framework for a translation commentary: twelve "tendencies", deforming and inevitable to a certain degree. Yet, because these deformations present the problem but not its solution, and because they focus on differences between languages, which does not fully accommodate my retranslation claims, they are too restrictive and repetitive for the project's goal. Ultimately, I focused on conclusions based on my research on Eliade – what connects this story to his network of literary works, rather than language-related differences alone, and factored in the French translation. My commentary presents a number of the French version's losses because they acted as a first translation to my retranslation not only by uncovering the Bermanian deformations that could be avoided, but also by revealing elements of Eliade's style that needed to be emphasized. In my commentary, first, I tackled "Proper Names", an element with significant importance for Eliade, as his names are always carefully selected to resonate with his work on the history of religions. The second category, "Mots Clefs", are words that appear again and again and that likely contribute to the author's signature style; this category is recommended by Berman in his "Esquisse d'une méthode". These recurring words build Eliade's underlying network of signification, the "hidden dimension", which "constitute[s] one aspect of the rhythm and signifying process of the text" (Berman 2010:284). Finally, I developed the "Character

Profiles”, whose purpose is to build very clear images of how the reader should see each character, a category that I felt is absent in the French version and that I consider vital to Eliade’s prose.

The quotes below are organized by language, chronologically according to the time of publication: Romanian first, French second and English third. I also included a literal translation with notes for clarification following the Romanian. Occasionally, I have made adjustments to these literal translations to fit the context in which they appear, since my purpose is to use the literal translations as a relay rather than build a linguistic analysis between Romanian and English. For example, the reflexive form “ne lovim” appears as “bump into” rather than “we hit ourselves”, which is the word-for-word rendition.

Proper Names

[T]ranslation of proper names is not a trivial issue but, on the contrary, may involve a rather delicate decision-making process, requiring on the part of the translator careful consideration of the meanings the name has before deciding how best to render it in the target language.

(Zarei and Norouzi 159)

Rouhollah Zarei and Somayeh Norouzi quote Sadeghi Ghadi to emphasize the importance of considering *translating* or *adapting* proper names. Zarei and Norouzi go on surveying current theories and proposing strategies to overcome the burden of proper names.

At first glance, names can appear to be pure entertainment, yet, generally, in any given language, proper nouns, more than any other word class, can carry a plethora of information such as sex, gender, approximate geographical location, approximate age, social class, and cultural connotations that subscribe perhaps only to their original system. That said, in literature, names help build a physical portrait of the element in question,

whether a person or a place etc., which, in turn, forges a bond between the reader and the story.

In the translation of names, as Peter Newmark points out, the first step is "determin[ing] whether a name is real or invented" (1993:15). The latter demands a sort of poetic creativity, where the translator is faced with rendering a morphologically and/or phonologically *catchy* name. To name an example, from the famous Harry Potter collection, the British name Severus "Snape" (reprimand, verb) becomes in French Severus "Rogue" (arrogant, adjective) and in Romanian Severus "Plesneală" (strike, noun) (List of Characters in Translations of Harry Potter). Even more telling is the translation of the legendary "Hogwarts" (combination of words hog and wart, noun), which, in French, becomes "Poudlard" (combination of words "poux", an insect - louse, and "lard", meaning fat, noun), and remains untranslated in Romanian (List of Locations in Other Languages). On the other hand, if the names are real, the process involves a creativity-informed-by-research whereby the translator substitutes the source language name with an equivalent name in the target culture. It could be as simple as "Ivan", "John", "Jean", "Ion", etc., but the equivalency is rarely evident. For example, the surname "Popescu"—arguably, the most common surname in Romania—could take the shape of "Smith" in English, "Dupont" in French for France, and "Tremblay" for Québec. Obviously, this kind of adaptation does not come about without a strong reason. On the one hand, a glance through scholarship on the translation of proper names through adaptation reveals it to be an issue especially when the source and target cultures are extremely different: from English into Persian (Ahanizadeh, Zarei and Norouzi), from English into Arabic (Al-Hamly and Farghol), from English into various Chinese dialects (Shu, Zheng), etc. Saeideh Ahanizadeh quotes John Searle in that names carry "senses", that the reader must be able to "substitute [the name] with an identifying description of the referent," otherwise the name "would fail to perform a definite reference" (64). While names may be mono-referential, they are multi-functional, carrying heavy cultural weight. "Ivan"—the Russian "John"—is perhaps the simplest and most common name in any language, thus readily translatable. However, a quick search in the Oxford English Dictionary uncovers a cultural

undertone that is geographically and temporally specific. "Ivan", from a mainly European perspective, refers to a Russian soldier or, rather, to all Russian soldiers. It is equivalent to the American "Charlie" for a Vietcong fighter or the English "Jerry" for a German soldier. This is likely *insider information* that is lost in the transfer of the name "Ivan" from Romanian to English. Considering the likelihood that the majority of the North American audience does not have the same relationship with the World Wars as Europeans do—the magnitude of the fighting was not felt as if it were geographically close—the cultural weight that the story carries is rendered subtle, not readily accessible for this audience. By titling his story "Ivan", Eliade emphasizes three pieces of information, accessible to all, yet deducted with ease by the original readership. "Ivan" implies, first, that the story is set during a World War, second, that the three soldiers represent the Axis Powers and the wounded soldier, Russia, thus representing the Allies, and third, that the war in question is WWII, given that Romania did not fight on the German side in WWI. Yet, "Ivan", as merely a derogatory general appellation of the Russian soldier, is not as obvious as "Charlie"—the most mediatized name for "enemy." *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *First Blood* (1982), *Platoon* (1984), *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987), even *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *American Gangster* (2007) are just a few Hollywood productions that reached an international level of popularity, consequently promoting the appellation to a variety of audiences. In theory, this slight equivalence opens the possibility of adaptation, that is, domestication, since the reader may otherwise not identify the degree of hostility between the two enemy camps—the Axis Powers versus the Allies. As the intended reaction relies on the ability of the reader to recognize the clues left by the author, the translator must creatively reinvent them in the target text. The issue here is that changing one reference involves changing all references. Ukraine, the Romanian City of Iași (Jassy), the "Russian Brandts" would have to be changed to equivalents in the Vietnam war—in case "Ivan" is rendered as "Charlie". This,—in practice, would be more problematic than the original issue.

However, the most problematic characteristic in translating Mircea Eliade's names lies in their hidden depth, which requires several layers of creativity on the part of the

translator. As Gheorghe Glodeanu points out, Eliade's names are not chosen lightly (286); they always seek to fully affect the development of the fantastic, to contribute to the unfolding of the sacred within the profane. His names contain clues that divulge details about the fate of the characters who bear them. His source of inspiration is, of course, his scholarly work. Glodeanu gives the example of “Zaharia Fărâmbă” (Zachary Crumb) of the short story “The Old Man and the Bureaucrats”. “Zaharia” is a Hebrew name that means “remember Yahweh”, the ancient God King in the territory that is now Israel. His name foretells Zaharia’s destiny of returning to the sacred and re-establishing his origins. Mythical time is Eliade’s key source of inspiration, that is the prehistoric times of *religions* before religions, which he presents in the span of the three volumes of *A History of Religious Ideas*. Glodeanu and Matei Călinescu demonstrate that Eliade very often draws from ancient religious or spiritual figures to build his characters' personalities (290). Conclusively, the names of the three Romanian soldiers Darie, Zamfira and Iliescu can be traced back in Eliade's research.

Darie is a variant of “Darius the Great”, “the first of the true Zoroastrian among Achaemenian kings” (Moulton viii), having departed from “earlier superstitions” that his predecessors accepted because they were “in accord with their character” (Moulton xi). Zoroastrianism is an ancient Iranian religion worshiping the spirit of good, Ahura Mazdhā, as preached by the prophet Zarathustra (Eliade 1978: 303). Zarathustra’s revelation as opposed to other religions built around Ahura Mazdhā is that man is free to choose between good and evil. Thus, Darie represents reform.

Zamfira is a surname from the word “zamfir”. According to the 1929 dictionary of Romanian Language “zamfir” is an old mispronunciation of “safir”—the Romanian term for the precious stone “sapphire” (Șăineanu). “Safir” is also a Muslim name meaning “ambassador”, “mediator”, “intercessor” (Ahmed 183). Especially in Zamfira’s case, the origin of his name confirms, if not foretells, his role in the story. He is an ambassador of the hidden sacred and an intercessor for Darie and Iliescu as well in some respects.

Iliescu is a surname formed of “Ilie”, English “Elias”, variant of “Elijah”, and the ending “-escu” denominating “son of” (Constantinescu lviii). Elijah appears in Eliade’s *Religious Ideas* as representing a period of transition during the first century B.C., when Israel was considering accepting various religions. Elijah opposed this idea of accepting several belief systems and declared “Yahweh sole sovereign in Israel” (Eliade 1978: 342), claiming that only Yahweh can end the draught and fertilize the soil.

When Darie tumbles deep into his own psyche in dream state, he meets two gentlemen by the names of Procopie and Arhip. Albeit not religious, these two names also have a hidden significance that describes their purpose in the story. As Lucian Strochi points out, “procopie” (“pro copy”) and “arh(et)ip” (“archetype”) announce the consolidation of Darie-Ivan-Procopie-Arhip at the end of the short story.

In light of these discoveries, the translator is faced with a realistically impossible task to translate or adapt these names. They must recreate the subtle references to these ancient religions, while not inventing names, but rather choose them from an existing bank of names, since the original names of these characters, including Procopie and Arhip, are all real names currently in use in the Romanian language. “Zamfira” could become “Safir” or “Safirul”—adding the suffix “-ul” could give it a more *authentic* Romanian nuance. “Iliescu” could be “Eliascu” or “Elijascu”. Yet, using false names destroy the natural rhythm of the text. To recreate such a fluid system of names is a task that implies either a phenomenal creative break or countless hours of research. The former would fall prey to and be criticized for its subjective nature and the latter would suffer the fate of “Charlie”—substitution of all references in the existing system with those of a similar one pre-existing in the target culture. Aside from reinventing the names or substituting them, Van Coillie proposes eight other strategies, yet all but one are truly pertinent to this short story, that is, “non-translation plus additional explanation” (125), where the necessary information is provided within the text or a footnote. Although still disruptive, from a translator’s perspective, this is the most effective and least destructive strategy.

When dealing with real events that are geographically specific, finding equivalents is no simple task. For the translation into English of the short story “Ivan”, I explored the aforementioned strategies with the intent of communicating something that seemed severely understated in the French translation. Eventually, I concluded that any type of modification of the names Eliade used would be by no means satisfying. On the other hand, for the Romanian public, as Glodeanu points out, despite the abundance of connections, the meaning of these names can still be categorized as esoteric in the original. The sublayer can only be uncovered by those proficient in Eliade’s theory, or those willing to research their roots. The general reader would not engage in the lengthy research required to uncover these meanings. Arguably, this shortcoming of the common reader is universal since, in any piece of literature, references are bound to be obscure to at least part of the audience, if not to the majority. Admittedly, the target reader will be supplied with more information than the source audience, since, as mentioned, the references are not obvious to the general public; yet, compensation has to be used when there is a lack of equivalence, otherwise the theoretical value of the short story is completely obscured by an apparently uncertain literary style.

Mots Clefs

Eliade has many favourite terms, which are, perhaps, part of the popular lexicon of the time. Yet, for this category, I have identified three recurring words with a major impact on the development of the story and, thus, words that have to be treated with care in the translation. I will start with the morpheme “eviden-”, important due to its connection with the most iconic line of the story, namely, “a series of mutually contradicting certainties”. The adjective/adverb “curios” will follow, a term that becomes significant as the story progresses due to the interesting way Eliade uses it. Finally, I will look at the adjective “adevărat”, which creates certain issues in English that impede it from being completely transferred over.

“Eviden-”

Variations of this morpheme echo throughout the text and they create an important musicality. This musicality plays a fundamental role in establishing the unexplainable nature of certain elements of reality. These paradoxical elements are at the very core of Eliade’s main theme, as they are manifestations of the sacred—the intangible, spiritual—within the profane—the tangible and logical. In English, recreating this pattern proved to be impossible on account of the differences in the use of the words containing “eviden-” between Romanian and English, whether lexically or musically.

Romanian Word	French Dictionary Translation	English Dictionary Translation	Description of Romanian
evidență, -e <i>noun</i>	évidence, certitude	obviousness, certainty	something that is visible and does not need to be proven
evident, -ă <i>adjective</i>	évident, claire, certain, indubitable	evident, obvious, clear, certain	the quality of being visible, identifiable
evident <i>adverb</i>	évidemment, naturellement, effectivement	evidently, obviously, certainly, clearly, undoubtedly	obviously, however, of course, absolutely

Table 4.1

Noun

As the main element in the signature line of the short story, the noun “evidență” was quite delicate to handle. “Evidențe”, “évidences” and “certainties”, are described as something that is perceived as true. While the Romanian and the French versions emphasize that this truth is perceivable almost physically, the English does not. The best translation for “evidență” and “évidence” in this context would be “obviousness”, yet, as the plural is morphologically messy, I appealed to synonyms. I considered changing the grammatical category to use the adjective “obvious”, but, as the most defining sentence in the story, a rendition the like of “a series of things that are obvious but also mutually contradicting”, does not preserve the awkwardness of unprocessed thought, but, rather, it is just

gramatically awkward. Cadet Second Lieutenant Darie returns to this expression several times in the story, and describes it as “imperfect”³⁰, “trivial”, and “stylistically problematic”³¹, thus, the sentence should be slightly awkward. I reached a compromise by using “certainties”. This is a case of destruction of underlying networks of signification, in Bermanian terms. Using “certainties” severed the echo created by the recurrence of the morpheme “eviden-”, yet, as Berman concludes about these textual deformations, this is sometimes inevitable. The noun “evidență”/“évidence”/“certainty” appears nine times³² in the story, always within the context of *a series of instances*.

Pentru că ne lovim deodată de o serie de evidențe mutual contradictorii, dacă mă pot exprima astfel... (74)

Literal: Because we bump into a series of mutually contradicting obviousnesses, if I can express myself this way...

Car nous nous heurtons aussitôt à une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires, si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi... (95)

Because we suddenly run into a series of mutually contradicting certainties, so to speak... (38)

Adjective

The adjectival and adverbial forms of this noun look to amplify the impact of the noun. In terms of using “evident” to describe a person, I encountered a textbook case of collocations. While Romanian and French agree on using the adjective “evident”/“evident” to describe a person in a sarcastic way, English uses “obvious”. This would resonate well with “obviousness”, if it were stylistically usable.

[...] Laura, fata aceea de la Iași [a]vea, și are încă, modul ei propriu de a fi evidentă. (82)

Literal: Laura, that girl from Iași, had, and has still, her own way of being obvious.

³⁰“expresia aceea aproximativă” (80)/“cette formule approximative” (104)/“that imperfect expression” (44)

³¹“banală și stilistic incertă” (82)/“banale et d'un style douteux” (107)/“trivial and stylistically problematic” (48)

³²Pages in Romanian/French/English: 74/95/38, 80/104/44, 80/104/44, 82/107/48, 82/108/48, 85/113/49, 86/114/250, 91/121/57, 91/122/57

[...] Laura, cette fille de Iași [...] avait, elle a toujours, sa propre manière d'être évidente. (108)

[...] Laura, that girl from Iași, had, and still has, her own way of being obvious. (48)

When not used to describe a person, my use of “obvious” in relation to the contradictions resonates with my previous use of the adjective for Laura. This is purely accidental, as this is the most fitting in the context. The French is, again, more successful as “contradictions évidentes” echoes “évidences contradictoires”, whereas my “obvious contradictions” express a lesser connection to “contradicting certainties”.

[...] [C]ontradicțiile sau inconsecvențele sunt de două moduri: cele evidente chiar *dinlăuntrul* sistemului de referință, și cele care ni se descoperă ca atare, ni se arată că sunt contradicții sau inconsecvențe numai când le privim *din afara sistemului*. (85)

Literal: The contradictions or the inconsistencies are of two modes: the ones obvious even from the inside of the system of reference and those that are discovered to us as such, they show themselves as contradictions or inconsistencies only when we look at them from outside the system.

[...] [L]es contradictions ou les inconséquences sont de deux types : les premières évidentes *de l'intérieur* même du système de référence, les secondes nous apparaissent en tant que telles, c'est-à-dire contradictions ou inconséquences, uniquement lorsque nous les envisageons *de l'extérieur* du système. (111)

[...] [T]here are two kinds of contradictions, or inconsistencies: those that are obvious even from the *inside* of their system of reference and those that unravel as such, those contradictions or inconsistencies that reveal themselves only when we look at them from *outside* the system. (51)

Adverb

The adverbial form of the morpheme “eviden-” is the most prominent. Unlike its counterparts, the adverb “evident” is used in a variety of situations that I have divided into four categories: as a natural conclusion, as concession, as agreement, and as a sarcastic remark. It is unfortunate that the English version does not allow the original musicality to follow through, yet, throughout the translation, certain connections have been echoed.

Natural Conclusion: when “evident” is used as a form of introducing a natural, obvious conclusion. Darie uses “evidently” to conclude his analytical, philosophical remarks. In English, “evidently” works well in this context, since it is a more elevated form for “clearly”

and "obviously". French was able to and did follow through with repeating the morpheme "éviden-" that mirrors the story's signature line when Darie "concludes" his ideas.

First occurrence: Darie enters the first dream. He is speaking to an audience about the unnatural size of the grave that Zamfira and Iliescu were digging for Ivan as he was falling asleep.

Evident, [...] atunci mi-am dat seama că visez [...]. (77)

Literal: Evidently, that's when I realized that I am dreaming.

Évidemment, [...] à ce moment-là je me suis rendu compte que je rêvais [...]. (99)

Evidently, [...] that's when I realized that I was dreaming [...]. (41)

Concession: when "evident" could be replaced by "however". Interestingly, the French version abandons "évidemment" in favor of "naturellement" (second, fourth, fifth and sixth occurrences of the Romanian "evident" as listed below). In fact, French also uses "bien évidemment" in one instance; perhaps the French version classified what I evaluated as concessions part of the natural conclusions category. "Naturellement" can announce axioms—things that cannot be proven yet that are known to be true, while "bien évidemment" can only be proven theories—what has been shown through evidence and calculation. In contrast, I interpreted this use of the Romanian "evident" as a slight shift. Likely, the French translator did not consider the chain to be significant enough to appear in the translation yet, it seems important to note that the French alters the pattern of the Romanian morpheme "eviden-" despite having the possibility not only to achieve it but, above all, to do so in a graceful manner.

Second occurrence: Procopie explains why he believes that Ivan blessed them but not in the true sense of the meaning. He believes that Ivan likely spoke to them in a positive way, which did not suffice as Zamfira and Iliescu had a much more precise request.

Dar, evident, nu asta așteptau Zamfira și Iliescu de la el [...]. (79)

Literal: But, evidently, this is not (what) Zamfira and Iliescu expected from him.

Mais, naturellement, Zamfira et Iliescu attendaient autre chose de lui [...]. (102)

Evidently, that's not what Zamfira and Iliescu were expecting from him [...]. (44)

Fourth occurrence: Darie further explains his claim that the formula was, in fact, an epiphany for the very idea of existence, still in front of Procopie and the rest of the crowd at Madame Machedon's apartment. However, he cannot remember the epiphany because it happened in a dream.

Dar, evident, așa cum se întâmplă mai întotdeauna în vis, acum nu mai mi-aduc nimic aminte... (80)

Literal: But, evidently, the way it happens almost always in dream, now I can't remember anything.

Mais, naturellement, comme le plus souvent quand il s'agit de rêves, maintenant je ne me souviens plus de rien... (104)

But, evidently, as it almost always happens with dreams, now I cannot remember anything... (45)

Fifth occurrence: Darie *wakes up* and reiterates his analysis of how Ivan's condition and fate have affected him. This time around, he is in front of a *new* crowd, that is Zamfira and Iliescu. He dives deeper into his analysis, while remarking that he was not able or could not have been able to achieve that level of clarity at the moment of the event.

Probabil că *exemplul* lui Ivan îmi revelase propria mea condiție umană, deși, evident, nu-mi dădeam seama de asta. (82)

Literal: Maybe that the example of Ivan revealed to me my own human condition, although, evidently, I couldn't realize it at the time.

L'exemple d'Ivan me révélait probablement ma propre condition humaine, alors même que, bien évidemment, je ne m'en rendais pas compte. (108)

Ivan's case probably revealed to me my own human condition; although, evidently, I didn't see this at the time. (48)

Sixth occurrence: Darie explains to Arhip why he continued to let Zamfira and Iliescu lead the way, although, in his opinion, they were going the wrong way.

Evident, mă încredeam în simțul lor de orientare. Amândoi erau siguri că mergem în direcția cea bună. (84)

Literal: Evidently, I trusted in their sense of orientation. Both were sure that we walk in the good direction.

Naturellement, je me fiais à leur sens de l'orientation – ils étaient sûrs tous deux d'aller dans la bonne direction. (110)

Evidently, I trusted their sense of direction. They were both sure that we were going the right way. (50)

Agreement: “evident” could be replaced with “of course”. In terms of expressing complete agreement in English (third and eighth occurrences listed below), it was possible to establish a connection with the “certainties” of the famous formula by using “certainly” and, while not crucially significant and obvious for the reader, this still represents a small success in the translation.

Third occurrence: Procopie contradicts Darie’s claim that the formula “a series of mutually contradicting certainties” could entail an epiphany related to the Unknown God of the Greeks, “Agnostos Theos”. Darie agrees with his statement and points out that they have agreed on *what it is not*.

Evident, evident, dar sunt fel de fel de zei și dumnezei necunoscuți.... (80)

Literal: Evidently, evidently, but there are sorts and sorts of unknown gods and gods.

Évidemment, évidemment. Mais il y a toutes sortes de dieux inconnus. (103)

Certainly. Certainly. But there are all sorts of unknown gods and divinities... (45)

Eighth occurrence: Ivan gives Darie his interpretation of the theological origin of the mysterious phrase; namely, it is likely that Darie drew inspiration from the “gnostic myths” in Hindu religions and not the Unknown God of the Greeks that Darie had used as an example. Darie’s reply:

Evident, evident. Asta a remarcat și Procopie. (92)

Literal: Evidently, evidently. This is (what) Procopie remarked too.

Certes. Certes. Procopie l’avait d’ailleurs remarqué. (123)

Certainly. Certainly. That’s what Procopie remarked as well. (60)

Sarcastic remark: Lastly, as Darie does sarcastically describe Laura as “obvious”, the English allowed for another small connection. This connection is accidentally perfect,

since it is the English language that allows it. It is also slightly more significant than the aforementioned "certainly", since sarcasm adds weight to the term.

Seventh occurrence: Darie tells Arhip that Laura believes that Ivan blessed them. This statement appears in-between two of Arhip's replies that are unrelated to Ivan in any way. Namely, prior to the statement, Arhip responds to Darie that, yes, they should wait for the rest of their group to catch up to them, implying that it would be dangerous for the two of them to continue climbing Piatra-Craiulua, a dangerous summit, on their own. Following Darie's remark about Laura, Arhip lectures Darie about smoking while doing physical effort. After Arhip's interjection, Darie completely abandons Laura's conviction and starts on another side of the story. This marks Darie's observation as random and sarcastic.

Evident, Laura e convinsă că [...] Ivan ne-a binecuvântat [...]. (84)

Literal: Evidently, Laura is convinced that Ivan blessed us.

Laura est évidemment persuadée qu'Ivan nous à bénis [...]. (111)

Obviously, Laura's convinced that [...] Ivan blessed us [...]. (50)

To conclude, it seems that the French version broke the chain of the morpheme "eviden-" despite having the possibility to transfer it completely. Although other options like "naturellement" or "certes" could well be defended as better choices, the importance of the morpheme could completely trump these explanations if considered as a random morpheme. In the following pages, I have quoted the occurrences of the Romanian adverb "evident" and labeled them in terms of situation: natural conclusion, concession, agreement, and as a sarcastic remark. Each entry describes the parameters under which the adverbs appear to better illustrate how the situations were categorized.

"Curios"

Out of the list of Eliade's Mots Clef in "Ivan", "curios" is the item with most occurrences, yet, what is most striking about this word is its interesting use.

Romanian Word	French Dictionary Translation	English Dictionary Translation	Description of Romanian
curios, curioasă <i>adjective</i>	curieux, étrange	1.(<i>person</i>) curious, inquisitive, 2. (<i>person</i> or <i>thing</i>) odd, strange	it describes a person interested in learning and discovery or a thing or an affair that is odd

Table 4.2

“Curios” is an adjective that matches its French (*curieux*) and English (*curious*) counterparts. It is an adjective primarily used to describe a person who wants to know something, whether knowledge in general or information about a specific thing or situation. However, out of the fifteen occurrences of this word in the story, only one fully subscribes to this denomination—the tenth occurrence, when Arhip declares his interest in Darie's story. In order to honour the repetitive pattern of this *mot clef*, I used the expression "to spark interest", since, in my translation of the story, "curios" becomes "interesting" in most cases.

M-ai făcut curios... (84)

Literal: You made me curious.

Vous m'avez rendu curieux. (111)

You've sparked my interest... (50)

While the primary denomination is used once, “curios”, in the story, often describes something strange—which remains its less expected usage. “Curios” reappears in several parts of the story and is uttered by several characters and, precisely because it draws attention to itself, it is a *mot clef*. The formula “E(ste) curios”, commonly translated as “it’s strange”, points out to the reader that there is something unexplainable about the subject, which, for Eliade, signals the sacred within the profane. However, unlike its English counterpart, “curios” announces a sort of enthusiasm about the anomaly, while “strange” focuses on the negative aspect, attributing a worrisome attitude to the speaker. In translation, attributing a curious side to *strange* is vital to the story as it builds a positive tension between the noumenal world and the mystical, by emphasizing the obscure and

contradicting relationship between some noumenal elements. Furthermore, echoing this curiosity throughout the story is even more important to the main theme of progressively discovering the sacred within the profane. That said, naturally, my first draft translated all accounts where “curios” expresses something odd as the obvious “strange”. However, upon further consideration, “interesting” proved to be more fitting for recreating that positive curiosity towards the mystical. “Interesting” is ambiguous and it encourages the reader to look at the context to decide whether it is positive or negative. The most obvious example is Darie’s curious feeling of déjà vu; he expresses this feeling overtly during his encounters with Procopie and Arhip, attributing to them Ivan’s seemingly non-physical characteristics—a natural observation, since these characters prove to be mirror *images* of himself. The resemblance does not scare Darie, nor does it embarrass him, but he only goes as far as to investigate and discover the connection at the end. Arguably, “interesting” expresses too much interest in the subject matter, yet, I evaluated that avoiding the negative connotation of “strange” or “odd” or “weird” is more important than enhancing the enthusiasm in translation. As another possibility, I considered regaining some of the attention that “curios” achieves in the original by using the English “curiously”, yet this form did not fit in all situations, forcing the English version to use a very awkward “it’s curious that” or to break the chain of repetition.

The French translation, on the other hand, tells a different story. First, the repetitive nature of the word is not transferred and, second, it does not emphasize the enthusiasm in “curios”, which is prominent in the English version. The French version uses four different words: “étrange”, “bizarre”, “curieux” and “drôle” in their adjectival as well as their adverbial forms. Below, I have extracted all occurrences and categorized them into types of situation.

Situation 1: the uncanny yet exciting feeling of déjà vu. I translated “curios” in this category as “interesting” to allow the enthusiastic side of discovery to surface. The French version uses a different term each time.

First occurrence: Darie tells Procopie about the feeling that they had met before from the beginning of their conversation. My impression of the Romanian is that it is ambiguous compared to both the French and the English, the former leaning towards a more unpleasant outlook, while the latter towards a more pleasant one. The French here paints a darker picture, using "étrange"—a worrisome inability to understand, and amplifying the angst with "brusquement"—a more violent stop-and-start than my "all of a sudden".

Ce e mai curios, începu el deodată, este că am avut de la început impresia că ne-am mai întâlnit. (78)

Literal: What is stranger, he started all of a sudden, is that I had from the beginning the impression that we met (again). ("mai" = adverb that emphasizes, untranslatable)

Le plus étrange, dit-il brusquement, c'est que, moi, j'ai eu aussitôt l'impression que nous nous étions déjà rencontrés. (101)

What's more interesting, he started all of a sudden, is that, since the beginning, I've been under the impression that we've met before. (43)

Second occurrence: Laura describes her reaction to Darie's confession above. While the Romanian remains neutral, both French and English continue on their respective intensified paths. The French opts for the less polished "bizarre", but does not stray away from the unpleasant side of discovering the unknown, even amplifying it with "vraiment"; the English remains the same.

Este în orice caz curios, exclamă Laura, pentru că nu mi-l închipuiam așa pe Ivan. (78)

Literal: It is in any case strange, exclaimed Laura, because I wasn't picturing Ivan like that.

C'est vraiment bizarre, s'écria Laura, je ne voyais pas Ivan comme ça. (102)

It's interesting in any case," exclaimed Laura, because this is not how I pictured Ivan. (43)

Twelfth occurrence: Darie remarks that Arhip resembles Ivan. To better illustrate the reasons why his encounter with Ivan was out of the ordinary, Darie lists a series of obvious questions that the soldiers should have but did not ask themselves. The statement follows Arhip's interpretation of this odd behaviour, where he explains that looking from the outside in is an advantage while the reverse is not. The French version leans towards

playful with "drôle" while the English, towards stimulating, using the same "interesting". "Interesting" was a fortunate fit in this instance since, in my understanding of the Romanian, the context does not provide sufficient information to decide whether Darie is anxious or enthusiastic. "Interesting" recreates this ambiguity and, like "curios", it draws attention to itself.

E curios, începu el târziu, dar acum, că te privesc mai bine îmi dau seama cât de mult semeni cu Ivan. (85)

Literal: It's strange, he started late, but now, that I look at you better I realize how much you resemble Ivan.

C'est drôle, dit-il, en vous regardant mieux je m'aperçois que vous ressemblez beaucoup à Ivan. (112)

It's interesting, he added a good while later, now that I look at you better, I realize how much you resemble Ivan. (51)

Situation 2: the irony in coincidence. Given the diversity of the parameters in which the irony occurs, I did not follow through with echoing the morpheme "interest-". The terms changed according to the level of formality, which depended on the interlocutors.

Third occurrence: Procopie answers Laura's question regarding the idea that Ivan's case revealed something new about the Unknown God. He starts his reply by pointing out that he had already asked himself this question. On stage are people in Darie's social group—an upper-middle class crowd judging by their professions: the lieutenant, a judge, doctor Procopie; details about Laura, her mother, Mrs. Machedon, and Adela are not listed. Since adverbial forms are recognized as elevated speech, I considered the form "interestingly" as a fitting candidate. Not only because it honours the pattern of the morpheme "interest-" but also because it recovers some of the formality of this situation. The French easily recreates the formal environment just by using polite pronouns and conjugations; in English, these cues have to be forced by means of vocabulary. The French marks Procopie's enthusiasm by using the adverbial form of "curieux".

E curios că și eu mă întrebam cu ce seamănă toată întâmplarea asta. (79)

Literal: It's strange that I was asking myself with what this whole occurrence resembles.

Curieusement, je me demandais aussi à quoi ressemble toute cette histoire. (103)

Interestingly, I, too, was wondering what this whole occurrence resembles. (45)

Fourth occurrence: Darie tells Zamfira and Iliescu what happened in his dream. He points out that the lieutenant had agreed with his initial order—to shoot Ivan on the spot, which is ironic. I opted for the colloquial expression "It's funny" as opposed to "It's interesting", to illustrate a more informal situation. To note: the French version wrongfully attributes this statement to Zamfira, while, in the original, Darie is the speaker. On account of this confusion, I cannot evaluate the French as part of the same context.

Ce e mai curios e că domnul locotenent spunea că rău am făcut, că am pierdut prea mult timp. (81)

Literal: What's stranger is that (sir) lieutenant was saying that we did wrong, that we lost too much time.

Le plus drôle, mon lieutenant, c'est que vous disiez qu'on avait tort, qu'on perdait notre temps. (106)

What's funny is that the lieutenant was saying that we were wrong to carry Ivan, that we wasted too much time. (47)

Ninth occurrence: Darie confirms to Zamfira and Iliescu that he had, in fact, forgotten how he intended to continue the mysterious sentence regarding the *contradicting certainties*, precisely as he had admitted in the dream. In this context, the irony is worrisome. As Darie presents forgetfulness as happening in an almost circular motion, he makes the term more eerie than the previous occurrences, yet, above all, the content surrounding the statement leads the translation towards "strange". Here, the French and the English agree.

Ce e mai curios, începu el cu o voce gravă, aproape severă, este că *atunci*, în vis, aveam dreptate. *Am uitat*. Am uitat ce mă pregăteam să-i spun lui Ivan. (82)

Literal: What's stranger, he started with a serious voice, almost severe, is that *then*, in the dream, I was right. *I forgot*. I forgot what I was preparing myself to say to Ivan.

Le plus étrange, dit-il d'une voix grave, presque sévère, c'est qu'à ce moment-là, dans mon rêve, j'avais raison. *J'ai oublié*. J'ai oublié ce que je m'apprêtais à dire à Ivan. (108)

[He] continued on a serious tone, almost severe: What's stranger, is that, *then*, in the dream, I was right. *I forgot*. I forgot what I was about to tell Ivan. (48)

Fourteenth occurrence: Ivan tells Darie about their longstanding relationship of random forgotten encounters where they tackled the same topics, forgetting, every time, the conclusions of their discussions and even forgetting that they ever met. Ivan picks up the idea of forgetfulness that Darie had drawn earlier in the story of the word "curios" and exposes it as a vicious circle. Ivan, however, does not consider this eerie or worrisome; on the contrary, he looks at the idea of recurring forgetfulness with enthusiasm. The French and the English agree on this, the French even taking it a step farther, by reusing the term that was associated with enthusiasm earlier in the story (third occurrence), that is, "curieux" in its adverbial form.

Și, e curios, aceleași probleme reveneau neconținut în discuțiile noastre, continuă Ivan. (91)

Literal: And, it's strange, the same issues would come back continually in our discussions, Ivan continued.

Or, curieusement, les mêmes questions revenaient sans cesse dans nos conversations. (121)

And, interestingly, the same topics would always resurface in our discussions, added Ivan. (59)

Situation 3: the eeriness of illogical conclusions. Although the English could continue to use "interesting", the context does lean towards the unpleasantness of "strange" in these cases, making the use of "interesting" unfit.

Eleventh occurrence: The statement is the onset of Darie's list of obvious questions that he believes the soldiers should have immediately asked about Ivan situation: his wounds, location etc. The French and the English agree that this instance of "curios" is *odd*, the French focusing on the unpleasantness of this realization. By using "strange", the English also takes the route of the *unlikely*, yet, it is less eerie and more ambiguous.

Ce este mai curios [...] este că o singură clipă nu m-am întrebat ce căuta acolo Ivan. (84)

Literal: What's stranger is that one single moment I did not ask myself what Ivan was doing there.

Bizarrement, je ne me suis pas demandé un instant ce qu'il pouvait bien chercher là, Ivan. (111)

What's stranger, [...] is that not even once did I wonder what Ivan was doing there [...]. (50)

Thirteenth occurrence: Ivan is *surprised* that Darie is still not accepting the fact that he, Ivan, Procopie and Arhip are mirror images of the same nameless entity. The French skips the term entirely, translating only the description following.

Ivan îl privi curios, aproape cu surprindere, apoi zâmbi, ridicând din umeri. (90)

Literal: Ivan looked at him strangely, almost with surprise, then [he] smiled, shrugging.

Ivan leva les yeux, non sans une certaine surprise, puis sourit et haussa les épaules. (120)

Ivan gave him a strange look, almost surprised, then he smiled and shrugged. (58)

Fifteenth occurrence: As Darie crosses over into the spirit world, he still struggles to understand and accept what is about to happen. The process is worrisome, yet very far from panic. The French and English follow through on their respective paths, “bizarre” and “strange”.

Și i se păru deodată curios că nu aude nici paseri, nici avioane, nici măcar uruitul surd al camioanelor rusești pe care le văuse de curând trecând pe șosea. (93)

Literal: And it suddenly seemed strange to him that he didn't hear birds, nor planes, not even the muffled rumble of the Russian trucks that he had seen passing on the road a short while before/not long before.

Il lui parut bizarre de n'entendre ni les oiseaux ni avions, pas même le sourd grondement des camions qu'il venait de voir passer sur la route. (125)

Suddenly, it felt strange that there were no birds or planes, not even the muffled rumble of the Russian trucks that he'd recently seen passing on the road. (62)

Although not attributed to a person, in four instances—that appear together—, Darie expresses interest in the subject matter, that is, curiosity. In the fifth and sixth

occurrences, Darie describes his dream to Zamfira and Iliescu. It is not fully clear how he feels about not being able to understand the dream, whether it encourages him to understand or, on the contrary, if it impedes him. Yet, it is in the seventh and eighth occurrences, where he further explains the same idea, that curiosity becomes obvious. Initially, the French opts for a surprised "drôle" yet it shifts towards the worrisome inability to understand which is "bizarre" and follows through with this choice in the next two occurrences. In English, I opted for the more ambiguous "interesting" because it can change its effect but not its form, which is my overall goal.

Curios vis, reîncepu după o lungă tăcere. Nu-i pot da de rost. De ce mi s-o fi părut mie atunci, *în vis*, că ce mă pregăteam să-i spun lui Ivan, *aici*, acum câteva ceasuri, când m-ați strigat voi din urmă, era atât de important? E curios, nu e așa? Întrebă întorcând capul spre Zamfira. [...]Nu, eu mă gândeam la altceva, de-aceea spusesem că-i curios. E curios pentru că *în vis* eram convins, pe de o parte, că acele câteva cuvinte pe care începusem să i le spun lui Ivan anunțau lucruri foarte profunde [...]. (82)

Literal: Interesting dream, he started again after a long silence. I can't make sense of it. Why did it seem to me then, *in the dream*, that what I was preparing to say to Ivan, *here*, a few hours ago, when you called me from behind, was so important? It's strange isn't it? He asked turning his head towards Zamfira. No, I was thinking of something else, that's why I said it's strange. It's strange because *in the dream* I was convinced that, on the one hand, those few words that I had started telling Ivan were announcing very profound things.

Drôle de rêve, dit-il après un long silence. Je n'arrive pas à en comprendre le sens. Pourquoi ai-je eu l'impression, *dans mon rêve*, que ce que je m'apprêtais à dire à Ivan, *ici*, il y a quelques heures, quand vous m'avez appelé, était tellement important? C'est bizarre, n'est-ce pas? demanda-t-il en se tournant vers Zamfira. [...] Non, je pensais à autre chose, voilà pourquoi j'ai dit que c'était bizarre. Bizarre parce que *dans mon rêve* j'étais certain d'une part, que les quelques mots que j'avais commencé à dire à Ivan annonçaient des idées très profondes [...]. (107)

Interesting dream, he started again after a long silence. I can't make sense of it. Why did I think, *in the dream*, that what I was about to tell Ivan a few hours ago, *here*, when you guys called me, was so important? It's interesting, isn't it?" He asked, turning towards Zamfira. [...] No, I was thinking about something else; that's why I said it's interesting. It's interesting because, *in the dream*, on the one hand, I was convinced that the few words that I had started to tell Ivan entailed something profound [...]. (47)

In translation, the text faces further complications using the morpheme "strange" in two very different instances. In English, I chose to avoid using it in other contexts than when Eliade uses "curios". The French translation experience differs from that of the

English version, using “étrange” in one instance and avoiding the struggle altogether due to a morphological difference in another. In the first case, when translating the adjective “straniu”, which is a more intense “strange”, both the French and English are able to use the term “strange”. In English, I chose to avoid it by using “weird”. The French, however, opted for “étrange”.

Ar fi trebuit să se ridice și el, să arate limpede că s-a pus capăt discuției, dar parcă o stranie, deși plăcută, oboseală îl pironia acolo, în fotoliu. (80)

Literal: He should have stood up too, to show clearly that the discussion had come to an end, but it was like a strange, yet pleasant fatigue was pinning him down there in the armchair.

Il aurait dû se lever aussi afin d’indiquer clairement que son propos était clos, mais une sorte de fatigue étrange et agréable le clouait au fond de son fauteuil. (104)

He should have stood up as well, to clearly mark the end of the discussion, but a weird yet pleasant fatigue pinned him there, in the armchair. (45)

Secondly, while in French, the noun “necunoscut” becomes “inconnu”, the only direct translation into English would be “stranger”. I chose to avoid it by using, awkwardly perhaps, “new person”.

[C]um Ivan îți este inaccesibil, încerci să-l regăsești în fiecare necunoscut pe care-l întâlnești. (85)

Literal: As Ivan is inaccessible to you, you try to find him again in every stranger you meet.

Ivan vous étant inaccessible, vous essayez de le retrouver dans chaque inconnu que vous rencontrez. (112)

[S]ince Ivan is out of your reach, you try to find him in every new person you meet. (51)

“Adevărat”

Unlike the previous two mots clef I listed, “adevărat” does not have a very strong presence in the story, appearing a total of nine times, yet only in six different instances, as it is repeated several times within the same phrase.

Romanian Word	French Dictionary Translation	English Dictionary Translation	Description of Romanian
adevărat, -ă <i>adjective</i>	vrai	1. true, truthful, 2. real	1. the opposite of a lie or something false 2. that which exists

Table 4.3

“Adevărat” is used in the story for its two main denominations: true and real, both main descriptors for differentiating the sacred from the profane; its limited occurrence is not representative of the unparalleled role that “adevărat” plays in the story. Naturally, creating a similar morphological pattern would be ideal. The systematic similarities between Romanian and French, make it possible for “adevărat” to be completely transferable in French, appearing as “vrai” or “vraiment”. The French does, however, omit “vrai” in some cases. In English, recreating the pattern was made more complicated by the inability to use “true” and “real” interchangeably. I chose to focus on “true” as a *mot clef*. Below, I have extracted all occurrences of “adevărat” to illustrate the incompatibility between “true” and “real”.

“True”

First occurrence: Zamfira encourages Darie to speak to the wounded Ivan, considering he is “a philosopher”. Within the context, Zamfira points out that Darie is the only one with some sort of formal higher education. Darie, mockingly repeats Zamfira’s assertion, showing clear disbelief in his ability to communicate with Ivan. While the French omits it, in English, “adevărat” can be transferred as “true” or “real”, with an inclination towards “true”. “Real” is a common collocation for objects, while “true”, for people. Thus, I opted for “true”. The French version omits the original expression, thus a comparison between versions is not possible.

Darie oftă fără voia lui și-și trase chipiul pe frunte. Cu adevărat filozof! exclamă, încercând să zâmbească. (72)

Literal: Darie sighed without his will and pulled his cap on his forehead. “Truly philosopher!” He exclaimed, trying to smile.

Darie ne put s'empêcher de soupirer. Tu parles d'un philosophe! fit-il en esquissant un sourire désabusé. (91)

Darie could not help but sigh and pulled his helmet forward. A true philosopher! He exclaimed, trying to force a smile. (35)

Third occurrence: The lieutenant (French: le capitaine) tells Darie that, as leader of the group, it was his responsibility to pull rank over Zamfira and Iliescu, who were determined to carry the wounded Ivan to the nearest village. Darie agrees with this statement and uses the common expression "it's true", which is *identical* across the board.

E adevărat, vorbi Darie zâmbind absent. Dar pe de altă parte, de câte ori îndrăznisem să comand, în acele șase zile, ieșise prost. (77)

Literal: It's true, spoke Darie smiling absently. But on another side, every time I had dared to command, in those six days, [it] came out badly.

C'est vrai, répondit Darie, un sourire distrait aux lèvres. Mais d'autre part, chaque fois que j'avais osé donner des ordres, durant ces six journées, ça avait mal tourné. (99)

That's true, said Darie, smiling absently. But on the other hand, every order I dared to give during those six days didn't work out. (42)

Fourth and fifth occurrences: Darie recounts to the crowd in Iași his thought process during the event where the soldiers found Ivan. The event had a truly existential effect on Darie, forcing him to *put things in perspective*. Here, both "true" and "real" could be used, yet "true" not only was a better fit, but also continued the pattern that I tried to achieve.

[T]urburat de credința și nădejdea lui Zamfira, [...] mi-am spus: dacă ar fi adevărat, dacă Ivan, așa cum este el, paralizat, aproape mut, trăgând să moară într-o margine de drum, dacă Ivan *ne poată mântui cu adevărat* atunci ascunde un mister impenetrabil și cutremurător [...]. (79)

Literal: Troubled by the faith and hope of Zamfira, I told myself: if it were true, if Ivan, as he is, paralyzed, almost mute, in his last moments, on the side of a road, if Ivan can bless us truly then he hides a mystery impenetrable and shattering.

[T]roublé par la foi et l'espérance de Zamfira, [...] [j]e me suis dit : si c'est vrai, si Ivan, tel qu'il est, paralysé, presque muet, mourant au bord d'un chemin, si Ivan *peut vraiment nous sauver*, alors il cache un mystère terrible et impénétrable [...]. (102)

Rattled by Zamfira's faith and confidence, I told myself: if it is true, if Ivan, as he is, paralyzed, unable to talk, dying on the side of a road, if Ivan *can truly save us*, then he holds a mystery, impenetrable and astounding. (44)

Sixth occurrence: Ivan presents his analysis of Darie's comparison between Ivan's ability to bless the Romanian soldiers and the Unknown God. While not in agreement with Darie, Ivan asserts that Darie's comparison is still a valiant attempt at processing the mystical experience. In this case, "true" and "real" are not interchangeable.

Și cu toate acestea, ceva era adevărat în comparația dumitale, dar numai dacă privim lucrurile dintr-o cu totul altă perspectivă. (92)

Literal: And with all of these, something was true in your comparison, but only if we look at things from a completely other perspective.

Et pourtant il y avait du vrai dans ta comparaison; mais seulement si l'on envisage les choses selon une toute autre perspective. (123)

And, still, there was some truth in your comparison but only if we adopt a new perspective. (60)

"Real"

Second occurrence: Among Darie's ramblings to Ivan, he draws a comparison between their present situation and an unwritten short story, whose subject he does not develop. Here, the English collocation pattern is in favour of "real".

Ca într-o năvelă celebră, pe care încă n-a scris-o nimeni, dar care va fi desigur scrisă într-o zi, pentru că e prea adevărată, dacă înțelegi la ce fac aluzie [...]. (73)

Literal: Like in a famous short story that no one wrote yet but that will surely be written one day because it's too real, if you understand what I am alluding to.

Comme dans une nouvelle célèbre, que personne n'a encore écrite, mais qui sera certainement écrite un jour, parce qu'elle est trop vraie [...]. (93)

Like in a famous short story that hasn't been written yet but that will surely be written one day. Because it's too real, if you know what I mean [...]. (36)

Seventh, eighth and ninth occurrences: Darie, tired of switching between dream and reality, finally reaches his end. "Real" is the perfect match in this case. Although "true" would be more convenient, it would be too awkward and it would attract too much attention to itself.

Vasăzică, e adevărat? întrebă Darie fără să deschidă ochii. De data aceasta e adevărat? [...]
E adevărat, domnule elev. (102)

Literal: So then, it's real? Asked Darie without opening [his] eyes. This time it's real?

It's real, cadet sir.

C'est donc vrai ? demanda Darie sans ouvrir les yeux. Cette fois-ci c'est vrai?
C'est vrai, mon lieutenant. (138)

So then it's real? Asked Darie with his eyes closed. This time it's real?...
It's real, sir." (72)

Character Profiles

As established, Mircea Eliade's purpose in his prose is to illustrate his scholarly work, namely, to expose the sacred side of the coin, which, in profane terms, is the spiritual and irrational. Yet, it is precisely due to its unearthly nature that the sacred explains and gives meaning to paradoxical elements present on the profane side. To expose the sacred, Eliade recreates two kinds of participants: archaic and modern, two opposite ends of the spectrum. His ultimate goal is to convince the modern man to reaccept their archaic, mystical roots. In "Ivan", Eliade appoints an archaic man, Zamfira, to lead the modern man, Darie, into this acceptance. These two protagonists appear in antithesis; the difference in social class between Darie and Zamfira is evident in the way they express themselves. The level of language that Zamfira employs is not just informal but colloquial, characteristic of an oral lower register: his sentences are either very simple or they contain mistakes and his vocabulary is peppered with regionalisms. Moreover, as he tries to repeat words that he hears, he makes semantical mistakes, exposing his limited academic skills. This is not to say that he appears less intelligent or rude; his use of a lower level of language does not impede him from addressing his peers—Darie in particular—with the utmost respect and he repeatedly proves his shrewdness. The way he speaks merely emphasizes his roots and his purpose in the story as dictated by Eliade's theory, namely, the role of the archaic man. His way of speaking reveals an understanding of the profane that is simplistic, instinctual and practical. Darie, on the other hand, speaks with correct grammar even through his spontaneous existential ramblings; only towards the end, he and Ivan both start loosening their verb tenses to forms more commonly

associated with oral speech, all the while maintaining a high level of respect even in informal situations. This, of course, represents Darie's acceptance of the sacred, which will have to be obvious in translation. In terms of vocabulary, Darie does not generally use regionalisms like the others, yet he does not use specialized language either. As a philosophy student, he is a well-read person with an array of terms at his disposal. However, he continues to opt for different languages, in spite of the fact that he continues to fail to truly communicate in those languages; it is clear that he is only speaking to himself. When he describes to Ivan the events that changed his life or the ill-fated beginnings of the Romanian people, he could be eloquent and clear, yet, as he spirals into the sacred side of the world, he loses the ability to bring up empirical proof. Darie is derailed in this rural landscape, having trouble reading the land like the other two. He is out of his comfort zone and, although reluctant to accept it, he knows that he is at a loss and follows Zamfira's lead. Zamfira's view of the profane is a collage of symbols that he can interpret using the knowledge he inherited from his ancestors, making him a map of sorts. Yet, despite bestowing Zamfira with the power of the group's leader and placing his life in Zamfira's hands, Darie's profane way of interpretation surfaces in his language, which is vulgar and unkind at times.

Iliescu generally speaks properly and respectfully; he always addresses Darie in a formal way. Unlike Zamfira, Iliescu is able to tap into the city-life mentality; his ideas are often more polished than Zamfira's, yet less so than Darie's. He likely comes from the middle class and, most importantly, his background is a combination of archaic and modern. He often chooses to follow Zamfira's lead; he supports Zamfira's symbolic interpretations and he remains in a safe place between Darie's urban philosophical preoccupations and Zamfira's sometimes naïve obsession with rituals. As mentioned previously, Iliescu is able to acknowledge sacred symbols, yet he never initiates their interpretation, instead following Zamfira's lead. He is the only one who reacts somewhat violently to Ivan's inability to understand the four languages spoken and accuses Ivan of treachery. This shows that he has lost some of the compassion characteristic of the Archaic, yet he is not fully anchored into the modern intellectual either. Due to his

position in the middle of the spectrum, Iliescu is a strategist; he can use Zamfira as a map to calculate their next move. In other words, he is equipped with the ability to make the right choices by applying modern intelligence to Zamfira's raw data. In terms of language, he seems to be able to choose whether to employ lower grammatical forms and regional vocabulary, as mentioned, yet he often opts for the less complicated language specific to the archaic people and rightfully so, considering that they happen to be in the middle of nowhere.

Since the onset of this project, I knew that class division would be an issue coming from Romanian into English because of the absence of a distinct polite form in English pronouns, that is, and absence of a T-V distinction—the French “vous” and the Romanian “dumneavoastră”. Yet, I realized the importance of properly transferring these character profiles as I dug into their rendition into French. As mentioned, the distinction between archaic and modern is at the core of Eliade's prose, thus amplifying the importance of accurate representation. Placing Darie and Zamfira at opposite ends on the axis of corruption from archaic to modern is, of course, vital and it has to be achieved by mimicking Eliade's tropes: Darie's proper grammar and his depth of thought, Zamfira's colloquial choices, his religious remarks and compassionate attitude, compared to the others involved. Certainly, neither end of the spectrum is extreme, especially since the participants are young adults, merely discovering the world. Darie's position in society is, of course, the most obvious as he is at the centre of the story. The Romanian and the French versions use the polite forms "dumneavoastră" and "vous" when he is addressed to reveal his *superiority*; his use of these forms uncover the status of other characters also. In translation, these relationships have to be established. Below, I have extracted a set of quotes that establish these relationships. To note: the Romanian original uses three levels of formality: informal, semi-formal and formal. What I call the semi-formal are forms that were once the singular forms of the polite pronouns, but which are now used in a semi-formal manner; the once plural form "dumneavoastră" has taken over the singular address of the polite form.

Second person singular	informal	semi-formal	formal
personal	tu	dumneata	dumneavoastră
direct object	tine, te	dumneata, te	dumneavoastră, vă, v-
indirect object	ție, îți, ți	ție, îți, ți	dumneavoastră, vă, v-
possessive	al tău, a ta, ai tăi, ale tale	al/a dumitale ai/ale dumitale	al/a dumneavoastră ai/ale dumneavoastră

Table 4.4

Zamfira and Iliescu → **Darie**: formal. In the quote below, Zamfira not only uses the formal pronoun, but he amplifies the formality by addressing Darie as “domnule elev” (mister cadet). The French translation removes the amplifying “domnule”, but establishes Darie’s superiority by inserting his military rank; the English, completely loses the effect of the formal pronoun, but manages to point out the difference in status between the two by using what originally amplified the statement, namely “sir”.

E pentru dumneavoastră, domnule elev, spuse. Poate îl păstrați ca amintire... (68)

Literal: It’s for you (formal), mister cadet, [he] said. Maybe you keep it as souvenir.

C’est pour vous, mon lieutenant³³. Ça vous fera un souvenir. (85)

It’s for you, sir. Maybe you can keep it as souvenir... (29)

Iliescu only addresses Darie directly a few pages later, yet since the beginning, it is obvious that Zamfira and Iliescu occupy the same rank, therefore Iliescu would also address him formally.

Darie → **Zamfira and Iliescu**: informal or semi-formal. Darie uses the informal or the semi-informal second person to address both Zamfira and Iliescu. In the quote below, Darie turns towards Iliescu, “forcing a smile”, to point out that Iliescu’s rudeness will not

³³ Although Darie appears as a lieutenant here, the French translation does mention elsewhere that Darie is an “aspirant”, a lieutenant *in training*. The original term is “elev”.

have a positive effect on the situation. The French translator changed the point of view to an all-inclusive subject “on” and follows up with the all-inclusive indirect object pronoun “nous”. The French translation does not emphasize Darie’s superiority over Zamfira and Iliescu; in fact, in the few instances where Darie addresses only one of the two soldiers, he employs the impersonal “on” form rather than the “tu”. On the other hand, the English version needed to compensate for the absence of the T-V distinction, therefore over-emphasizing every opportunity.

Dacă-l înjuri, cum o să te mai binecuvânteze? (70)

Literal: If you (informal) cuss him, how will he even bless you (singular informal)?

Si on le traite d’enfoiré, il ne risque pas de nous bénir. (88)

How is he going to bless you if you curse him? (32)

Darie, Zamfira and Iliescu → **Ivan**: informal. It is no surprise that the Romanian soldiers would address the enemy in an informal manner.

The Lieutenant → **Darie**: semi-formal. The Romanian original employs the semi-formal possessive pronoun “dumitale” as shown in Table 4. This pronoun is, grammatically speaking, the singular of the formal “dumneavoastră” and uses second person singular conjugations. Its current use is informal and oral and it satisfies situations where neither extreme is fitting, such as between acquaintances; however, it leans more towards the informal. As quoted previously, Zamfira and Iliescu address Darie using the “dumneavoastră” form, thus pointing out the difference in layers of formality. Further on, Darie addresses the lieutenant using the “dumneavoastră” form. The French translator opted for a formal situation and I used an unavoidably informal address, yet, this time, not all-together wrongfully.

În orice caz, îl întrerupse locotenentul privindu-l cu simpatie, aproape cu căldură, vina a fost, de la început, a dumitale. Nu trebuia să-i lași să-l transporte. (77)

Literal: In any case, the lieutenant interrupted him, looking at him pleasantly, almost with warmth, the fault was, from the beginning, yours (singular semi-formal). You (singular informal or semi-formal) shouldn’t have let them transport him.

En tout cas, c'était votre faute, dès le début, dit le capitaine³⁴ sur un ton dont la cordialité tranchait avec l'apparente sévérité du propos. Vous n'auriez pas dû les laisser le transporter. (99)

In any case, interrupted the lieutenant, looking at him with compassion, almost with warmth, the fault was yours to begin with. You shouldn't have let them take him. (41)

Darie → The Lieutenant: formal. Darie addresses the lieutenant—his superior—as Zamfira and Iliescu address him, using the formal “dumneavoastră”. While the French version can mirror the Romanian original, in English, yet again, I used “sir” as a way to show the formal relationship.

Nu y-am recunoscut adineaori, începu încurcat. Era încă întunec. (93)

Literal: I didn't recognize you (formal) a moment ago, he started, embarrassed. It was still dark.

Je ne vous avais pas reconnu tout à l'heure, mon capitaine, bredouilla-t-il. Il faisait encore noir. (124)

I didn't recognize you just now, lieutenant, sir, he stammered. It was still dark. (56)

Procopie → Darie: uncertain. Procopie never addresses Darie directly.

Arhip → Darie: semi-formal. When Arhip appears in the story, he uses what seem to be informal conjugations. However, he actually intends for “dumneata”, the semi-formal that the lieutenant uses with Darie and which conjugates following the informal pattern. This clue in their relationship appears later in their conversation. The French translator rendered their relationship formal, as it has with the lieutenant and I, yet again, took an informal route.

Și aș vrea să ascult și sfârșitul povestirii, adăugă. M-ai făcut curios... (84)

Literal: And I would like to also listen to the end of the story, he added. You (singular informal or semi-formal) made me curious.

Et puis j'aimerais entendre la fin de votre histoire. Vous m'avez rendu curieux. (111)

³⁴ Since the French translator opted to attribute the rank of lieutenant to Darie, the original lieutenant becomes captain.

But I'd like to hear the end of your story, he added. You've sparked my interest..." (50)

Moments later, it becomes clear that the Romanian Arhip does not share the predicament of the French one. Although the French version maintained the tone set at the beginning of this segment, the Romanian Arhip becomes very direct—borderline rude—by scolding Darie about wanting to light a cigarette. The English version recovered the informality, but lost the implications of the semi-formal “dumneata”, namely that the two are not close; they are, at best, acquaintances.

Nu mai aprinde țigarea, îl întrerupse Arhip. Mai așteaptă. Ești încă obosit. Te-a obosit și pe dumneata urcușul. (84)

Literal: Don't light (singular informal or semi-formal) the cigarette anymore, Arhip interrupted him. Wait more. You're (singular informal or semi-formal) still tired. The hike tired you (semi-formal) too.

Vous ne devriez pas fumer. Attendez un peu, dit Arhip. Reprenez d'abord votre souffle. L'escalade vous a fatigué aussi. (111)

“Don't light that”, interrupted Arhip. “Wait a minute. You're still tired. The climb tired you out too”. (50)

Darie → **Arhip**, first encounter: semi-formal. Darie addresses Arhip once, as part of a group of various scientists, whom he accuses of wrongfully interpreting the world as something that can be grasped. He uses the form “dumneavoastră” as plural of the semi-formal “dumneata” in the first half of the next quote, and “dumneata” in the second half, as he refers to Arhip only. It is clear that he reciprocates Arhip's vision of their relationship, that they are neither strangers nor friends. The French version continued with the formal and the English, with the informal.

Dumneavoastră, tehnologii, sociologii, psihologii, sunteți oameni foarte ciudați. Dar nu cred că lucrurile sunt întotdeauna atât de simple pe cât le vedeți dumneavoastră. Ci să fiu foarte sincer când ți-am spus că semeni cu Ivan, ce mă turbura mai mult în această bruscă descoperire nu era speranța că, prin dumneata, aș fi putut ghici ce se petrecuse în mintea lui Ivan [...]. (85)

Literal: You (semi-formal plural) technologists, sociologists, psychologists, are people that are very weird. But I don't think that things are always so simple as you (semi-formal) see them. To be really honest, when I told you (semi-formal) that you resemble Ivan, what troubled me more in this sudden discovery wasn't the hope that through you I could have guessed what had happened in Ivan's head.

Vous autres, technologues, sociologues, psychologues, vous êtes des gens vraiment bizarres. Mais je ne crois pas que les choses soient toujours aussi simples que vous le pensez. À la vérité, quand je vous ai dit que vous ressembliez à Ivan, ce qui me troublait surtout dans cette découverte soudaine, ce n'était pas l'espoir de deviner par votre truchement ce qui se passait dans l'esprit d'Ivan [...]. (112)

You technologists, sociologists, psychologists are odd people. But I don't think things are always as simple as you see them, sir. To be quite honest, when I told you that you resembled Ivan, what troubled me more in this sudden discovery, wasn't the hope that, through you, sir, I could figure out what went through Ivan's mind [...]. (51)

Darie → **Procopie and Arhip**, as he confuses Ivan for them: formal. Darie subtly enters a dream where he hears himself called by a man under a tree. He first believes that this man is doctor Procopie, then Arhip and, finally, he discovers that this is Ivan. Despite not having addressed Arhip formally in their previous conversation, he strangely does at this point in the story. In both cases, Procopie and Arhip, the French translation transferred the relationship, using the formal “vous” but omits “domnul” (mister), an element which further adds to the respect or the social distance between the two. In English, I lost the majority of that distance in the absence of the formal pronoun. While Procopie's case was unrecoverable, Arhip's presented the opportunity to add a “sir”.

Dar ce-i cu dumneavoastră aici, domnule doctor? Cum ați ajuns aici? [...] În aceeași clipă își dădu seama de confuzie și încercă să se scuze. E întuneric, nu y-am recunoscut. Sunteți domnul Arhip. Dar tot nu înțeleg ce căutați aici. (89)

Literal: But what are you (formal) doing here mister doctor? How did you get here? [...] In the same moment, he realized he confusion and tried to apologize. It's dark, I didn't recognize you (formal). You (formal) are mister Arhip. But I still don't understand what you are doing here.

Mais que faites-vous là Major³⁵? Comment êtes-vous arrivé là? [...] Mais il comprit aussitôt le quiproquo et, confus, bredouilla une excuse: Il fait noir, c'est pourquoi je ne vous avais pas reconnu. Vous êtes Arhip. Mais je ne comprends pas ce que vous faites là. (118)

But what are you doing here, doctor? How did you get here? [...] At that moment, he realized that he had confused him. Embarrassed, he tried an awkward apology. It's dark, I didn't recognize you, sir. I know you are Arhip. But I still don't understand what you are doing here. (56)

³⁵ The French version translates “doctor Procopie” as “Major”.

Darie → **Ivan**, final encounter: semi-formal. Despite starting off the conversation addressing first Procopie and then Arhip, using the formal “dumneavoastră”, Darie shifts gears into the semi-formal immediately and completely once he discovers that this man is Ivan. It is possible that the formal was initially used to emphasize the fact that Darie is starting to accept his descent into the archaic and is distancing himself from those whom he previously considered his peers. Yet, he may have only been responding to a register proposed by his interlocutor. It only becomes clear that he is using the semi-formal “dumneata” later in the conversation. Both French and English transferred the relationship as informal.

Așadar, știai românește, și nu ne-ai spus nimic. Ne-ai lăsat să ne chinuim. (89)

Literal: Therefore, you (informal or semi-formal) knew Romanian and you didn't tell us anything. You (informal or semi-formal) left us to agonize (ourselves).

Par conséquent, tu parlais le roumain et tu ne nous as rien dit. Tu nous as laissés nous donner toute cette peine... (119)

So then, you knew Romanian and you didn't say anything. You let us torture ourselves... (57)

Îmi pare rău dacă te contrazic, începu încurcat, dar sunt sigur că te înșeli. Pe Procopie și Arhip i-am cunoscut de curând, iar pe dumneata te-am întâlnit ieri, alaltăieri, cum spuneai, în marginea porumbiștii. (91)

Literal: I'm sorry if I contradict you, he started embarrassed, but I am sure that you're wrong. Procopie and Arhip I met only recently, and you (semi-formal), I met yesterday or the day before yesterday, on the edge of the cornfield.

Excuse-moi de te contredire, mais je suis sûr que tu te trompes. J'ai fait la connaissance de Procopie et d'Arhip tout récemment et toi, je t'ai rencontré hier ou avant-hier, comme tu le disais, à l'orée d'un champ de maïs. (121)

I'm sorry to contradict you, he started, but I'm sure that you're wrong. I only met Procopie and Arhip recently; and you, I've only met yesterday or two days ago at the edge of the cornfield, as you said. (58)

Ivan, Procopie and Arhip → **Darie**: formal and semi-formal. Ivan (as himself, Procopie and Arhip) opens Darie's dream by asking him why he was afraid. Not only that he uses the formal pronoun, but he also addresses Darie as “domnule” (mister). In French

both accounts are transferred, while in English both are lost, but one only partially. Inspired by French, the “philosopher” is capitalized to illustrate a sort of reverence. The effect is somewhat different, considering the Romanian original did not insist on admiration; merely, it showed great respect.

De ce y-a fost frică, domnule filozof? se auzi întreat în șoaptă. (89)

Literal: Why were you (formal) afraid, mister philosopher? he heard himself asked in whisper.

Pourquoi avez-vous eu peur, Monsieur le Philosophe? lui demanda doucement une voix. (118)

What were you afraid of, Philosopher? Whispered someone. (56)

A few lines into their conversation, Ivan switches to the semi-formal “dumneata”. This switch does not happen immediately after Darie addresses him informally. There is no obvious reason for why he proceeds this way, yet there is a possible speculation that Ivan is showing a loss in respect for Darie. At this point in their conversation, Ivan is criticizing Darie’s reaction to the possibility of eternal life in the sacred. Ivan believes that Darie is wrong to be afraid of the possibility that he may never rest, as this is an invitation to rejoice rather than a reason to despair. Darie, stuck in his profane way of interpreting the world, cannot imagine that he could escape boredom in billions of years to come. Ivan seems to find this immature. The French translator disagreed with this interpretation and opted to use the formal. English, having no other choice, proceeded informally.

Ce n-am înțeles, continuă Ivan, a fost deznădejdea dumitale, domnule filozof, frica dumitale că nu te vei odihni niciodată. Dar de ce vrei să te odihnești? (90)

Literal: What I didn’t understand was your (singular semi-formal) hopelessness, mister philosopher, your (singular semi-formal) fear that you (informal or semi-formal) will never rest. But why (singular informal or semi-formal) do you want to rest?

Je n’ai pourtant pas compris une chose: votre désespoir, Monsieur le Philosophe, votre peur de ne jamais vous reposer. (120)

What I didn’t understand, added Ivan, was your disbelief, Philosopher, your fear that you will never rest again. But why would you want to rest? (57)

Zamfira

Despite not being the main protagonist, Zamfira sets the tone of the short story; he is the one first uttering one of the iconic phrases of the story, namely “trage să moară”.

Trage să moară, spuse. (68)

Literal: He draws near death, he/she said.

Il se meurt, dit-il. (85)

He's dying. (29)

In the original Romanian, Zamfira opts for a colloquial expression that is fairly dated, “trage să moară”, whose closest English counterpart expression is “he is in his last moments” or “he is breathing his last”. The French and the English versions, however, are clearly focused on the unavoidable destination of this action rather than the manner in which this action is happening. The French translator employs a very posh “il se meurt”, choice which earned Paruit a very crude review by Jean-Louis Courriol.

Le “trage să moară” prononcé par Zamfira à l’adresse de ses compagnons d’errance est rendu par un pompeux et ridicule “il se meurt” qui nous place dans un contexte de tragédie classique au lieu de nous introduire dans l’univers dramatiquement prosaïque de soldats en déroute qui ne songeraient pas à dire autre chose que, par exemple “il est en train de mourir” ou “il n’en a pas pour longtemps”.

(Courriol 267)

Courriol proposes accentuating the temporal aspect—in grammatical terms, a present continuous rather than present simple—as the best alternative to the overly dramatic “il se meurt”. However, he may have not considered that the syllabic pattern of “să moară” and “se meurt” are close in terms of sonority. The expression is used three times on the very first page—and seven times in total— in the Romanian original. Perhaps this reoccurrence motivated Paruit's decision. I had initially chosen “he’s about to die”, but eventually decided against it as the expression felt too impersonal. I made the decision to use a simple but efficient “he’s dying”, which is not all-encompassing. In Romanian dictionaries, whether in the 2000s, the 1950s (Macrea, Petrovici, Rosetti et al), and even

1929 (Șăineanu), the expression “trage să moară” consistently appears as “to be in agony in the final moments of life” (DEX 98 and 2009). Both French and English fail here to captivate the agony in the same short and colloquial style. Most importantly, both translations strip the assertion of all clues about the speaker. From the beginning, the original adds detail to the portrait of the character who uses this sort of colloquial language. Elements later in the story reveal Zamfira’s rural roots, whose lexical fashion favours regionalisms and whose interjections often involve God. Eliade’s clues about Zamfira’s roots are subtle: small grammatical oddities and regional or archaic lexical choices. In addition to the “trage să moară”, “ostenit”—a regional form of “tired”—is another one of Zamfira’s terms; the others adopt and start using this term throughout the story, thus it is Zamfira that sets the pace once again. In English, I generally did not manage to follow through with the reoccurrence of the morpheme “osteni-”, but I focused on using informal words and expressions: “worn out” (53), drained (66), “to try hard” (35), “to go through the trouble of” (58 and 64), even “to break one’s back” (40). The French version also breaks the pattern, translating the adjective “ostenit” as “fatigué” (114) or “faible” (as “faiblesse” 129) and the expression “a-și da osteneala” (to break a sweat) by “se donner du mal” (91, 97, 106, 120) or “se donner de la peine” (127).

Zamfira’s battle with Romanian lexical complexities is best illustrated in two instances in the story. First, there is the problem of the neutral gender in Romanian which is characterized by a masculine singular and a feminine plural. Of course, considering that the neutral gender does not have forms that are specific to it, that is, it borrows from the masculine and the feminine, it can and does create confusion. In the example below, Eliade uses Iliescu to emphasize Zamfira’s mistake.

Visuri, spuse Zamfira. Cine poate să le dea de rost? (82)

Literal: Dreams (masculine plural), said Zamfira. Who can give them meaning?

Des rêves... répondit celui-ci. Qui peut les comprendre? (107)

The dreams, answered Zamfira, who can figure them out? (48)

Au și visele tâlcul lor, dacă știi cum să le tălmăcești, vorbi Iliescu. (82)

Literal: Dreams (feminine plural) have their own meaning, if you know how to interpret them.

Les rêves, ça a un sens si on sait les deviner, dit Iliescu. (107)

Dreams have a message if you know how to read them. (48)

As illustrated, Zamfira and Iliescu use different plural forms of the noun "vis" (dream). Currently, the meanings of the two differ, in that, Iliescu's "vise" refers to what we experience in sleep state, and Zamfira's "visuri" refers to plans that are difficult to attain. It is unclear whether this differentiation was already established in the 1960s when the short story was written, yet, limited knowledge of proper Romanian can be assumed for two reasons: first, the masculine plural "visuri" is the marked one of the two, and second, Zamfira confuses other terms. This distinction between "vise" versus "visuri" is lost in translation. The French translator rendered a marked form by using the indefinite article "des" instead of the definite "les", and, in English, I copied the solution by adding the definite article "the". This article switch, however, only manages to signal an awkwardness in both languages, which illustrates a different version of Zamfira. While in the original, Zamfira merely lacks fine tuning, in translation he leaves the reader wondering what is happening to him. At most, the two translations manage to distinguish Zamfira from Iliescu and Darie by association, but the complexity of Zamfira's academic standing that Eliade achieves in language-play, is lost.

Another such instance occurs when Zamfira attempts to use Darie's metaphor to describe making their way into the cornfield. Zamfira is obviously not familiar with the verb "a afunda", which describes immersing an object or one's own person in a liquid. Here, Darie uses it metaphorically.

Pe-aici ne afundăm în porumbiște... (83)

Literal: Through here we immerse ourselves back in the cornfield.

Par ici, on s'enfonce dans le maïs. (108)

We're diving back into the cornfield. (49)

Zamfira uses a term that is similar in form but that has a completely different meaning, namely, the verb “a înfunda”, which describes stuffing or plugging something to create a clog.

După aceea ne înfundăm din nou în porumbiște și ne odihnim. (83)

Literal: After that we stuff ourselves back into the cornfield.

Après, on retournera s'enfoncer dans le maïs et on se reposera. (109)

After that, we'll drive back into the cornfield and rest. (49)

This lexical switch can be attributed only partly to Eliade's mastery, since it is the Romanian language's inherent playfulness that conditions this connection. The French translation omitted the difference, perhaps out of a lack of a similar pair of terms. The English, however, uses a pair that are less likely to be confused—"dive" and "drive"—but that achieve part of the original effect.

Zamfira's sentences are generally well formed, yet simplistic and, in order to expose him as the archaic man, Eliade alters his grammar in small instances. Thus, Eliade appeals to the complexities of the Romanian verb: the conditional and subjunctive modes.

The Conditional

Doamne-ajută! că dacă vă scrânteți piciorul tocmai acum, nu era bine. (86)

Literal: God help! Because if you twisted your leg just now, it wasn't good.

Bon Dieu ! C'est pas le moment de vous fouler une cheville (116)

Oh my God! If you twisted your ankle just now, wouldn't be good. (54)

Dacă v-am fi legat brațul pe loc, era ca și cum nimic nu s-ar fi întâmplat... (95)

Literal: If we had tied your arm on the spot, it was like nothing would have happened.

Si on vous avait fait un garrot de suite, ç'aurait été vraiment un rien" (127)

If we tied up your arm on the spot, would be like nothing happened..." (63)

In the examples presented, Zamfira tries forming two hypothetical situations in the past. He starts off well, using the imperfect and the conditional perfect, respectively, but clumsily uses the imperfect instead of the conditional perfect in the second half. Romanian, as French, uses the imperfect tense to express descriptions and habitual actions in the past. In the first example, Zamfira reacts to Darie having tripped on a dry root, thus not a case for the imperfect. The French translator avoided the if-clause and, thus, the mistake. In the second example, he corrected the verb mode, but forced an unlikely contraction to reproduce the effect, namely “ç'aurait”. Jean-Louis Courriol disagreed with this choice claiming that such a contraction is “pénible” since “ça aurait” would be “[le] seul possible, normal et spontané dans un dialogue de ce type” (Courriol, 267). Courriol’s stance seems to completely overlook the Romanian original, its mistakes and, most importantly, the reasons behind the mistakes. Without these clues, his evaluation can only be linguistic and can only steer away from honouring the character profiles as decided by Eliade. In English, I was inspired by the French version and made use of oral speech patterns—I omitted the subject and simplified the tense by using the simple past rather than the past perfect continuous.

The Subjunctive

Dar de Dumnezeu și Iisus Cristos tot trebuie c-a auzit el, și cruce nu se poate să nu știe să facă. (70)

Literal: But of God and Jesus Christ it must be that he heard still, and it can’t be that he doesn’t know how to make the sign of the cross.

Mais il aura quand même bien entendu parler du bon Dieu et de Jesus-Christ et il est pas possible qu’il sache pas faire le signe de la croix (88)

But he must’ve heard of God and of Jesus Christ and it can’t be that he doesn’t know how to make the sign of the cross. (33)

In Romanian, Zamfira fails to fulfill the subjunctive that the verb “trebuie” (must) demands. Zamfira says “trebuie c-a (contraction: că a) auzit el” – “a auzit” being the indicative composite past version of the verb “a auzi” (to hear). The correct sequence is “trebuie să fi auzit el”, “să fi auzit” being the subjunctive past version of the same verb. The two utterances—the correct and the incorrect one—can both be translated as “it must

be that he heard” in the most literal way possible. Thus, the grammatical mistake is inevitably corrected in the process. In the sentence that follows, Zamfira uses the subjunctive again and he does so correctly. It is clear that Eliade wants to point out Zamfira’s academic shortcomings. In French, the meaning was transferred, yet the impression that the reader should have of Zamfira is altered: he is someone whom the reader will later discover as a young man likely born and certainly raised in rural Romania of the early 1920’s. “Il aura bien entendu parler” and “il est pas possible qu’il sache pas” is a complex sequence of tenses that is unlikely for Zamfira. Since English does not allow the same mistake to be transferred, I tried compensating with a verbal contraction. This contraction, however, cannot salvage much; the subjunctive’s need for fine tuning is unequalled. “Il est pas possible qu’il sache pas” is a literal translation of the Romanian, but in English, the use of subjunctive was replaced with a slightly awkward—yet familiar in oral language—use of “can’t be” instead of “it’s impossible”. This orally-oriented translation follows the pattern started in the previous sentence, creating a consistency between them rather than a major gap. He uses the conjunction “că” immediately after the verb “trebuie” (must) gain, yet, this time, likely what is missing is a comma. Zamfira’s intonation is faulty here more so than his understanding of morphology and syntax.

Nu mai spuneți nimic, domnule elev, vorbi Zamfira. Trebuie că sunteți osteniți. (86)

Literal: Don’t say anything anymore, mister cadet, said Zamfira. You have to be tired.

Vous ne dites plus rien, mon lieutenant, chuchota Zamfira. Vous devez être fatigué... (114)

You shouldn’t be talking, sir, said Zamfira. You’ve got to be worn out... (53)

From the context, Zamfira does not intend to give an order—he’s genuinely concerned about Darie, yet he expresses himself awkwardly and comes off as crass. The French translator disinfected Zamfira’s less polished speech pattern by correcting the subjunctive, but points out his informal tone by omitting the “ne” that forms the French negation in combination with “pas”. Zamfira performs this elision throughout the text. While Eliade prioritizes form as a way to sustain his theme, the French translator usually favours

meaning with compensations elsewhere in the text that show Zamfira's limited academic training:

Vorbiți-i dumneavoastră, domnule elev. Spuneți-i ceva să vadă că-i vrem binele...(71)

Literal: Talk to him, mister cadet. Tell him something to see that we want what's good for him.

Causez-lui mon lieutenant. Dites-y quelque chose, qu'il voye qu'on lui veut pas de mal... (91)

You talk to him, sir! Tell him something, we want what's best for him..." (34)

While the Romanian original is grammatically correct, the French translation intentionally uses the impersonal object pronoun to lower Zamfira's understanding of grammar. In fact, the French translation took advantage of an opportune sequence to simulate what Eliade does elsewhere—"visure" versus "vise". To emphasize Zamfira's academic level as opposed to the others', Eliade again has one of the other characters properly repeat what Zamfira says improperly. In the example above, Darie replies with a question using the correct object pronoun: "Lui dire quoi?" (91). Provided with the correct form, Zamfira reiterates properly: "Dites-lui n'importe quoi [...]" (91). However, as illustrated in the above quote, the French Zamfira initially uses the right pronoun in the imperative "causez-lui" and only in the second instance, "dites-y", he attributes the impersonal "y" to Ivan. In addition to performing an unlikely mistake, this misuse following a proper use of the indirect object "lui" creates a slightly uncomfortable inconsistency.

Darie

Zamfira's way of being, his instincts and innocence are taken for granted by the modern city folk as it is made obvious in the below conversation between Darie and his fellow city dwellers of Iași.

Am avut desigur noroc, continuă Darie. Dar Zamfira avea instinct de jivină sălbatecă, parcă simțea de departe apropierea omului și ne ascundeam pe loc. (97)

Literal: We had of course luck, continued Darie. But Zamfira had the instinct of a wild animal, as if he would feel from afar humans approaching and we would hide on the spot.

Nous avons eu de la chance, c'est sûr, reprit Darie. Mais Zamfira avait un instinct de bête fauve, on aurait dit qu'il sentait l'homme de loin et alors nous nous cachions aussitôt. (132)

"We were lucky, of course", answered Darie, "but Zamfira had the instinct of a wild beast. It's like he could feel people getting close and we would hide on the spot". (67)

The context around this statement does not show foul intentions on Darie's part. Yet, the tone of the statement is quite cruel; Darie uses the term "jivină", a regional term, an odd choice for Darie, since he is completely out of tune with *the regional*; as Zamfira remarks, Darie does not seem to have experienced the countryside, at least, lately. The term is loaded on several counts; just by looking at the dictionary definitions of that time period, Eliade's word choice proves to be much more confusing than expected. Where declared, dictionaries agree that this term is of a southern Slavic origin; Serbian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Slovakian, Czech, all use variants of this term to describe a wild animal, or a domesticated bird, or according to August Scriban's dictionary, the insect family of locusts. To recall, grasshoppers³⁶—insects that are part of the locust family, have a minor role in the story—they help immerse the reader in the rural landscape and they act as a clue for Darie to realize that he is crossing over into the sacred. Scriban pinpoints the use of "jivină" in Moldavia—where Iași is situated, and in the south—including the region of Oltenia. Eliade, the literary author, is notorious for carefully planning his every choice to satisfy Eliade, the philosopher. "Jivină" is much more than just an animal, yet my research on Eliade's thought process in this case has not proven fruitful. The only certainty in the case of "jivină" is that it stands out. Thus, in translation, the best of imperfect choices is to recreate Darie's cruel tone. The French translator emphasizes this idea by using a stronger term, "bête", which inspired me to use "beast" instead of "animal". "Animal" would be the

³⁶ The French version translates the word "greier", which is "grasshopper" as "cigale". This is a forgivable mistranslation, considering that they also make a loud noise. The issue in this matter is that the cicadas are less likely to be characteristic of the region that Eliade describes—a region where trees are rarely found and where grasshoppers are likely to thrive, given that they feed on plants such as cereal.

safest translation, considering that Eliade pairs it with “wild”. Since the term “beast” already implies that the animal is wild, reinforcing the instinctual nature can only draw attention to the expression.

Cadet second lieutenant Constantin Darie is the main character of the story. The universe or the story is constructed and deconstructed around him—the modern man discovering his people’s long-forgotten sacred roots. Darie inevitably thinks of himself as superior; he is led by the voice of reason rather than signs found in nature. The modern man believes reason to be the only logic worth knowing in their profane world, yet the sacred disagrees, promoting instinct as the only path to survival. Darie is a good man but he is not kind; he comes off as a snob, even rude at times. While Zamfira is positive and hopeful, he is a realist; Darie, on the other hand, is often confused and confusing. He distinguishes himself from others by claiming that he’s more experienced than he actually is, yet this is an illusion, since he considers the experiences he has read about as his own experience. Darie is poetic and sophisticated, yet, paradoxically, he fails to communicate albeit speaking a lot—an expected outcome of the modern man encountering the sacred. He has reached the point where he needs to escape the concrete profane to give the profane meaning; his monologues are abstract existential ramblings, yet his sentences are always well put together: he does not pause or shift direction without completing a sentence. Second to the scenery descriptions, Darie’s replies are the most stylistically problematic in translation. Sentences carrying several subordinates are quite typical for Romanian, yet, in light of Darie’s profile, the translation needs to follow a similar pattern. The story portrays someone whose ideas are complicated and long, yet weaved together in the vocabulary and grammar of a well-read individual. The French language is more accustomed to this style than English, thus the challenge is likely more cumbersome in the latter.

Cred că a fost cea mai profundă, dar și mai nemiloasă autoanaliză din toate câte am încercat în viața mea. Simțeam atunci că intuiseam ceva care îmi rămăsese întotdeauna inaccesibil, că ghicisem, cum să spun? însuși principiul existenței mele, poate nu numai al existenței mele, adăugă coborând glasul. Simțeam că ghicisem misterul însuși al oricărei existențe umane. Și expresia aceea aproximativă – “o serie de evidențe mutual contradictorii” – era o primă încercare

de traducere a misterului pe care tocmai îl pătrunsesem și eram pe cale de a-l analiza și formula. (80)

Literal: I think that it was the most profound, but also the most merciless self-analysis of all that I have tried in my life. I felt then that I had intuited something that had always remained inaccessible to me, that I had guessed, how can I say it? the principle of my existence itself, maybe not just my existence, he added lowering his voice. I felt that I had figured out the mystery itself of any human existence. And that approximate expression – “a series of mutually contradicting evidences” – was a first try of translation of the mystery that I had just pierced and I was on the way to analyze and formulate it.

Je crois que ce fut l'auto-analyse la plus profonde, mais aussi la plus impitoyable, de toutes celles que j'ai jamais tentées. Je sentais alors que j'avais l'intuition d'une chose qui m'était toujours restée inaccessible, que je devinais – comment dire ? – le principe même de mon existence ; et peut-être pas seulement de la mienne, ajouta-t-il en baissant la voix. Il me semblait percevoir le mystère même de toute existence humaine. Et cette formule approximative – “une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires” – représentait simplement une première tentative de traduction du mystère que je venais de pénétrer et que je m'apprêtais à analyser et définir. (104)

I think that it was the most profound, but also most unforgiving self-analysis of all that I had attempted in my life. I felt then that I had intuited something that had always been out of my reach. I had figured out – how should I put this? – the very principle of my existence; maybe even beyond my own existence, he added lowering his voice. I felt that I had figured out the very mystery of any human existence. And that approximate formula – “a series of mutually contradicting certainties” – was the first attempt to translate that mystery that I had just uncovered and I was on the verge of analyzing and defining it. (45)

Darie's word choices stand out as they allude to two contradicting profane disciplines simultaneously; he thinks in terms of arts and sciences, crossing back and forth between the two. The noun “*formulă*” (formula) in the quote above is a such an example. Often, these expressions transfer literally in French, yet not in English. To avoid altering the Romanian Darie in English, I opted for collocations rather than for direct dictionary equivalence, yet, still, the French translation provided a good point of reference. I have extracted some examples below, yet excluded the obvious cases of “*principiul existenței*” (the principle of existence), “*misterul existenței umane*” (the mystery of human existence), and the iconic “*o serie de evidențe mutual contradictorii*” (a series of mutually contradicting evidences), which was discussed in the previous section, “*Mots Clefs*”.

“cea mai profundă, dar și mai nemiloasă autoanaliză”

Literal: the most profound, but also the most merciless self-analysis

“l’auto-analyse la plus profonde, mais aussi la plus impitoyable”

“the most profound, but also most unforgiving self-analysis”

While the Romanian and French versions agree on an extreme form of pity, the English, neutralizes it into a general “forgiving”, without the implication of an extreme punishment.

“expresia aceea aproximativă [...] eram pe cale de a-l analiza și formula.”

Literal: “that approximate expression [...] I was on the way to analyze and formulate it”

“cette formule approximative [...] que je m’apprêtais à analyser et définir.”

“that approximate formula [...] I was on the verge of analyzing and defining it.”

The French version uses a denomination of “expresie” that Darie uses in the following sentence, a denomination that alludes to mathematics, namely “formula”. Darie uses the verb “a formula” (to formulate) at the end of the paragraph, which completely justifies the French choice. Sciences are a practice of the profane that negate the symbols of the sacred. The Romanian original plays on the term “formulă” (formula), oscillating between its main denomination—a mathematical equation, and its figurative one—a literary trope. Conversely, the play on the term “expresie” (expression) is inverted: the literal meaning is related to the arts, while the figurative, to sciences.

“era o primă încercare de traducere a misterului pe care tocmai îl pătrunsesem”

Literal: a first try of translation of the mystery that I had just pierced

“une première tentative de traduction du mystère que je venais de pénétrer”

“the first attempt to translate that mystery that I had just unlocked”

The literal translation into French here is correct, yet the naturalness of Darie’s idea is broken. The Romanian noun “mister” (mystery) co-occurs with the verb “a pătrunde”, yet the French noun “mystère” does not naturally co-occur with “pénétrer”; rather “découvrir” or even “décrypter” for an amplified effect, are a more natural choice. In English, I considered first “uncover”, yet “unlock”, albeit not the most common choice, seemed more

accurate as compared to the original. The goal, however, is met by both translations. Darie tends to use metaphors that feel natural, yet that are unexpected.

Darie aspires to literary production, he himself is impressed with his lyricism, so much so that he does not change his mode of expression based on his audience, as it would be expected. Although he does not believe Zamfira and Iliescu capable of remembering all the information he wishes them to transmit to his beloved Laura, he continues to test his verbose suppositions on them.

Ce revelație extraordinară anunța această expresie care, acum, mi se pare destul de banală și stilistic incertă! (82)

Literal: What an extraordinary revelation announced this expression that, now, seems to me quite commonplace and stylistically uncertain!

Quelle révélation extraordinaire était-elle annoncée par cette formule qui me paraît à présent assez banale et d'un style douteux? (107)

What an extraordinary revelation this expression entailed, but it now seems quite trivial and stylistically problematic! (48)

Darie struggles to gain understanding of the sacred. The profane lacks essence, yet it denies visibility of the sacred, putting Darie at a disadvantage since he is essentially restricted by profane abstract language. This statement encompasses Darie's realization of the limits of his tools and it is quite striking. He describes his iconic expression "o serie de evidențe mutual contradictorii" as "commonplace", "unoriginal". It is obvious that Darie exaggerates just how commonplace his expression is: first, the expression is clearly too abstract and complex to be described as commonplace, second, his audience, Zamfira and Iliescu, are common folk who are unlikely to use such jargon, with respect to the expression in question as well as its description: "banală" and "stilistic incertă". The Romanian and the French versions used cognates to express "commonplace". While the cognate "banal" exists in English, I chose a term that is more common than "banal", but more dramatic than "unoriginal", that is "trivial". Again, opting for naturalness rather than literal accuracy, "trivial" and "expression" are good collocations. The second half of his description, namely "stilistic incertă" (stylistically uncertain), is even more problematic, as the original Romanian is grammatically far-fetched. The noun "expresie" and the adjective

“incert” are by no means collocations, in turn creating a translator’s dilemma. The French and the English translations took different routes: the French translator chose to assume the adjective “incert” (uncertain) as “unlikely”, while I considered it as “ambiguous” in English. Darie uses two terms that are naturally unlikely to appear together: the abstract concept of *expression* cannot have a *changing* nature. Darie’s use of a lyrical trope compromises the stability of his statement and it is the very cause of the translator’s dilemma. However, it is clear that the French and the English translations worked towards the same goal: to recreate the dramatic atmosphere, while not allowing the statement to become too awkward; the French version employed the adjective “douteux” and, the English “problematic”. Despite their differences, the common ground is their respective co-occurrence pattern, yet, this word-choice on the part of the French translation caused a disagreement in punctuation: while the Romanian original uses an exclamation point, proposing a choice between excitement and desperation, the French version indicates confusion with an exclamation point that is undoubtedly meant to reinforce the term “douteux”.

Throughout the story, Darie uses vocabulary associated with the sacred — religious terms and expressions that are characteristic of Zamfira. While the sacred is not synonymous with Christianity or religion, mysticism often takes shape in these. Thus, Zamfira’s interjections always have to do with God:

Minunea lui Dumnezeu. (71)

Literal: God’s wonder.

Dieu merci. (89)

My God! It’s a miracle. (34)

Dumnezeu să-l ierte. (76)

Literal: God forgive him.

Dieu ait son âme. (98)

May God rest his soul. (40)

Doamne ferește. (88)

Literal: God protect.

Dieu nous en garde. (116)

God forbid. (55)

Instances where Darie adopts mystic vocabulary start appearing as the story progresses and these are vital to recreating the process of discovery as it is originally presented. Darie's monologue that onsets his philosophical dilemma happens in the first episode of the story, when the three soldiers find the badly wounded Russian soldier. This monologue spreads across several pages and it poses a major problem for translation. From this passage, I have extracted a segment where Eliade uses the word "cer" (sky) as a denomination for both "heaven" and "sky". This dual characteristic of "cer" plays a vital role in showing how absorbed Darie is in his profane understanding of the world.

Dacă aş fi murit la 12 martie, aş fi fost un om fericit, pentru că mă duceam în Cer; *au Ciel*, *Ivan, auprès de la Sainte Trinité*, acolo unde, cu ajutorul preotului—dacă a mai rămas vreunul—ai să ajungi şi tu, curând. Dar dacă îmi va fi dat să mor azi, mâine, poimâine, eu unde mă voi duce? În orice caz, nu în Cer, pentru că la 13 martie am aflat că *Cerul pur şi simplu nu există*. Nu mai există, Ivan! Din clipa când înţelegi, cum am înţeles eu la 13 martie, că Cerul e doar o iluzie, totul s-a terminat. Nu mai există nici Cer, nici sus, nici jos căci Universul e infinit, n-are nici început, nici sfârşit. (73)

Literal: If I would have died on March 12, I would have been a happy human, because I was going to heaven; *au Ciel*, *Ivan, auprès de la Sainte Trinité*, there where, with the help of a priest—if there's any left—you will arrive too, soon. But if it's given to me to die today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, where will I go? In any case not to heaven, because on March 13th I found out that heaven *simply doesn't exist*. It doesn't exist anymore, Ivan! From the moment when you understand, as I understood on March 13, that heaven/the sky is just an illusion, everything is done. Neither sky, nor up, nor down exist anymore because the universe is infinite, it doesn't have a beginning nor an end.

Si j'étais mort le 12, j'aurais été heureux, parce que je serais allé au ciel; *au ciel*, *Ivan, auprès de la Sainte Trinité*, là où tu vas bientôt te retrouver, avec l'aide d'un prêtre, s'il en reste... Mais si je dois mourir aujourd'hui ou demain ou après-

demain, où irai-je, moi ? En tout cas pas au ciel parce que j'ai appris le 13 mars que le ciel *n'existait pas*. Il n'existe plus Ivan. A l'instant où tu comprendras, comme je l'ai compris un 13 mars, que le ciel est une simple illusion, tout sera fini. Il n'y a plus de ciel, ni de haut, ni de bas, car l'univers est infini, il n'a ni début, ni fin. (94)

Had I died on March 12th, I'd have been a happy man, because I'd have gone to heaven, *au Ciel, Ivan, auprès de la Sainte Trinité*, where you'll soon find yourself with the help of a priest—if there's any left. But if I'm meant to die today, tomorrow, or the day after, where will I go? In any case not to heaven because, after March 13th, I found out that heaven *simply does not exist*. It doesn't exist anymore, Ivan! From the moment you start to understand, like I understood on March 13th, that heaven is just an illusion, it's over. There is no heaven anymore, not above, not below. Because the universe is infinite; it has no beginning and no end. (37)

Eliade uses the noun “cer” (sky) six times. He also capitalizes it to signal that this usually common noun is, in this case, more powerful. In the first three instances, “cer”/“ciel” is clearly used for its religious connotation “heaven”, however, the last three are left ambiguous.

“Cer” as “ciel” as “heaven”: Eliade eliminates any kind of doubt about his metaphorical use of the sky by inferring destiny.

Dar dacă îmi va fi dat să mor azi, mâine, poimâine, eu unde mă voi duce?

Literal: But if it's given to me to die today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, where will I go?

Mais si je dois mourir aujourd'hui ou demain ou après-demain, où irai-je, moi?

But if I'm meant to die today, tomorrow, or the day after, where will I go?

“Cer” as “ciel” as “sky” and “heaven”: While the passage starts on a mystical tone, it takes a quick turn towards science. With the mention of the universe being “infinite” and the “sky” being an illusion, Eliade creates a double-entendre of “heaven” but also “sky”—the primary translation for “cer”. While the French term “ciel” is identical to the Romanian “cer”, English was unable to produce a similar effect. The reference made to the physical inexistence of the sky, to the illusion created by light scattering into the atmosphere is completely lost.

[...] Cerul e doar o iluzie, totul s-a terminat. Nu mai există nici Cer, nici sus, nici jos căci Universul e infinit, n-are nici început, nici sfârșit.

Literal: The sky/heaven is just an illusion, everything is done. Neither sky, neither up, neither down exist anymore because the universe is infinite, it doesn't have a beginning nor an end.

[Q]ue le ciel est une simple illusion, tout sera fini. Il n'y a plus de ciel, ni de haut, ni de bas, car l'univers est infini, il n'a ni début, ni fin.

[H]eaven is just an illusion, it's over. There is no heaven anymore, not above, not below. Because the universe is infinite; it has no beginning and no end.

While the French language generally allows the transmission of the mystical connotations via literal translation, it is clear that the French version did not always consider it vital. During Darie's first dream, he explains his thought process to his crowd in Iași.

Cum mă credeam urmărit de nenoroc și piază-rea, și mi-era teamă să nu-i pierd și pe ei, pe ultimii doi, mă hotărâsem să le mai dau un singur ordin: să ne despărțim; să ne îndreptăm spre sate, ei pe un drum, și eu pe altul... De-aceea poate, m-am lăsat ispitit de speranța lor absurdă: că binecuvântarea lui Ivan, care trăgea să moară, ne va purta noroc. (77)

Literal: As I thought myself followed by bad luck and evil spirit, and I was afraid to lose them too, the last two, I had decided to give them one other order: to break up; to head towards the villages, them, on one road and me, on another. Because of that maybe, I let myself be tempted by their absurd hope: that the blessing of Ivan, that was dying, will bring us luck...

Me croyant poursuivi par la guigne, par la malchance, je craignais d'en faire subir les conséquences à mes deux derniers hommes. J'avais donc décidé de leur donner un dernier ordre: nous séparer; ils se seraient dirigés vers le front par un chemin et moi par un autre... C'est peut-être pourquoi je me suis laissé aller à l'espérer comme eux, bêtement, que la bénédiction d'Ivan, qui se mourait, nous porterait bonheur... (100)

Since I believed that I was ridden with bad luck and evil spirits, and I was afraid to lose them too, the last two, I had decided to give them one last order: to part ways. I wanted us to head to the village on different paths—the two of them together and I, alone...Perhaps, that's why I fell into the temptation of their absurd hope, that Ivan, while dying, would bless us and that this would bring us luck... (42)

Despite admitting to Ivan that he has been disenchanted of the sacred on March 13th, Darie also says that he believes himself cursed. The expression “piază-rea” (evil spirit) has lost some of its mystical effect even in the Romanian language—it has been reduced to a sort of a “bad omen”; yet it is most important to distinguish it from the “bad luck” that is already mentioned in the sentence. The French translator opted for the synonyms “guigne” and “malchance”, transforming the distinction into a repetition and erasing the mystical

history of “piază-rea”. In English, I chose “evil spirits” to better represent this history as opposed to the current dictionary translation of the expression, which is essentially just “bad luck”. Similarly, in the example of “m-am lăsat ispitit” (I let myself be tempted), the French translator neutralized the mystical nuance into “espérer”. Again, I considered the religious side of the term “ispitit” (tempted) as vital to the development of the story and emphasized it by using an expression that clearly references Christianity, that is “to fall into temptation”.

Iliescu

As Eliade places Zamfira and Darie on opposites ends of the spectrum, Iliescu should be the healthy middle. Iliescu is the true realist, strategist and mediator between Zamfira and Darie. He shares some of Zamfira’s interpretive ability but not his naïveté, and he can develop the best logical strategy because he does not let himself fall into existentialist riddles. However, unlike the other two, Iliescu is more aggressive and impatient; he is the first to propose that Ivan has bad intentions and he is the only one to use foul language. This, of course, happens only once and the swear-word that Iliescu uses is not obscene, on the contrary, it is quite innocent in terms of language; it is the intention that has an impact on the story.

Grijania lui de bolșevic! izbucni Iliescu printre dinți. Se preface că nu ne înțelege... (70)

Literal: His Eucharist of Bolshevik! Burst out Iliescu through his teeth. He is pretending he can’t understand us...

Un enfoiré de bolcheviste, oui, grommela Iliescu. Il fait semblant de pas comprendre. (88)

This damn Bolshevik! Grumbled Iliescu. He’s pretending he can’t understand us... (33)

Iliescu’s use of a church-related swear-word is not a coincidence, of course. In English, the word “damn” has lost most of its religious weight and, even on a basic level, it is an imperfect match to the original “grijanie”; the intention of “damn” is not that of a gentle

nudge, but rather a harsh slap to the receiver. The French version further amplified the aggression and draws away from the religious aspect for unclear reasons.

Like Zamfira, in translation, Iliescu must use an informal register that is more characteristic to speech than the written word, yet this does not exclude the ability to speak in a grammatically correct way.

Ce-a mai fost și pe-aici! [...] Și dumneavoastră dormeați dus, iar noi ne-am văzut de treabă... [...] Noroc că n-au ajuns până aici. Au bătut ce-au bătut cu brandturile, și apoi nu s-au mai auzit. (81)

Literal: What was here too! And you were in a deep sleep and we saw to our work. [...] Luckily that they didn't arrive up to here. They knocked what they knocked with their Brandt mortars and then they weren't heard anymore.

Qu'est-ce que ça a pu tonner! [...] Vous vous dormiez à poings fermés et nous, on a continué notre boulot. [...] Heureusement qu'ils tapaient pas jusqu'ici. Ils ont tiré pendant un bon moment et puis on n'a plus rien entendu (105)

What a show you missed! [...] You were fast asleep. And we went about our business... [...] Lucky they didn't get up to here. They dragged it on for a while but then they stopped. (46)

Iliescu uses expressions that are informal and grammatically correct yet structurally untranslatable: “ce-a mai fost” (what was), “ne-am văzut de treabă” (we saw to our work), “au bătut ce-au bătut” (they knocked what they knocked). Naturally, both French and English took on their respective routes to reach the colloquial level of Iliescu's expressions. Yet, in the universe of this short story, what matters most here is achieving a relative distance from the other two characters. Above all, the challenge in translation is to differentiate him from English Zamfira, who is inevitably a more diluted version of Romanian Zamfira, considering a lot of his regional weirdness is lost in the process. The French translation, having assigned Zamfira better diction, did not place Iliescu very far—Iliescu and Zamfira both omit the “ne” of the French negation, yet, unlike Zamfira, Iliescu does not awkwardly contract the subject with a verb that forms the past tense with “avoir”, namely “ça” and “a pu”³⁷.

³⁷ In the French translation on page 127, Zamfira says “ç'aurait été”.

Compared to Zamfira, Iliescu is better able to speak properly. It seems as if he can choose whether to make mistakes or not. In the following example, while addressing Zamfira, he conjugates the verb “a avea” (to have) in the wrong mode, tense and person.

N-avea grijă, îl întrerupse Iliescu, că ne strecurăm. Scăpăm noi și de data asta... (81)

Literal: [He] didn't have a worry, interrupted Iliescu, because we'll sneak by. We'll get away this time too.

T'en fais pas, dit Iliescu. On se faufileira. On s'en tirera cette fois-ci aussi. (106)

Don't you be worried, interrupted Iliescu, we'll manage to get through this too... (47)

Iliescu employs the Romanian “avea”, the indicative imperfect of the third person singular, as opposed to the imperative singular “ai”, which is the correct conjugation in this situation. In the French translation, the conjugation is adjusted but the “ne” that introduces the French negation is omitted. Yet, while rendering it informal, this change does not transfer the message: Zamfira and Iliescu communicate in deeper manner than just using the “tu” rather than the “vous”. The consensus of what mistakes to make in these situations is not available to Darie, thus it further distinguishes him from the others. English also fails this transfer; the combination of “to be” and the adjective worried in a negative form is not nearly as marked as in Romanian.

There is a slight chance of recovery a few replies later, yet the reply is, this time directed at Darie. In the original, Iliescu hardly ever fails to speak a high caliber Romanian when addressing Darie. In the following example, Iliescu is informal and only mildly grammatically odd.

Așa sunt ordinele, spuse Iliescu. Dar, ați văzut și dumneavoastră, ne-a purtat noroc... (81)

Literal: Like this are the orders, said Iliescu. But, you saw it too, he brought us luck...

C'est les ordres, rappela Iliescu. Mais vous avez vu, mon lieutenant, il nous a porté bonheur. (106)

That's how the orders are, said Iliescu. But you saw it too, sir, he brought us luck... (47)

While the French translator opted for a combination of a singular verb and a plural object, I lengthened the statement to a more awkward state, using “that’s how the orders are” instead of “those are the orders”.

On the other hand, when dealing with a more complex tense structure, Iliescu fails to produce it perfectly, seemingly not by choice.

Că dumneavoastră pierduserăți prea mult sânge, și aveăți febră, și poate de aceea ne-ați cerut să reîncărcăm carabina, că nu mai știați pe ce lume sunteți, slăbit și nemâncat, si ostenit. (96)

Literal: That you had lost too much blood, and you had a fever, and maybe that is why you asked us to reload the rifle, that you didn’t know what world you are on anymore, weakened and hungry, and tired.

Que vous aviez perdu beaucoup de sang, que vous aviez la fièvre et c'est peut-être pour ça que vous nous demandiez de recharger votre fusil, parce que la faiblesse et la faim et la fatigue vous enlevaient le jugement. (129)

That you had lost a lot of blood and you had a fever and maybe you asked us to reload your rifle because you are out of it and you were weakened and hungry and tired. (63)

In this passage, Iliescu’s error is barely noticeable, yet it is an error nonetheless. Iliescu is describing a situation in the past using a string of verbs that are not in sequence but in parallel. For this sort of description in the past, Romanian, as French, uses the imperfect tense. When pairing the verbs “to know” and “to be” to create a sentence along the lines of: “you didn’t know what world you were on”, he misconjugates the second verb in the present. In this example, the French translator rearranges the sentence and completely avoids using the two actions in question.

Iliescu’s vocabulary is close to Zamfira’s, that is, colloquial, yet the creativity and the complexity of his ideas show that he shares more of Darie’s formal training than Zamfira.

Au și visele tâlcu lor, dacă știi cum să le tălmăcești, vorbi Iliescu. (82)

Literal: Dreams have their own meaning, if you know how to interpret them.

Les rêves, ça a un sens si on sait les deviner, dit Iliescu. (107)

Dreams have a message if you know how to read them. (50)

The noun "tâlc" and the verb "a tălmăci" are colloquial words that belong to the same semantic field, that of the interpretation of signs. My initial translation of Iliescu's statement was "Dreams have a meaning, if you know how to interpret them", which is an accurate rendition of the content in the original. The issue with using these neutral terms, albeit accurate in meaning, is that they strip the statement of its underlying messages. First and foremost, the vocabulary that Iliescu uses is regional and is charged with spiritual meaning. The French version was unable to recreate the regional aspect but it uses the mystical "deviner"—alluding to a prophecy and what is revealed by intuition. The English translation suffered the same transformation, abandoning the collocation between "dream" and "interpretation" in favor of "reading", which is more common in the mystical arts.

Iliescu's creativity surfaces in language when he tries to speak to Ivan using a Slavic-sounding original concoction. Unlike Darie, Iliescu does not have formal training, yet he does have a strong spirit of observation—including a musical ear. However, no matter how inventive he may be, his attempt is incorrect and likely impossible to grasp on the Russian side.

Priatin! Ivan, *priatin!* (76)

Literal: Friend (with Russian-sounding ending), Ivan, friend!

Tovaritch! Ivan, *tovaritch!* (96)

Comraditch, Ivan, *comraditch!* (40)

The French version took a creative path, in that, instead of translating the original word used "prieten" (ami/friend), it employs "țovarăș"—the Romanian word for "comrade". I copied the strategy using a synonym that is easily associated with Russian Communism; yet, the association is not present in the original, likely because the story precedes the Communist era in Romania.

Conclusion

Mircea Eliade, best known for his work surveying the history of religions, wrote the short story “Ivan” in Romanian in 1968, yet it was published as part of a volume of short stories in 1977. Alain Paruit, renowned French-Romanian translator picked up this volume of short stories and translated it for Gallimard in 1981. And now, half of a century after the first publication of the short story, it has appeared on the stage of translation again, this time, to be rendered in English. In the thirty years that separate the French translation and my own, translation norms have likely gone through quite a lot of change. As Gideon Toury asserts:

Along the temporal axis, each type of constraint may, and often does move into its neighboring domains through processes of rise and decline. Thus, mere whims may catch on and become more normative, and norms can gain so much validity that, for all practical purposes, they become as binding as rules; or the other way around, of course.

(Toury 206)

Adequacy and acceptability are relative; the expectations of the audience, as Douglas Robinson puts it, are mandated by the type of project that is sought (8). In literary translation, this equation is especially powerful, considering literature is carried on across time. Thus, it is unfair to evaluate the French translation against the current translation fashion that is certainly more open to adequacy than the France of the 1980s; considering the rise of global awareness, it is unlikely that the 1980s’ reader be just as comfortable with the strangeness of foreign literature as they are nowadays. Jean-Louis Courriol’s article, “La traduction, acte littéraire mineur?”, published in the same year as Paruit’s translation of “Ivan”, proves to be a strong illustration of the French translation practices of the time, in that, they were geared towards acceptability. In his article, Courriol’s premise is that French-Romanian translators are to blame for the lack of recognition of Romanian literature on the international stage. Courriol is of the opinion that Romanian literature had been overlooked because it was often perceived as a literature of “imitation”

and, thus, uninteresting for the French audience. However, Courriol believes that, above all, the “incompetence” displayed in the French translations of Romanian literature showed a lack of respect for basic translation principles that are usually observed for “major cultures” (263). In light of such a claim, it comes as no surprise that Courriol goes on to ruthlessly dismantle micro instances of Paruit’s translation to corroborate his evaluation. Courriol uses a series of isolated cases ranging from minor grammatical mistakes to inaccuracies in terms of register. In short, he shows no empathy towards the translator. Yet, Courriol too fails to show realistic consideration, always using one possible solution as the “only” solution, in addition to providing no analysis of the Romanian original lines of the French quotes extracted. His analysis leaves the impression that translation is a simple equation, not considering the cultural significance of “Ivan”. While Courriol rightfully recognizes Paruit’s general lack of rigour in terms of connotations and register—which I illustrated in the “Character Profiles” section—, his description of the translation as “bancale” and “déroutante” (267) for the target audience is grossly inaccurate. Paruit may not have used target audience-oriented expressions at all times, nor appreciated perfect register levels to transcribe some of the occurrences demolished by Courriol, but his translation is not the embarrassing series of missteps that Courriol makes it out to be. It seems to me that Courriol not only focuses on linguistic aspects, but completely omits the cultural ones and, above all, Eliade’s literary style. By today’s standards, Paruit’s translation displays a lot of qualities that cannot be ignored. Certainly, there are a few elements that I deemed domesticating—in my commentary, I pointed out a number of deficiencies. In fact, it was Paruit’s ennobled rendition of Zamfira, the archaic man, that inspired me to look into retranslation as a possible theoretical model for my commentary. In that respect, I found Paruit’s version enormously valuable to my translation process. Moreover, looking at reviews of Paruit’s French translations of Eliade and other Romanian authors, the general consensus is that they are good translations. With respect to the short story collection *Uniformes de général*, reviewer Marguerite Dorian deems it “excellently translated from the Romanian original” (1982: 99). That said, to factor in Paruit’s translation and my English version as a case of retranslation, I will quote Paul Bensimon:

La première traduction procède souvent – a souvent procédé – à une naturalisation de l'œuvre étrangère; elle tend à réduire l'altérité de cette œuvre afin de mieux l'intégrer à une culture autre. Elle s'apparente fréquemment – s'est fréquemment apparentée – à l'adaptation en ce qu'elle est peu respectueuse des formes textuelles de l'original.

(Bensimon 1)

Yves Gambier writes that, in the 1985 edition of the French dictionary *Le Grand Robert*, a retranslation is defined as “traduction d'un texte lui-même traduit d'une autre langue” (413), with no specification as to whether two or three languages are involved. In fact, this definition implies that the first translation is a relay, more than a text in the same target language. Gambier, however, clearly states in his article that he considers retranslation as happening within the same target language. Still, this sort of unclear wording does evoke the idea that there may not be a need to restrict the target language. The prerequisite for a *re*-translation is a sequence of texts: an original, its translation and another translation that is aware of the previous one. The only necessary differences between the two translations are: a period of time—retranslation is “une activité soumise au temps” (Gambier 415), and a clear declaration that the more recent translation used the older version as guide, no matter the degree to which this happened. Certainly, other scholars who have expressed an opinion or a study on the matter, like Gambier, always clarify that the two translations happen within the same target language (Gambier, Bensimon, Susam-Sarajeva). Yet, it stands valid that the idea of “same” is problematic, as Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva points out:

From the beginning, I wish to note that the notion of “same” target language is problematic. As Gideon Toury points out, if a comparative study of translations done in different periods of time “is to have real significance, at least the notion of (one) target language would have to be modified in view of the fact that languages undergo constant changes.

(Susam-Sarajeva 30)

In her article on the retranslation, Susam-Sarajeva looks at retranslations of texts by Roland Barthes in Turkish and Hélène Cixous in English. She challenges several mainstream assumptions about retranslation: they do not only occur in the case of

canonical texts, they do not always correct a tendency towards acceptability in the initial translation, nor do they always reveal an aging of the initial translation. Susam-Sarajeva urges that we see retranslation from the opposite end; rather than investigating the causes behind certain retranslations, we should be looking for reasons to retranslate more. Berman shares this opinion, as usual bringing the matter into the philosophical court; “aucune traduction n’est jamais une “première version”” (Berman 1990: 4). For Berman, retranslation is an absolute must due to the fact that translation is a time-stamped activity (1990: 1) that can always be re-cleansed into a more adequate version:

La retraduction surgit de la nécessité non certes de supprimer, mais au moins de réduire la défaillance originelle.

(Berman 1990: 5)

Looking at my own process, my choices have been cleansed since my first version, as Berman would expect. The more I looked at my word choices to compare to the French translation, the more I changed them into denominations closer to their literal forms. The most basic expectation of retranslation is that alterations will happen only to areas that need changing, areas that no longer subscribe to the contemporary norms. As mentioned, my encounter with the French translation was conditioned by a need for a relay language, yet it quickly turned into an “initial translation”. The French version is the original “Ivan” that has passed through the lens of translation, a great value regardless of the language.

The first version of English “Ivan” was hand-written in a composition notebook. Even with the French version by my side, the result was a tattered text whose margins were bleeding with questions. Going into the second version, I started putting together a trilingual commentary, which forced me to rethink my choices at a micro level. The French text constantly led me back to the original; there had to be a justifiable reason behind each of my choices. In spite of my desire for adequacy, my natural tendency was towards acceptability and the most significant effect of the French version was to comb out what did not come from the original but from my own personal repertoire. Of course, the French was equally useful in confirming my interpretation but with each version; I would

ask myself the same questions: What does the Romanian original mean? Could it have meant something different fifty years ago? What does the French version say about it? And, is it a personal choice to write this way? During this back-and-forth, I discovered elements I had omitted and others that the French had misrepresented according to my analysis. Perhaps, had it not been for the French translation, I would have not noticed the impact that Zamfira's language has on the story. There are particular instances that I had not originally noticed; these instances are quite subtle in the original. Zamfira, whom I evaluated as the most iconic character of the story, albeit not the main protagonist, is a prime example of my retranslation approach to the English translation. The quotes that I used in relation to Zamfira in the section "Character profiles", which showcase Zamfira's academic short-falls, illustrate elements whose importance I realized while going back and forth between the three texts, the Romanian, the French and the English. For example, the case of "visuri" versus "vise" (dreams) – the odd plural form, which Paruit had translated as "des rêves" rather than "les rêves". Another instance where I copied Paruit's creative solution was his rendition of Iliescu's invented Russian word "priatin" (misspelling of *prieten* – friend) as "tovaritch". Perhaps without Paruit's aid, I would have not used a termination that is globally associated with Russian, namely, "-itch". However, in spite of recognizing some of Zamfira's mistakes, the French Zamfira is very well spoken and key moments in the story are absent; most notably, Zamfira's mistaken pronunciation of "a afunda" (to immerse, to dive) as "a înfunda" (to stuff), which I translated as "to dive" and "to drive". In fact, the variation between the way the three soldiers speak is not very noticeable in the French translation. Of course, the fact that Paruit does have Zamfira speaking oddly here and there, indicates that he noticed Zamfira's way of speaking. I do recognize that this ennobled version of Zamfira may have not been Paruit's choice; first, he was at the mercy of Gallimard, and, second, the translation norms at the time were likely more geared towards acceptability rather than adequacy, thus, Zamfira would have had to change to accommodate style.

Moreover, there are a few description passages that have been omitted in the French version. These passages, albeit not critical for the development of the story, did force me to

speculate about the reasons behind it. For example, when Darie comes back to the group after having gotten carried away into one of his ramblings, Zamfira describes Ivan's response to Darie's monologue, saying that he believes that Ivan is asking for water that they do not have. Instead, Zamfira tries offering Ivan a sugar cube. The original describes someone grabbing one of the cubes and eating it. It is unclear whether the subject is Zamfira or Darie, yet, the context points to Zamfira.

Luă din palma deschisă o bucată de zahăr și începu s-o sugă. (74)

Literal: He took out of the open hand a piece of sugar and he started sucking it.

He grabbed a cube and started sucking on it. (38)

The French translation should have had this sentence on the bottom half of page 95. Another such case is the second part of Darie's gesture when he prepares to speak to Ivan:

Darie oftă fără voia lui și-și trase chipiul pe frunte. (72)

Literal: Darie signed unwillingly and pulled his cap on his forehead.

Darie ne put s'empêcher de soupirer. (91)

Darie could not help by sigh and pulled his helmet forward. (35)

As illustrated, these passages are far from being significant, yet, as a translator, Paruit is but a lens through which the material can cross over into another language. He is not entitled to alter the original text in such a manner, but he has assumed this right in the past. In her study *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: l'oubli du fascisme*, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine extracts a note from Paruit's translation of Mihail Sebastian's *Journal* explaining why he chose to not translate certain passages:

[Ce sont] des passages qui n'auraient pas été compréhensibles pour le lecteur français sans de longues notes sur les circonstances ou des personnages roumains de l'époque.

(Boisserie 222)

This comes to show that Paruit did make unnecessary changes in other cases.

There are, of course, many other such examples in the heated discussion between the French and the English translations, and I have listed only a few to illustrate that this conversation happened. I believe that I am quite fortunate to have had the French translation act as training wheels for my English version and I see the process as a retranslation. Of course, the English reader would not be able to see it that way, nor would the French, yet, in terms of the process itself, it was nothing short of a retranslation, where the first version fuels the confidence needed to survive a literary translation, as well as provides the arsenal to interrogate the original.

During my defence examination, I was asked about what I hope to achieve with this project in the literary translation field, and, as any scholar, my hope is to push the boundaries of retranslation theory. Of course, my study is but the start of an idea in that direction; not only that much more practice needs to be recorded, but there are a few layers that should be added to this type of analysis. First, as indicated by Berman, other translations by Aain Paruit of Eliade and especially of other Romanian writers should be compared with the French “Ivan” to determine how Paruit’s Eliade is different from other writers Paruit translated. Second, considering that an English Eliade already exists in literature, these translations could be useful aswell. Eliade’s prose was translated by quite a few different people, among which Mac Linscott Ricketts, whom we know was in direct contact with Eliade, Mary Park Stevenson, who translated several works, and, Christopher Moncrieff, who recently translated Eliade’s early novels *Diary of a Nearsighted Adolescent* (tr. 2016) and *Gaudeamus* (tr. 2018). Lastly, as suggested by my defence committee, consulting criticism by non-Romanian speakers writing in English would help expose how the existing English Eliade is received. Of course, comparing this reception to the original Romanian audience would help iron out the insecurities in my assumptions on how English Eliade *should* sound.

Raquel de Pedro looks at the translatability of texts and evokes Albrecht Neubert’s classification of texts as: exclusively source language-oriented, mainly source-oriented, both source- and target-oriented, and solely target-oriented. Obviously, the translatability

varies with an upwards inclination from the first category mentioned, the exclusively source-oriented. I believe that “Ivan” is mainly source-oriented; it is clear that Eliade did not look to give the reader a map into his references. Perhaps “Ivan” was not written to be enjoyed but to present another side of the coin and to awaken questions that the reader may have not considered. The original audience, as well, has to go to great lengths to uncover the multi-layered symbolism in Eliade’s literature. Thus, “Ivan” does not “lend itself to translation”³⁸, yet better versions can be achieved in subsequent *retranslations*; Eliade’s theory combined with the different readings of the original that is obvious in translation and the various world views of different languages will inevitably better these subsequent *retranslations*.

³⁸ Walter Benjamin described the translatability of a text as the ability to “lend itself to translation” (Benjamin 76).

Bibliography

- Adameşteanu, Gabriela. "Traducerea adică esenţialul pentru mine... (Alain Paruit în dialog cu Gabriela Adameşteanu)". *Cultura*. April 29, 2002. Web. September 4, 2017 <<http://revista22online.ro/81/.html>>.
- . "Alain Paruit". *Bucureştiul Cultural*, no. 5, 2009. Web. September 4, 2017. <<http://revista22online.ro/6251/.html>>.
- Ahmed, Salahuddin. *A Dictionary of Muslim Names*. New York: New York University Press. 1999.
- Ahnizadeh, Saeideh. "Translation of Proper Names in Children's Literature." *Journal of Language and Translation*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, pp. 61-71.
- Al-Hamly, Masha'el and Mohammed Farghal. "The Translation of Proper Nouns into Arabic". *Babel*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2015, pp. 511-26.
- Alexandrescu, Sorin. "Dialectica fantasticului". *La Țigănci și alte povestiri/Mircea Eliade*. Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1969, pp. v-xlvi.
- . "Un miop neobișnuit". *Observator Cultural*. www.observatorul.ro. Web 9 Feb 2017 <<http://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/un-miop-neobisnuit/>>
- Allen, Douglas and Dennis Doeing. *Mircea Eliade, An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1980.
- Altizer, Thomas J.J. "Mircea Eliade and the Recovery of the Sacred". *The Christian Scholar*. vol. 45, no. 4, 1962, pp. 267-289.
- Anghelescu, Mircea. "Alain Paruit". *Observatorul cultural*. Web. September 4, 2017. <<http://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/alain-paruit/>>
- Arargüç, Mehmet Fikret and Maryam Ebadi Asayesh, "Magical Realism and its European Essence". *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*. 6.2, pp. 25-3.
- Askari, Mojtaba and Alireza Akbari. "Challenges in Translation of Proper Nouns: A Case Study in Persian Translation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*". *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2014, pp. 19-28.
- Baker, Mona. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Milton Park: Routledge. 2007.

- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator". *The Translation Studies Reader/Lawrence Venuti*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 75-85.
- Berman, Antoine. "La retraduction comme espace de la traduction". *Pamplisestes*, vol. 4, 1990, pp. 1-7.
- . "Esquisse d'une méthode". *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*. Paris: Gallimard, 1995, pp. 64-97.
- . "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign". *The Translation Studies Reader/Lawrence Venuti*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. 2010, pp. 276-89.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*". *The Translation Studies Reader/Lawrence Venuti*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. 2010, pp. 75-83.
- Bensimon, Paul. "Présentation". *Pamplisestes*, vol. 4, 1990, pp. ix-xiii.
- Bibliothèque nationale de France. "Alain Paruit". Web March 12, 2017. [www.data.bnf.fr.<http://data.bnf.fr/documents-by-rdt/11918675/680/page1>](http://data.bnf.fr/documents-by-rdt/11918675/680/page1).
- Boisserie, Étienne. "Un procès déplacé". *Esprit*, vol. 290, no.12, 2002, pp. 214-23.
- Călinescu, Matei. "Introduction: The Fantastic and Its Interpretation in Mircea Eliade's Later Novellas". *Youth Without Youth/Mircea Eliade*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 1988, pp. xiii-1.
- . "Eliade and Ionesco in the Post-World War II Years: Questions of Identity". *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade/Christian Wedeneyer and Wendy Doniger*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2010, pp. 103-131.
- Cave, David. *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Ciorănescu, Alexandru. *Dicționarul etimologic român*. Tenerife: Universidad de la Laguna. 1958-1966.
- Constrantinescu, Nicolae A. *Dicționar onomastic românesc*. Bucharest: Editura academiei republicii populare romîne, 1963. Web <<https://www.slideshare.net/gruiianul/dicionar-onomastic-romnesc-constantinescu-nicolae-a>>.
- Courriol, Jean-Louis. "La traduction, acte littéraire mineur?". *L'avant-garde russe et la synthèse des arts/Gérard Conio*. Lausanne: L'âge d'homme. 1990, pp. 263-8.
- de Pedro, Raquel. "The Translatability of Texts: A Historical Overview". *Meta: Translators' Journal*. vol.44, no. 4, 1999, pp. 546-559.

- Dorian, Marguerite. "Review: *Uniformes de général* by Mircea Eliade and Alain Paruit". *World Literature Today*, vol. 56, no.1, 1982, p. 99.
- . "Review: *Les trois grâces* by Mircea Eliade, Marie-France Ionesco and Alain Paruit". *World Literature Today*, vol. 59, no.1, 1985, p. 79.
- Dorobanțu, Mirela Doina and Erwin Kretz. "Exile and Interculturalism – The case of five French Writers of Romanian Origin". *Studii de știință și cultură*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2011, pp. 111-117.
- Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române. *Dex 98*. 2nd ed. 1998. Web <<https://dexonline.ro>>
- Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române. *Dex 09*. Reviewed 2nd ed. 2009. Web <<https://dexonline.ro>>.
- Dicționar englez român, English Romanian Dictionary. *Dictionare.com*. Web <<http://www.dictionare.com>>.
- Durdureanu, Ioana Irina. "Translation of Cultural Terms: Possible or Impossible?". *JoLIE*. vol. 4, 2011. pp. 51-63.
- Eliade, Mircea. *A History of Religious Ideas. Volume 1. From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- . "Ivan". *Uniformes de général*. Paris: Gallimard, 1981, pp 85-139.
- . *A History of Religious Ideas. Volume 2. From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982a.
- . *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957-1969*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers 1982b.
- . *A History of Religious Ideas. Volume 3. From Muhammad to the Age of Reforms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- . *Autobiography, V 2: 1937-1960, Exile's Odyssey*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1988.
- . *Autobiography, Volume I*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- . "Ivan". *În curte la Dionis*. Bucharest: Editura Cartex 2000, 2008, pp. 68-102.
- La Forge Librairie. "Alain Paruit". Web. March 12, 2017. www.librairielaforge.fr <<https://www.librairielaforge.fr/personne/alain-paruit/79871/contributions/traductions/>>.
- Gambier, Yves. "La retraduction, retour et détour". *Meta*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1994, pp. 413-7.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1972.

- Gheorghiu, Mihai. *Reversul istoriei. Eseu despre opera lui Mircea Eliade*. Bucharest: Humanitas. 2015.
- Glodeanu, Gheorghe. "Esoteric Meaning of Names in the prose of Mircea Eliade". *Name and Naming: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives/Ovidiu Felecan*. Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, pp. 284-94.
- Gürçağlar, Şehnaz Tahir. "Retranslation". *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies/Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge. 2009, pp. 233-6.
- Jakobson, Roman. "On the Linguistic Aspects of translation". *The Translation Studies Reader/Lawrence Venuti*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 138-43.
- Larousse: encyclopédie et dictionnaires gratuits en ligne. *Larousse.fr*. Web <<http://www.larousse.fr>>
- Leitch, Vincent B. et al. "Ferdinand de Saussure". *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001, pp. 956-60.
- Levințchi, Leon and Andrei Bantaș. *Dicționar român-englez*. 2nd ed. Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1965.
- Linscott Ricketts, Mac. "Biographical Note on Mircea Eliade". *Youth Without Youth/Mircea Eliade*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988a, pp. vii-xii.
- . "Translator's Preface". *Autobiography, V 2: 1937-1960, Exile's Odyssey/Micrea Eliade*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988b, pp. vii-xxi.
- . "Translator's Preface". *Autobiography, V 1: 1907-1937, Journey East, Journey West/Micrea Eliade*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1990, pp. vi-ix.
- List of Characters in Translations of Harry Potter. *Harry Potter Wikia*. Web. July 10, 2017.<http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_characters_in_translations_of_Harry_Potter#Albus_Dumbledore_.28Headmaster.29>
- List of Locations in Other Languages. *Harry Potter Wikia*. Web. July 10, 2017. <http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_locations_in_other_languages>
- Macrea, Dimitrie, Emil Petrovici, Alexandru Rosetti et al. *Dicționarul limbii române literare contemporane*. Bucharest: Editura academiei republicii populare române, 1955-1957. Web < <https://dexonline.ro>>
- Maftai, Mara Magda. "Tânăra generație. Foști naționaliști în fața comunismului românesc și a stângii occidentale". *Communication interculturelle et littérature (Communicational)*, vol. 2, no. 6, 2009, pp. 75-82.
- Manea, Norman and Sanda Cordoș. "Mircea Eliade". *Romanian Writers on Writing*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2011, pp. 52-6.

- Moulton, James Hope. "Preface". *Early Zoroastrianism. Lectures Delivered at Oxford in London. February to May 1912*. London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1936, pp vii-xiv.
- Motoc, Radu. "Dicționarul limbii românești de August Scriban (Etimologii, înțelesuri, exemple, citațiuni, arhaisme, neologisme, provincialisme)" Review of *Dicționarul limbii românești. Omniscop*. Dec 24, 2014. Web. November 24, 2017. <<http://www.omniscop.ro/dictionarul-limbii-romanesti-de-august-scriban-etimologii-intelesuri-exemple-citatiuni-arhaisme-neologisme-provincialisme/>>
- Mușlea, Ioan. "La moartea lui Alain". *Revista Apostrof*. vol. 20 (2009), no. 7 (230), 2009. Web. September 4, 2017. <<http://www.revista-apostrof.ro/articole.php?id=860>>
- Newmark, Peter. "Chapter 1: Translation as a Means or End – As Imitation or Creation." *About Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991, pp. 1-13.
- . *Paragraphs in Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1993.
- Nicolaev, Mariana. "A plecat dintre noi Alain Paruit". *Acum*. Web. September 4, 2017 <<https://acum.tv/articol/9888/>>
- Nord, Christine, "Proper Names in Translations for Children: *Alice in Wonderland* as a Case in Point". *Meta*, vol. 48, no. 1-2, 2003, pp. 182-96.
- Oxford English Dictionary. *OED*. Web <<http://www.oed.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca>>.
- Opreșan, Ionel. "La reeditarea Dicționarului lui August Scriban". *Cultura*. no. 475, Jul 10 2014, Web November 24, 2017. <<http://revistacultura.ro/nou/2014/07/la-reeditarea-dictionarului-lui-august-scriban/>>.
- Pals, Daniel L. "Chapter 6: Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade". *Eight Theories of Religion/Daniel L. Pals*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 193-228.
- Pachet, Pierre. "La Roumanie, le travail de mémoire et la méthode historique". *Esprit*, vol. 290, no.12, 2002, pp. 209-13.
- Paruit, Alain. "Comment critique Eliade, Cioran et Ionesco?". *Esprit*, vol. 287, no.8-9, 2002a, pp. 227-39.
- . "La méthode contre la thèse". *Esprit*, vol. 290, no.12, 2002b, pp. 223-5.
- Robinson, Douglas. *Becoming a Translator*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

- Samo, Marc. "Une époque de folie". *Libération*. Web September 4, 2017.
<http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2009/04/09/une-epoque-de-folie_551753>.
- Scriban, August. *Dicționarul limbii românești*. Iași: Institutu de Arte Grafice "Presa Bună", 1939. Web <<https://dexonline.ro>>.
- Shu, Qi-Quan. "On Principles of Translation of Chinese Proper Nouns into English". *Chengdu Daxue Xuebao Shehui Kexueban*, no. 3, 2006, pp. 106-9.
- St. André, James. "Relay". *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies/Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge. 2009, pp. 230-2.
- Strochi, Lucian. "Ivan". *Introducere în fantastic: Dimensiuni ale fantasticului în proza lui Mircea Eliade*. London: Editura Virtual, 2010, pp. 162-63.
- Susam-Sarajeva, Şebnem. "Multiple-entry Visa to Travelling Theory: Retranslations and Cultural Theories". *Target*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1-36.
- Şăineanu, Lazăr. *Dicționar universal al limbei române*. 4th ed. Craiova: Scrisul românesc, 1929. Web <<https://dexonline.ro>>.
- Toury, Gideon. "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation". *The Translation Studies Reader/Lawrence Venuti*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 205-18.
- Valk, John, "The Concept of the Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Thought of Mircea Eliade". *Religious Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1992, pp. 31-41.
- Valmarin, Luisa. "Mircea Eliade." *Multicultural Writers since 1945 (A Guide from A to Z)/Alba della Fazio Amoia and Bettina Liebowitz Knapp*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2004, pp. 195-9.
- Van Coillie, Jan. "Character Names in Translation: A Functional Approach". *Children's Literature in Translation: Challenges and Strategies/Jan Van Coillie and Walter P. Verschueren*. London: Routledge. 2006, pp. 123-139.
- Zarei, Rouhollah and Somayeh Norouzi. "Proper Nouns in Translation: Should They Be Translated?". *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, vol. 3, no. 6, 2014, pp. 152-61.
- Zheng, Sheng-Tao. "On the Translation of Proper Nouns from the Angle of Informativeness in Cultural Exchange". *Journal of Zhangzhou Teachers College (Philosophy and Sciences)*. vol. 23, no. 2, 2009, pp. 118-25.

Appendix A: “Ivan” (Romanian)

Eliade. Mircea. “Ivan”. *În curte la Dionis*. Bucharest: Editura Cartex 2000, 2008, pp. 68-102.

IVAN

L-a zărit întâi Zamfira. Își trecu carabina în mâna stângă și se apropie de el. Îl atinse ușor cu vârful bocancului.

– Trage să moară, spuse fără să întoarcă capul.

Rănitul îi privea cu ochii foarte mari, deschiși. Era tânăr, bălai, plin de pistrii, și buzele îi tremurau neconținut, parcă tot s-ar fi trudit să zâmbească. Zamfira oftă adânc, apoi îngenunche lângă el.

– Ivan! îl strigă. Ivan!

Desprinse bidonul și-l apropie cu grijă de buzele rănitului. Darie se oprise în spatele lui. Își scoase casca și începu să-și șteargă fruntea cu mâneca tunicii.

– Trage să moară, spuse. Păcat de apă.

Cu o mișcare bruscă, speriată, brațul rănitului se desprinse de trup și se zbatu în aer, ca și cum ar fi căutat ceva, apoi căzu inert și degetele i se încleștară pe un bulgăre de pământ. Căzuse prea departe de buzunar. Zamfira întinse mâna, scoase revolverul și zâmbi.

– E pentru dumneavoastră, domnule elev, spuse. Poate îl păstrați ca amintire...

Darie își reasezase casca. Apucă revolverul și-l cântări în mână.

– Nu mai are gloanțe, spuse. Nu mai e bun de nimic.

Se pregătea să-l zvârle în porumbiște, dar se răzgândi. Continua să-l cântărească în mână, nehotărât.

Iliescu îi ajunsese din urmă.

– Trage să moară, rosti rar, clătînând din cap. Fără lumânare, ca un câine. Ca și ceilalți, adăugă coborând glasul.

Întoarse capul și scuipă în lături. Darie mai privi o dată revolverul, apoi îl lăsă să cadă. Căzu, cu un sunet surd între bulgări, lângă brațul rănitului.

– Dacă vă e milă de el spuse, mai bine împușcați-l. Să nu se mai chinuie...

Făcu câțiva pași spre porumbiște, privind obosit în jurul lui ca și cum ar fi căutat un loc mai ferit de arșiță, să se odihnească. Dar se întoarse curând, posomorât, cu țigarea neaprinasă în colțul gurii.

– S-o luăm din loc, spuse.

Zamfira se ridicase în picioare, dar nu-și desprindea privirile din ochii rănitului.

– Dacă am ști rusește, i-am cere să ne binecuvânteze, vorbi încet, parcă mai mult pentru sine. Așa se spunea pe la noi – dacă te binecuvântează cineva când trage să moară, îți aduce noroc.

– Așa am auzit și eu, îl întrerupse Iliescu. Dar îți aduce noroc numai dacă te binecuvântează cu inimă bună... Și ăsta-i bolșevic..

– Orice-o fi, doar să ne binecuvânteze pe legea lui, în limba lui.

Întoarse capul spre Darie.

– Poate dumneavoastră, domnule elev, care știți atâtea limbi.

Darie își aprinse țigarea. Ridică descurajat din umeri, încercând zadarnic să zâmbească.

– Nu știu. Acum îmi pare rău. Ar fi trebuit să învăț rusește... Se întrerupse, cu ochii la rănit, și trase adânc din țigare. Dar poate înțelege el, adăugă. Poate cunoaște el alte limbi...

Șovăi câteva clipe, apoi înălță din nou din umeri.

– Încercați, domnule elev, îl auzi șoptind pe Zamfira. Încercați că poate înțelege...

Darie zvârli țigarea, se apropie neîncrezător, îi căută ochii, apoi izbucni deodată, cu un glas uscat, înăbușit:

– *Nous sommes foutus, Ivan! Nous sommes des pauvres types! Save our souls! Bless our hearts, Ivan! Car nous sommes foutus!...*

Rănitul gemu stins, și în acea clipă gura i se luminează deodată, parcă ar fi zâmbit. Îl privi pe rând, întrebător.

– *Blagoslovenie!* strigă Zamfira îngenunchind lângă el. *Boje, Christu!* Binecuvântează-ne, Ivane...

Își făcu cruce, cât putu mai încet, ridică ochii spre cer, își împreună mâinile și închise puțin ochii, ca și cum s-ar fi rugat, apoi îl privi din nou, adânc, cercetător.

– Fă și tu așa, Ivan! strigă. Fă cruce după mine. *Boje, Christu!...*

Apoi tăcu, și toți trei își pironiră privirile pe fața rănitului, așteptând.

– Nu mă înțelege, oftă târziu Zamfira. Dacă i-am fi putut vorbi pe limba lui...

– Grijană lui [...] izbucni Iliescu printre dinți. Se preface că nu înțelege...

Darie întoarse capul și-l privi, zâmbind încurcat.

– Dacă-l înjuri, cum o să te mai binecuvânteze?

– N-are a face. Când omul trage să moară, nu mai înțelege și iartă tot. Îngenunchi și se aplecă ușor spre urechea rănitului. Iartă, Ivane, iartă! șopti.

Atunci își dădu seama că nu-l mai privea și, întorcând capul, văzu câinele, la câțiva metri de ei, în marginea porumbiștii.

– E din sat, spuse Iliescu ridicându-se în picioare și fluierându-l prietenește. Trebuie să fie satul pe-aproape.

Era un câine slab, hămesit, cu părul arămiu decolorat de praf. Se apropie sfios de ei, neîndrăznind să se gudură. Rănitul întorsese capul și-l aștepta. Tremurul buzelor încetase brusc, și fața arăta acum streină, împietrită.

– Dacă e bolșevic și nu l-a învățat nimenea, n-are de unde să știe, vorbi Zamfira ridicându-se în picioare. Dar de Dumnezeu și Iisus Christos tot trebuie c-a auzit el, și cruce nu se poate să nu știe să facă.

Se trase un pas înapoi și-l strigă: „Ivan!” Apoi își depărtă cât putu mai mult brațele și rămase așa nemișcat, cu ochii la rănit.

– *Christu!* strigă din nou. Christos pe cruce. Fă și tu cruce. Ridică trei degete în sus și binecuvântează-ne.

Fața rănitului se luminase din nou, înmuiată de un mare zâmbet. Câinele se apropiase și-i lungea mâna încremenită pe bulgărele de pământ.

– Se preface că nu înțelege, spuse Iliescu, și scuipă cu furie în lături.

Zamfira intră în porumbiște și câteva clipe în urmă se întoarse cu doi coceni.

– Ivan, strigă el căutându-i ochii, privește încoace, Ivan! adăugă așezând cocenii de-a curmezișul în formă de cruce. Privește bine și adu-ți aminte. Asta e crucea lui Iisus Christos, mântuitorul lumii. Christos care a fost răstignit pe cruce. Acum înțelegi? întrebă apropiindu-se și arătându-i cocenii. Îți aduci aminte?

Rănitul îi urmărise mișcările cu un neașteptat interes, dar și cu teamă. Încercă să-și ridice capul, dar gemu și de durere închise ochii. Îi deschise după câteva clipe și zâmbi, văzându-l pe Zamfira așteptând acolo, în fața lui cu cei doi coceni încrucișați.

– *Christu!* rosti el târziu, *Christu!*

– Minunea lui Dumnezeu! șopti Zamfira îngenunchind din nou lângă el și punându-i mâna pe frunte. Ai înțeles ce te rugasem, binecuvântează-ne!...

– *Bénis-nous, Ivan!* izbucni cu fervoare Darie. *Bénis-nous, bless our hearts! Tu t'envoies au Ciel. Au Paradis, Ivan, auprès du Dieu Père. Auprès de la Vierge,* adăugă cu o bruscă, neînțeleasă oboseală în glas. Maică Preacurată și pururea Fecioară Maria...

Rănitul îl ascultase tremurând ușor. Apoi își roti ochii de la unul la altul. Nu mai îndrăzni să-și ridice capul, dar își mișca acum degetele, parcă ar fi încercat să arate ceva.

– Maria! izbucni el să rostească în cele din urmă. Maria...

– Înțelege, șopti Iliescu.

Îi urmări privirile și văzu câinele depărtându-se încet, cu capul plecat.

– Poate cunoaște câinele, adăugă. Poate-o fi și el din sat.

Rănitul începuse să șoptească, mișcându-și tot mai nervos degetele, închizând la răstimpuri ochii, apoi deschizându-i brusc, parcă tot mai înspăimântat că-i regăsește acolo, lângă el.

– Eu zic să încercăm să-l ducem până în sat, vorbi Zamfira...

Darie îl privi lung, neîncrezător.

– Are să fie greu, spuse. Trage să moară.

– Ar fi păcat, că acum înțelege, spuse Iliescu, și dacă ar mai ducea-o un ceas, două, până în sat, poate ne binecuvântează...

Câinele se oprise la vreo zece metri, în marginea porumbiștii, așteptându-i.

*

Îl purtau pe carabine. Darie le luase ranițele și le atârname de carabina lui, pe care o proptise pieziș pe umeri. Rănitul tremura, gemând înfundat, închizând și deschizând neconținut ochii. La răstimpuri, Zamfira îi striga:

– Binecuvântează-ne, Ivane, că te ducem acasă!... Nu te-ăm lăsat să mori pe marginea drumului.

– Zi măcar atât, încercă Iliescu, zi Christos! Christos! Maria!

După vreo sută de metri, se opriră să-și tragă răsuflarea, dar nu-și lăsară povara din mâini. Rănitul încerca, scâncind, să se zvârcolească. Își pironise privirile rugător, în ochii lui Zamfira.

– Vorbiți-i dumneavoastră, domnule elev. Spuneți-i ceva, să vadă că-i vrem binele...

Darie își saltă ranițele în spate cu un gest scurt de furie și deznădejde.

– Ce să-i spun? Pe ce limbă să-i vorbesc? Dacă nu știu rusește, cum o să mă înțeleagă?

– Vorbiți-i orice, îl încurajă Zamfira. Numai să vadă că ne dăm osteneală, că nu-l lăsăm să moară ca un câine. Vorbiți-i în orice limbă, că dumneavoastră sunteți filozof...

Darie oftă fără voia lui și-și trase chipiul pe frunte.

– Cu adevărat filozof! exclamă, încercând să zâmbească. Ivan! izbucni întorcându-se spre rănit și căutându-i ochii. Îți mai aduci aminte de Faust?

*Habe nun, ach! Philosophie,
Juristerei und Medizin,
Und, leider! auch Theologie
Durchaus studiert...*

Acesta sunt eu, Ivan, cel care-ți vorbesc acum. *Filozoful*. Mă auzi?

– Ziceți-i înainte, îl încurajă Iliescu pornind la drum. Vorbiți-i, că vă ascultă, și asta-i de-ajuns.

– Dacă vă ascultă, nu moare, adăugă Zamfira.

– ...Aș putea să-ți povestesc multe, Ivan, căci ce nu poate povesti un proaspăt licențiat în filozofie? Câte nu i-au trecut prin minte? Câte aventuri în două, trei volume, ba unele chiar în douăzeci și două – Proust, bunăoară, nu are douăzeci și două de volume? Sau poate mă înșel, poate am calculat greșit, am numărat și operele din tinerețe; știi la ce fac aluzie, *Pastiches et mélanges* și celelalte...

– Ziceți-i înainte, domnule elev, că-i ziceți bine, îl încurajă Iliescu.

Apoi întoarse capul și scuipă cu putere, departe, către porumbiște.

– Ivan! exclamă emoționat Darie. Aș putea să-ți vorbesc o noapte întreagă numai despre probele inexistenței lui Dumnezeu. Iar despre Iisus Christos, de care probabil n-ai mai auzit de când ai intrat în școala primară, despre Mântuitorul vostru și al nostru, al tuturor, și despre a lui enigmatică existență istorică, sau ineficiență politică, și-aș putea vorbi multe nopți, numai noi doi, fără comisari și fără teologi, căci simți și tu asta. Ivan, *nous sommes foutus, nous sommes tous foutus!* Și noi, și voi. Dar mai ales noi, care ne tragem din bădica Traian... Și dacă mi-ar părea rău să mor acum, curând după tine, sau poate înaintea ta, să mor la douăzeci și doi de ani, este

și pentru că n-am să mai apuc să văd cum o să-i ridică statuie lui bădica Traian. Căci lui i s-a năzărit să ne zămislească aici, la marginea pământului, parcă ar fi știut anume că într-o bună zi o să veniți și voi, obosiți după atâta rătăcire în stepă, și o să dați peste noi, frumoși, deștepți și bogați, și o să vă fie foame și sete, așa cum ne este și nouă acum...

– Ziceți-i înainte, domnule elev, că vă ascultă, îl încurajă Zamfira, văzând că Darie se întrerupsese și-și ștergea în neștire obrazul cu mâneca tunicii.

– ...Și câte altele n-aș putea să-ți povestesc... Deși, mă întreb, aș îndrăzni să-ți povestesc vreodată aventurile din 13 martie, din 8 noiembrie, și toate câte au mai urmat? Sunt întâmplări prea intime, Ivan, care m-au făcut și m-au desfăcut, și m-au făcut din nou, așa cum mă vezi acum, filozof itinerant, ținându-ți de urât că s-o mai îndura de noi Dumnezeu și brandturile voastre, *car nous sommes foutus, Ivan, il n'y a plus d'espoir. Nous sommes tous foutus!* Ca într-o năvală celebră, pe care încă n-a scris-o nimeni, dar care va fi desigur scrisă într-o zi, pentru că e prea adevărată, dacă înțelegi la ce fac aluzie, prea seamănă cu tot ce s-a întâmplat în zilele noastre, și seamănă și cu ce ni se întâmplă și nouă acum, și mă întreb cum va mai îndrăzni autorul nuvelei să dea ochii, să spunem cu soția și copiii lui, ba chiar cu vecinii lui, cum va îndrăzni să mai iasă pe stradă, pentru că, ai ghicit la ce fac aluzie, fiecare se va recunoaște în personajul principal al nuvelei, și cum ar mai putea trăi cineva după aceea, cum s-ar mai putea bucura de viață după ce va înțelege că e *condamnat*, că nu există nici o ieșire, că nu poate exista nici o ieșire, pentru că, pentru fiecare din noi, a existat înaintea noastră un împărat Traian, oricum s-o fi numit el, un Traian în Africa, unul sau mai mulți în China, oriunde îți arunci privirile nu vezi decât oameni condamnați pentru că cineva, un împărat Traian, mult înaintea lor, a hotărât să-i zămislească în locuri nepotrivite.

Se opri brusc și-și trecu, tremurând, palma pe față.

– Ziceți-i înainte, domnule elev, șopti Zamfira, dar mai rar, mai rar, ca să vă înțeleagă...

Darie îl privi zâmbind, parcă l-ar fi recunoscut deodată. Și-și saltă ranițele pe umăr cu o tinerească deznădejde.

– ...S-o luăm, deci, de la început, Ivan, s-o luăm de la 13 martie. Căci de-acolo a început tot începutul. Dacă aș fi murit la 12 martie, aș fi fost un om fericit, pentru că mă duceam în Cer; *au Ciel, Ivan, auprès de la Sainte Trinité*, acolo unde, cu ajutorul preotului – dacă o mai fi rămas vreunul – ai să ajungi și tu, curând. Dar dacă îmi va

fi dat să mor azi, mâine, poimâine, eu unde mă voi duce? În nici un caz, nu în Cer, pentru că la 13 martie am aflat că *Cerul pur și simplu nu există*. Nu mai există, Ivan! Din clipa când înțelegi, cum am înțeles eu la 13 martie, că Cerul e doar o iluzie, totul s-a terminat. Nu mai există nici Cer, nici sus, nici jos, căci Universul e infinit, n-are nici început, nici sfârșit. Și atunci, te întreb, eu unde mă duc?... Știi, te întreb degeaba, pentru că te-ai hotărât să nu răspunzi. Dar îți răspund tot eu. Și îți răspund cu 8 noiembrie, cu al doilea început. Pentru că la 8 noiembrie, cred că ai ghicit asta, am înțeles ceva poate chiar mai important. Am înțeles că nu e nevoie să te duci undeva, pentru că *ești deja acolo*. La nemărginire, Ivan, răspund cu o altă nemărginire. Pentru că, ascultă-mă bine, eu, ca și tine, ca și toți ceilalți, eu, noi, oamenii, suntem *indestructibili*. Nici brandturile voastre, nici avioanele nemțești nu ne pot distruge. Suntem aici de la începutul Lumii, și vom mai fi chiar după ce se va stinge și ultima stea din ultima galaxie. Și atunci, îți dai seama, Ivan, *nous sommes foutus, et sommes foutus pour l'éternité*. Pentru că, dacă sunt indestructibil, unde mă duc, azi, mâine, poimâine, când mi-o veni și mie rândul? Nu mă pot duce nicăieri, pentru că sunt deja acolo, și sunt peste tot, în același timp. Dar asta e îngrozitor, să fii peste tot și totuși, într-un anumit fel, să nu fii, pentru că nu mai ești viu. E îngrozitor, să nu te poți odihni niciodată, cum se odihneau moșii și strămoșii noștri. Căci ei se duceau unde le era scris: unii în cer, alții sub pământ, alții la marginea Pământului, dar, înțelegi, ei se puteau odihni. Dar noi, Ivan, ce se va întâmpla cu noi?...

Își săltă din nou ranițele pe umăr și grăbi și mai mult pasul.

– ...Și acum, dacă te-ai hotărî să rupi jurământul tăcerii; fără îndoială că m-ai întreba: dar *după* 8 noiembrie, ce s-a întâmplat *după* 8 noiembrie? Și pentru că legea războiului ne cere să fim sinceri și deschiși unii față de alții, aș fi obligat să-ți răspund. Dar mă vei înțelege? Pentru că ne lovim deodată de o serie de evidente mutuale contradictorii, dacă mă pot exprima astfel...

Se auzi strigat din urmă, și de-abia atunci își dădu seama că o pornise singur înainte, cu câinele lângă el. Cei doi așezaseră rănitul la umbra rară a unui salcâm, își scosaseră căștile și se ștergeau pe obraz. Darie se apropie stânjenit, silindu-se să zâmbească.

– A bolborosit mereu pe limba lui, în rusește, făcu Iliescu.

– Parcă ar fi cerut apă, îl întrerupse Zamfira, dar nu mai avem. Și când i-am arătat bucățele de zahăr, a închis ochii. Nu vrea.

Luă din palma deschisă o bucată de zahăr și începu s-o sugă.

– Cât îl vedeți de tinerel și de slab e greu, reluă Iliescu, și am obosit. Ne-am gândit să ne odihnim aici la umbră. Că satul tot nu se vede.

– Poate că își vine și el în fire, adăugă Zamfira.

Darie așezase ranițele pe iarba arsă prăfuită și îngenunchease lângă rănit, ascultându-i încordată răsuflarea grea precipitată.

– Mă întreb cum de mai trăiește, vorbi târziu. De-abia își mai trage suflul...

Întinse brațul, apucă una din ranițe și începu să caute. Rănitul îl urmări cu privirea, tresărind la răstimpuri din tot trupul, parcă ar fi fost scuturat de friguri.

Darie întoarse capul spre Zamfira și-l întrebă coborând glasul:

– Ce facem cu el? Că nu-l mai putem duce și e târziu. Îl lăsăm să se chinuie aici, sau îl ajutăm noi să moară?

Zamfira se codi și-și plecă privirile.

– Dacă ne-am trudit și l-am dus până aici... Poate se îndură Dumnezeu și-i dă putere să ne binecuvânteze. Pentru că, îmi dau eu cu părerea, acum *vrea* să ne binecuvânteze...

– L-am auzit și eu, interveni Iliescu. L-am auzit când a spus *Christu*. Dacă-l mai ținem de vorbă, poate o mai duce un ceas. Că satul nu e departe.

Darie își aprinsese țigara și-i privi pe toți trei pe rând, zâmbind.

– Nu se vede nimic, spuse. Unde te uiți, numai lanuri de porumb, numai lanuri...

Câinele se opri la câțiva metri, scâncind sfios, cu ochii ațintiți asupra bucățelelor de zahăr. Zamfira oftă.

– Să-i mai spunem de-ale noastre, că poate pe astea le înțelege mai bine. Cât ne-am odihni noi aici, să-l ținem de vorbă, să-i spunem cum o să fie în sat.

Iliescu se întoarse cu tot trupul spre rănit și începu deodată, cu un glas nou, necunoscut, parcă ar fi vorbit unui copil bolnav:

– Ivan, nu mai e mult și ajungem în sat. Și o să fie bine la voi în sat, o să fie ca la noi în sat...

– Spune-i ce-o să-i dăm, îl întrerupse Zamfira. Apă proaspătă din belșug...

– Ivan, continuă Iliescu apropiindu-și și mai mult fața de el, la voi în sat sunt livezi cu tot felul de poame, cu prune, și pere, și câte altele, și-o să-ți aducem câte vrei...

– O să-ți spele femeile obrazul, îl întrerupse Zamfira, o să te culce în pat...

Rănitul închisese ochii și-și mișca buzele parcă cu un mare efort, dar totuși din ce în ce mai repede.

– Doar să-ți aduci și tu aminte de noi, continuă Zamfira, să-ți aduci aminte de ce te-am rugat...

– O să-și aducă aminte, reluă Iliescu, nu se poate să nu-și aducă aminte. Că ne-am ostenit pentru el, i-am fost prieteni. *Priatin!* Ivan, *priatin!* strigă zâmbind cu toată fața. O să-ți aduci aminte, Ivan, și o să-ți ridici brațul către noi, și ai să ne binecuvântezi.

Căinele începu deodată să geamă, apoi privi speriat în jurul lui și, tremurând, cu părul zburlit, o luă la goană pe marginea drumului. Rănitul deschisese ochii, dar nu mai avu putere să întoarcă capul și să-l privească. Privea acum de-a dreptul către cer, și cu atâta intensitate încât nici lumina grea a după-amiezii de august, nici pulberea fină care plutea deasupra lor ca o nesfârșită pânză de păianjen nu-l tulburau. Tăcură toți, câteva clipe. Darie se apropie de rănit, îi puse mâna pe frunte și-l privi adânc în ochi.

– Mi-e teamă c-a murit, șopti. Dumnezeu să-l ierte! adăugă ridicându-se anevoie în picioare.

Zamfira îi puse și el mâna pe frunte, apoi îl bătu ușor pe obraz, îi scutură brațul.

– Dumnezeu să-l ierte! rosti făcându-și cruce. O să-l ierte Dumnezeu pentru că ne-a binecuvântat, și asta o să ne poarte noroc.

– Asta făcea când își mișca buzele adineaori, spuse Iliescu. Ne binecuvânta...

Darie își săltă ranița în spate și privi obosit drumul pe care apucase căinele.

– S-o luăm din loc, spuse. Am întârziat destul.

– Îndurați-vă încă puținel, domnule elev, șopti timid Zamfira desprinzând din raniță o lopată scurtă. Nu-l putem lăsa aici să-l sfărtece corbii. Până mai fumați dumneavoastră o țigare, i-am săpat groapa...

Darie îl privea uluit, parcă nu l-ar fi înțeles.

– Îndurați-vă, domnule elev, interveni Iliescu. Că e pământ sărac și groapa e gata cât ați bate din palme...

– Mă băieți, voi sunteți nebuni, vorbi târziu Darie. Sunteți nebuni de-a binelea... Dar e și vina mea, adăugă mai mult pentru sine, îndreptându-se spre porumbiște. E și vina mea...

Târziu întoarse capul și-i văzu cum săpau grăbiți, suflând greu, fără să-și vorbească. Și în acea clipă i se părea că visează pentru că săpau la o distanță de peste doi metri unul de altul, ca și cum s-ar fi hotărât să sape o groapă în care să încapă câteva trupuri și tot atunci

auzi șuieratul ascuțit al avioanelor de vânătoare germane zburând foarte jos iar în spatele lui, dincolo de lanurile de porumb în care se afundaseră în zori, poate chiar din șoseaua pe care se retrăsese compania întreagă cu o noapte mai înainte, auzi pocnetele scurte, surde, înfundate, ale brandturilor rusești.

*

– ...Evident, continuă desfăcând un nou pachet de țigări, atunci mi-am dat seama că visez și m-am deșteptat. Dar am să vă mai spun ceva, deși poate n-o să mă credeți: ce m-a impresionat mai mult, și m-a trezit, n-au fost avioanele nemțești, nici brandturile, ci groapa aceea nefiresc de mare, pe care începuseră s-o sape Iliescu și Zamfira. În fond, mă întreb, unde le-o fi fost gândul când s-au apucat să sape. Căci, v-am spus, eram toți însetați, înfometați și extraordinar de obosiți. De ce voiau să-și mai complice truda?

– În orice caz, îl întrerupse locotenentul privindu-l cu simpatie, aproape cu căldură, vina a fost, de la început, a dumitale. Nu trebuia să-i lași să-l transporte. Erați în retragere și orice moment pierdut vă putea fi fatal. Dacă le-a fost milă de Ivan, trebuiau să-l împuște pe loc...

– Nu crezi că putea fi salvat? îl întrebă Laura.

– Nu. V-am spus, când am dat cu ochii de el, trăgea să moară. Mă întreb cum a mai putut trăi atât. Evident, în vis lucrurile se întâmplă altfel...

– După cele șase zile de foc, îl întrerupse locotenentul, aveai destulă experiență. Nu mai aveai, ca la început, scuza că nu îndrăznești să comanzi unor soldați care luptaseră de un an doi, în linia întâi.

– E adevărat, vorbi Darie zâmbind absent. Dar pe de altă parte, de câte ori îndrăznisem să comand, în acele șase zile, ieșise prost. Plecasem cu un pluton, și, din comandă în comandă, rămăsesem trei.

– Știu la ce faci aluzie, îl întrerupse din nou locotenentul, dar n-a fost vina dumitale. Toată Ucraina era împânzită de partizani și de detașamente speciale admirabil camuflate. Îndată ce o unitate se despărțea de grosul diviziei, risca să fie înconjurată și decimată. Ați avut noroc dacă din șaisprezece ați scăpat trei.

– În orice caz, reluă Darie, de data aceasta nu mai voiam să-mi iau răspunderea. Și acum, pentru că suntem între noi, mai vă pot spune ceva. Cum mă credeam urmărit de un nenoroc și piază-rea, și mi-era teamă să nu-i pierd și pe ei, ultimii doi, mă hotărâsem să le mai dau un singur ordin: să ne despărțim; să ne îndreptăm spre sate,

ei pe un drum, și eu pe altul... De-aceea, poate, m-am lăsat ispitit de speranța lor absurdă: că binecuvântarea lui Ivan, care trăgea să moară, ne va purta noroc...

Doamna Machedon veni dinspre bucătărie cu o farfurie mare fumegândă, urmată de Adela, purtând o tavă cu multe păhăruțe și o sticlă de țuică.

– Luați-le repede, că sunt fierbinți, șopti doamna Machedon, oprindu-se în mijlocul grupului.

– Eu mă tot gândesc, începu judecătorul, cine-o fi fost Ivan? Ce fel de om? Și, mai ales, mă tot întreb: o fi înțeles ce voiăți de la el? Și, până la urmă, vă va fi binecuvântat?

– Fără îndoială că i-a înțeles și i-a binecuvântat, răspunse Laura. Dovadă că le-a purtat noroc și au scăpat.

– Se cunosc cazuri și mai extraordinare, spuse cineva rezemat de perete pe care Darie nu-l văzuse până atunci. Soldați care au reușit să scape de la Stalingrad și au ajuns, pe jos, după nu știu câte luni în țară. Și mă întreb dacă i-o fi binecuvântat și pe ei vreun Ivan care trăgea să moară...

Darie îl ascultase cu încordare, privindu-l mirat, cercetător.

– Nu cred că ne-am întâlnit până acum, continuă celalt stânjenit, parcă ar fi încercat să se scuze. Numele meu este Procopie. Medic, dar am ciupit și eu ceva filozofie, pe vremuri, când eram student. Mi-a plăcut filozofia...

Locotenentul îi privi pe amândoi surprins, aproape indignat...

– Dar cum se poate că nu v-ați întâlnit până acum? Ați fost în același regiment...

Darie întoarse capul către Laura și zâmbi cu înțeles, parcă ar fi așteptat un semn, să-l încurajeze să continue.

– Ce e mai curios, începu el deodată, este că am avut de la început impresia că ne-am mai întâlnit. Dar nu îndrăzneam să recunosc că impresia asta se datora întâmplării pe care v-am povestit-o adineaori. Într-adevăr, cu cât vă privesc mai bine, domnule director, cu atât mi se pare că semănați cu Ivan...

Câțiva izbucniră în râs și-i priviră pe rând, încercând să pară surprinși. Darie continua să zâbească.

– Este în orice caz curios, exclamă Laura, pentru că nu mi-l închipuiam așa pe Ivan. Îl vedeam un tinerel de optsprezece-nouăsprezece ani, foarte blond și plin de pistru. Și doctorul e așa cum îl vedeți: brun, fără pistru și cu doi băieți la școală.

Darie începu să se frece pe frunte, parcă ar fi încercat să-și amintească un amănunt care, în clipa aceea, i se părea hotărâtor.

– În fond, asta n-are nici o importanță, continuă Laura. Important este faptul că ție ți se pare că seamănă cu Ivan. Și în cazul acesta, îl putem întreba ce s-a întâmplat în mintea lui Ivan atunci când îl purtați pe carabine. Credeți că i-a binecuvântat, domnule doctor?

Procopie ridică încurcat din umeri.

– Cum să spun? După câte pot judeca, aş răspunde: da și nu. Este greu de închipuit că Ivan nu ghicise ce voiau de la el. Dovadă că a rostit cuvântul *Christu*. Așa că, probabil, le-a vorbit, șoptind cuvinte pe care ei nu le puteau înțelege, pentru că nu știau rusește. Cuvinte, foarte probabil, de prietenie, poate chiar de dragoste, creștină sau altfel, în sfârșit, de dragoste între oameni. Dar, evident, nu asta așteptau Zamfira și Iliescu de la el; în fond, nici nu era o binecuvântare propriu-zisă...

Darie ridică brusc fruntea și privi agitat în jurul lui.

– Acum mi-am adus aminte! exclamă. Mi-am adus aminte de ace mi-am spus la un moment dat, când, turburat de credința și nădejdea lui Zamfira, l-am implorat „*Bless our hearts, Ivan! Save our souls!*...” “ Mi-am spus: dacă ar fi adevărat, dacă Ivan așa cum este el, paralizat, aproape mut, trăgând să moară într-o margine de drum, dacă Ivan *ne poate mântui cu adevărat*, atunci ascunde un mister impenetrabil și cutremurător, căci, într-un anume fel, incomprehensibil minții mele, el reprezintă, sau exprimă, pe Dumnezeu necunoscut, *agnostos theos*, de care vorbea sfântul Pavel. Dar dacă a fost sau nu a fost așa, nu voi ști niciodată. Pentru că niciodată nu voi putea fi sigur că binecuvântarea sau dragostea lui a avut sau nu vreo importanță în existența noastră...

Doamna Machedon se apropie de soba de zid, o deschise cu grijă și zvârlă ce mai rămăsese din butucul despicat în după-amiaza aceea.

– Parcă s-a lăsat deodată frig, spuse.

– E deschisă fereastra de la baie, explică Adela. Era prea mult fum, și am deschis fereastra...

– Nu ne întrerupeți! strigă Laura întorcând capul. Să vedem ce spune doctorul. Căci ideea aceasta cu Dumnezeu necunoscut aduce un element nou, pe care nu-l bănuiam până acum. Dumneata ce spui, domnule doctor?

Procopie ridică din nou din umeri și-și trecu palma peste buze, parcă ar fi încercat să-și ascundă un zâmbet.

– E curios că și eu mă întrebam cu ce seamănă toată întâmplarea asta. Căci seamănă cu ceva care mi se pare cunoscut, dar nu

reuşesc să-mi amintesc cu ce. În orice caz, dacă ar fi fost o nouă epifanie a dumnezeului necunoscut, nu putea fi *agnostos theos* din Atena sfântului Pavel. Nu seamănă deloc cu un dumnezeu imaginat de greci...

Darie clătina nerăbdător din cap.

– Evident, evident. Dar sunt fel de fel de zei şi dumnezei necunoscuţi....

– Să lăsăm asta, îl întrerupse Laura. Eu regret un singur lucru: că n-ai apucat să-i explici lui Ivan ce înţelegeai prin acea expresie misterioasă: „o serie de evidenţe mutual contradictorii...”

Darie tresări şi o privi zămbind, cu o secreta feroare.

– Cred că a fost cea mai profundă, dar şi mai nemiloasă autoanaliză din toate câte am încercat în viaţa mea. Simţeam atunci că intuiseam ceva care îmi rămăsese întotdeauna inaccesibil, că ghicisem cum să spun? însuşi principiul existenţei mele, poate nu numai al existenţei mele, adăugă coborând glasul. Simţeam că ghicisem misterul însuşi al oricărei existenţe umane. Şi expresia aceea aproximativă – „o serie de evidenţe mutual contradictorii” – era o primă încercare de traducere a misterului pe care tocmai îl pătrusesem şi eram pe cale de a-l analiza şi formula. Dar, evident, aşa cum se întâmplă mai întotdeauna în vis, acum nu mai mi-aduc nimic aminte...

Privi în jurul lui şi i se păru că în afară de Laura şi Procopie ceilalţi îl ascultaseră mai mult din politeţe. Tocmai fuseseră chemaţi la masă când Laura intervenise cu ultima întrebare şi fuseseră obligaţi să-l asculte cei mai mulţi în picioare, unii din ei chiar lângă uşa sufrageriei. Ar fi trebuit să se ridice şi el, să arate limpede că s-a pus capăt discuţiei, dar parcă o stranie, deşi plăcută, oboseală îl pironia acolo, în fotoliu. Zâmbea în neştire, încercând să înţeleagă ce se întâmplă cu el. Laura îi puse mâna pe braţ:

– Haide, c-am rămas ultimii, şopti. E târziu...

*

Nu s-a ridicat decât când s-a simţit tras, cu putere, de braţ.

– E târziu, domnule elev, vorbi Zamfira zămbindu-i. Înnoptează...

Darie privi buimăc în jurul lui şi începu să-şi frece ochii. Apoi privi din nou, clătinând repede, încercând să se trezească. Erau în porumbište, şi parcă niciodată nu auzise atâtea greieri deodată. Deasupra lor, cerul pălise, dar stelele încă nu se desluşeau.

– Unde-i Ivan? întreabă Darie.

– Odihneşte sub pământ, vorbi Zamfira. Numai cruce n-am avut de unde să-i punem.

– Ne-a purtat noroc, adăugă Iliescu. Ce-a mai fost şi pe-aici! Mai rău ca alaltăieri, la pod. Şi dumneavoastră dormeaţi dus. Iar noi ne-am văzut de treabă...

Zamfira întinse braţul peste porumbište.

– Zburau atât de jos avioanele nemţeşti, de mi-era teamă că au să-şi încurce aripile în ştiuleţi. Mitraliau porumbištea, credeau că erau ascunşi ruşii acolo. Pe noi ne-au lăsat în pace, să ne vedem de treabă... Credeau, poate, că îngropăm pe unul de-ai noştri.

– Iar dintr-acolo, îl întrerupse Iliescu întinzând braţul în direcţia opusă, începuseră ruşii cu brandturile. Noroc că n-au ajuns până aici. Au bătut ce-au bătut cu brandturile, şi apoi nu s-au mai auzit. Ori că i-au mitraliat avioanele de vânătoare – că erau vreo douăzeci – ori au schimbat direcţia. Că dacă au trimis nemţii atâtea avioane, desigur că tot pe-aici se retrage şi ce-a mai rămas din divizia lor... Mai bine le trimiteau alaltăieri, la pod, adăugă întorcând capul şi scuipând cu necaz. N-ar mai fi fost atâtea măcel...

Cu un gest scurt, Darie se aplecă şi îşi apucă raniţa.

– Şi acum, începu Zamfira ajutându-l să şi-o salte în spate, cum o vrea Dumnezeu. Că dacă au schimbat ruşii direcţia, ne-au tăiat drumul, şi trebuie să ne strecurăm tot prin spatele lor, până dăm de batalion.

– N-avea grijă, îl întrerupse Iliescu, că ne strecurăm. Scăpăm noi şi de data asta...

Ieşiră într-o cărare largă, noduroasă, care părea că se întinde până foarte departe printre lanurile de porumb.

– Am visat, începu Darie fără să-i privească. Se făcea că eram la Iaşi, iarna, cu prietenii, şi le povesteam de Ivan...

– Aţi visat frumos, spuse Iliescu văzând că trecerea se prelungeşte.

– Dacă aţi visat pe Ivan, poartă noroc, adăugă Zamfira.

– Ce e mai curios e că domnul locotenent spunea că rău am făcut că am pierdut prea mult timp. Că, spunea, dacă ne-a fost milă de el, ar fi trebuit să-l împuşcăm, să nu se mai chinuie. Dar nu trebuia să-l purtăm cu noi.

– Aşa sunt ordinele, spuse Iliescu. Dar, aţi văzut şi dumneavoastră, ne-a purtat noroc...

– Ce e drept, ne-am dat şi noi osteneală, îl întrerupse Zamfira. I-am vorbit, i-am povestit.

Darie se opri deodată şi-i privi pe rând.

– Mă băieți, mi se pare mie sau sunt pe-aici milioane de greieri? M-au surzit...

– Sunt greieri, domnule elev, spuse Zamfira. Sunt mulți, dar așa sunt totdeauna la vremea asta... Poate n-ați mai fost de mult pe la țară, vara, adăugă zâmbind.

Darie își scoase casca și-l privi câțva timp nehotărât. Apoi brusc se întoarse și porni din nou.

– Curios vis, reîncepu după o lungă tăcere. Nu-i pot da de rost. De ce mi s-o fi părut mie atunci, în vis, că ce mă pregăteam să-i spun lui Ivan, aici, acum câteva ceasuri, când m-ați strigat, voi din urmă era atât de important? E curios, nu e așa? Întrebă întorcând capul spre Zamfira.

– Visuri, spuse Zamfira. Cine poate să le dea de rost?

– Au și visele tâlcul lor, dacă știi cum să le tâlmăcești, vorbi Iliescu.

Darie clătină din cap, gânditor, și grăbi brusc pasul.

– Nu, eu mă gândeam la altceva, de-aceea spuseseam că e curios. E curios pentru că în vis eram convins, pe de o parte, că acele câteva cuvinte pe care începusem să i le spun lui Ivan anunțau lucruri foarte profunde, pe care n-am mai apucat să i le spun pentru că m-ați strigat voi, iar, pe de altă parte, tot acolo, în vis, nu mai mi-aminteam decât de început: „o serie de evidențe mutual contradictorii”. Ce revelație extraordinară anunța această expresie care acum mi se pare destul de banală și stilistic incertă! Pentru, că știu foarte bine la ce mă refeream. Și dacă nu m-ați fi strigat, i-aș fi povestit lui Ivan măcar câteva din asemenea „evidențe mutual contradictorii”. Bunăoară, Laura, fata aceea de la Iași. Avea, și are încă, modul ei propriu de a fi *evidentă*. Dar nu era numai ea. Era, bunăoară... Era... Era bunăoară, să zicem, pasiunea mea pentru filozofie...

Se întrerupse brusc și-și trecu mâna prin păr. Apoi începu să se frece, absent, pe frunte.

– E grea, începu Zamfira, e grea filozofia.

– Este cea mai grea, continuă Iliescu. Și este cea mai grea pentru că n-ai cum să-i dai de rost...

Darie își așezase absent casca pe cap.

– Ce e mai curios, începu el cu o voce gravă, aproape severă, este că *atunci*, în vis, aveam dreptate. Am uitat. *Am uitat* ce mă pregăteam să-i spun lui Ivan. Probabil că mă inspirase, ca să spun așa, prezența lui, agonia lui neverosimilă, așa cum se stingea, zidit din toate părțile în singurătatea lui absolută. Probabil că *exemplul*

lui Ivan îmi revelase propria mea condiție umană, deși, evident, nu-mi dădeam seama de asta. Voi, pur și simplu, să fac cum mi-ați spus voi, să-l țin de vorbă, să-i vorbesc, *orice*, numai să nu moară...

Se întrerupse brusc, dându-și seama că lăsase cărarea și umbla acum, călcând anevoie printre porumbi. Întoarse capul și-l zări pe Zamfira la câțiva pași în urmă.

– Mă băieți, spuse, da voi știți unde mergem? Pe-aici ne afundăm în porumbiște...

– Pe-aici e drumul, domnule elev, spuse Zamfira apropiindu-se. Că dacă am umbla pe cărare, poate dă peste noi vreo patrulă rusească. O ținem tot pe-aici, prin porumb, până către miezul nopții, și numai după aceea, cu ajutorul lui Dumnezeu, ieșim în șosea în spatele rușilor, și ne luăm după ei până ce se luminează. După aceea ne înfundăm din nou în porumbiște și ne odihnim.

Iliescu se oprise la câțiva pași, pe stânga, și le făcu semn, ridicând brațul.

– Să fim mai cu băgare de seamă, șopti. Să mergem răsfirați, ca să nu răscolim porumbiștea. Asta până ce se înnoptează bine. După aceea, ne-am lăsa mai în voie... Domnule elev, adăugă apropiindu-se, dumneavoastră vă țineți la mijloc între noi. Vă uitați când la stânga, când la dreapta și urmăriți cum se clatină porumbii. Când vreți să vă odihniți o clipă, să vă trageți răsuflarea, ne fluierați ușor, și ne oprim și noi și vă așteptăm...

Pe aici, își dădu seama Darie, greierii se împuținaseră, sau poate amuțeau la apropierea lor. Se întunecase, chiar nu pătrundea de nicăieri nici o adiere și văzduhul era încă încis, și din foile tasate de porumb pe care le atingeau se ridica o pulbere înecăcioasă, amăruie. Încea să se strecoare printre porumbi fără să-i scuture prea violent, dar ranița și carabina îl încurcau și se lovea neconștient de bulgări uscați de pământ. Și uneori bocancul îi rămânea prins în vreo buruiiană cu multe lujere, subțiri, întortocheate, și zmucindu-și piciorul smulgea buruiiana din rădăcini, clătinând puternic porumbul, și-l năpădea pulberea, îl loveau în față fluturi mărunți de noapte.

După vreun sfert de ceas, se auzi fluierat și se opri. Privi în dreapta și în stânga lui, dar nu desluși nimic. Răsuflă adânc, apoi își lăsă capul pe spate și regăsi cerul. Se acoperise cu stele și începuse să se limpezească. Răsuflă rar, adânc, așteptând. Apoi auzi din nou fluieratul și, de foarte aproape din stânga lui, glasul lui Iliescu:

– O luăm din loc, domnule elev.

– Tot despre Ivan vorbiți? îi întreabă Laura, răsărind deodată în spatele lor. Unde ați ajuns?

– Dar tu pe unde ai venit? o întreabă surprins Darie. Cum de nu te-am văzut?

– Am fost după cumpărături, spuse Laura așezându-se cu un suspin de ușurare. Sunt frântă de oboseală...

– Dar ceilalți unde sunt? întreabă Darie întorcând capul.

– Vin și ei într-o clipă. Adela s-a oprit la chioșc, să cumpere ziare și doctorul cu mama și ceilalți au trecut pe la vecini, să vadă dacă mai împrumută ceva lemne. Că s-a făcut frig și parcă stă să ningă...

– Darie își dădu seama că mângâie cu amândouă palmele spe-tezele fotoliului și zâmbi misterios.

– Va trebui să-mi destăinuieți și mie într-o zi povestea acestui fotoliu, spuse. Am impresia că de câte ori îmi aduc aminte de Ivan, mai precis, de câte ori îmi aduc aminte de el în *acest fotoliu*, ori visez, ori mă trezesc din vis...

– De data aceasta n-a fost nici una, nici alta, îl întrerupse Arhip.

– Ce vrei să spui? îl întreabă Darie tulburat, privindu-l fix.

Arhip ridică din umeri.

– Cum s-ar mai putea spune altfel? Ai încercat formula „o serie de evidențe mutual contradictorii”, dar nu păreai prea entuziasmat. Atunci, să mai căutăm, adăugă depărtându-se, să mai căutăm...

Îl privea cum se depărtează, mâhnit și furios totodată că nu mai poate adăuga nimic.

– *Alors, nous sommes foutus!* șopti. *Il n'y a plus d'espoir. Foutus pour l'éternité!*...

– *Nous sommes foutus!* repetă Darie printre dinți când Zamfira le făcu semn de plecare. *Foutus pour l'éternité?*

Ieșiseră la un drum prost, de cărute, șerpuiind, zdrențuit de gropi, printre lanurile de porumb. Se auzi din nou, izbucnind parcă din toate părțile odată, larma greierilor. Acum, că scăpaseră din porumbiște, își scoaseră căștile; Darie o ținea în mână, și ceilalți le atârnavă de ranițe. Cerul începuse să sticlească, dar nu se simțea încă răcoarea nopții.

– Nu mai spuneți nimic, domnule elev, vorbi Zamfira. Trebuie că sunteți ostenit...

– Acum, că a trecut de miezul nopții, putem vorbi mai cu curaj, adăugă Iliescu. Până om da de șosea. Acolo iar trebuie să fim cu băgare de seamă...

Darie regăsise batista în buzunarul de sus al tunicii și începu să-și ștergă în neștire fruntea și obrazul.

– Mă băieți, întreabă el târziu, voi știți bine că asta-i drumul?

– Acesta-i, domnule elev, îl liniști Zamfira. Uitați-vă la stele. Am făcut doar un ocol ca să nu cădem în sat, dar încolo mergem bine. Ne ținem după ruși...

Darie privi în treacăt cadranul fosforescent.

– Acum e unu fără douăzeci și cinci de minute, spuse. Dacă dăm curând de șosea și totul iese bine, putem mărșălui până aproape de patru. După aceea, spuneți, trebuie să ne ascundem iarăși în porumbiște. Dar dacă încep pe-acolo, peste zece-doisprezece kilometri, lanurile de grâu și ovăz și rapiță, sau mai știu eu ce? Acolo cum ne ascundem?

– N-aveți dumneavoastră grijă, domnule elev, spuse Iliescu. Eu am mai fost pe-aici astă-primăvară, când ieșeau grânele. Toată Ucraina e așa cum o vedeți: porumb, pe câțiva kilometri, și alături grâu, sau secară, sau ce-o mai fi pe alți kilometri. Și apoi iar porumb.

– O s-o ducem mai greu cu apa, adăugă Zamfira. Poate n-o să găsim apă, vreun puț părăsit, pe câmp vreo băltoacă, poate n-o să găsim o zi, două. O să fie greu, la început, dar, cu ajutorul lui Dumnezeu, ieșim la capăt. Cunoșc eu ierburi, și mai sunt și rădăcini, și uneori poate mai dăm de un porumb crud de lapte... Ieșim noi la capăt, n-aveți grijă, repetă.

– De mâncat o să mâncăm ce-am mâncat în noaptea asta, reluă Iliescu. Porumb. Păcat că e cam trecut și nu putem face jăratec să-l coacem, dar e bun și așa. Ține de foame.

Darie se hotărî să-și vâre batista în buzunar, tocmai când bocancul i se afundă într-o groapă. Era gata să cadă, cu ranița alunecându-i brusc pe ceafă, când îl prinse de braț Zamfira.

– Doamne-ajută! că dacă vă scrânteți piciorul tocmai acum, nu era bine.

– Când aluneci într-o groapă și nu cazii, se spune că e semn bun, își aminti Iliescu.

Darie își îndesă batista în buzunar.

– Pentru că veni vorba de groapă, începu el zâmbind, voiam mai demult să vă întreb de ce v-ați căznit să-i săpați lui Ivan o groapă atât de somptuoasă, vreau să spun atât de mare?

– Nu era mare, domnule elev, făcu Zamfira. Groapă de creștin, ca toate gropile.

– Când ați început să săpați, îl întrerupse Darie, erați la doi metri și mai bine unul de altul. S-ar fi spus că vă pregăteați să îngropați o patulă întreagă...

Și începu să râdă, dintr-o dată, bine dispus ca și cum și setea și oboseala i-ar fi dispărut ca prin farmec... Râseră și ei deși, înțelese Darie, râdeau mai mult ca să-i facă plăcere.

– Doamne ferește! spuse târziu Zamfira. Dar să știți că n-avea doi metri.

– Acum că stau și mă gândesc începu Iliescu, dumneavoastră n-aveți cum s-o vedeți, domnule elev, pentru că intraserăți în porumbiște.

– Asta a fost mai târziu când am văzut apropiindu-se avioanele germane. Dar în clipa când le-am zărit de departe, și am auzit și brandurile rusești, vă vedeam pe voi cum săpați. Îmi aduc foarte bine aminte.

– Să vă spună Zamfira, îndrăzni târziu Iliescu. Să vă spună el cum a fost. Doar ce încercasem pământul cu lopețile și când am văzut primele avioane germane, le-am făcut semn, că începuseră să mitralieze în marginea porumbiștei. Și v-am căutat, să vedem de nu v-a atins cumva vreun glonte. V-am găsit acolo unde v-am trezit mai târziu. V-am lăsat să vă odihniți, și de-abia după aceea ne-am întors și-am săpat groapa. Când a trecut al doilea val de avioane, poate un sfert mai târziu, groapa era aproape gata, și le-am făcut semn de departe, cu lopețile, dar ne văzuseră și ei și n-au mai mitraliat pe lângă noi... N-a fost așa, Zamfira?

– Așa a fost, cum spune Iliescu, întări Zamfira.

Darie începu din nou să râdă.

– Cu atât mai bine. Asta înseamnă că începusem să visez înainte de a adormi. Mi s-a mai întâmplat și altă dată, adăugă.

Apoi tăcu, absent. După vreun sfert de ceas, Iliescu porni repede înainte, plecându-se ușor din spate, căci porumbii începuseră să fie mai rari și mai piperniciți. Le făcu semn cu mâna să se apropie cu grijă.

– Am ajuns în câmp, șopti Zamfira. Șoseaua trebuie să fie chiar în fața noastră, și nu prea departe. Lăsați-mă să trec eu înainte domnule elev...

*

De două ceasuri mergeau răsfirați pe câmp. Găsiseră repede șoseaua, dar o traversaseră în goană, căci din spate se auzeau înaintând spre ei, cu farurile stinse, o coloană nesfârșită de camioane

rusești. Noaptea era aici limpede și rece. Cerul parcă se apropiase deoparte, în fața lor, spre apus. La răstimpuri, ajungea până la ei o adiere leneșă de vânt, cu miros de iarbă uscată și benzină.

Zărise de departe arborele crescut singuratec și îi fluieră, scurt, să se îndrepte într-acolo, să se odihnească. Dar Zamfira îi făcu semn cu brațul să meargă înainte, după el.

– *Nous sommes foutus!* șuieră Darie printre dinți.

Ar fi vrut să poată scuipa, ca Iliescu, dar gura îi era uscată, și în acea clipă simți, cu surprindere, aproape cu spaimă, că i se face dintr-o dată frig. Încercă să grăbească pasul, dar aproape nu-și mai dădea seama cât de repede înaintează. Se trezi că fuge, cu carabina în mâna dreaptă, și cu stânga ținându-și ranița, să nu-i salte în spate. Se opri obosit și respiră adânc, de mai multe ori.

– De ce v-a fost frică, domnule filozof? se auzi întrebat în șoaptă.

Întoarse speriat capul și dădu cu ochii de Pricopie. Îl aștepta, lângă pom, cu câinele lângă el. Zâmbea.

– De ce v-a fost frică? îl întrebă văzând că Darie rămăsese cu privirile pironite asupra lui.

– Dar ce-i cu dumneavoastră, aici, domnule doctor? Cum ați ajuns aici?

Oboseala îi pierise deodată și se apropie de el repede, înviorat.

– Unde vă este unitatea? întrebă din nou, ajuns în fața lui. În aceeași clipă își dădu seama de confuzie și încercă să se scuize, încurcat: E întuneric, nu v-am recunoscut. Sunteți d-l. Arhip. Dar tot nu înțeleg ce căutați aici. Tot căutați formula, tot o mai căutați?

Celalt îl privea cu același zâmbet senin și totodată ironic.

– Eu v-am pus o întrebare, domnule filozof, și văd că nu voiți să răspundeți. Îmi spuneți că suntem indestructibili. Atunci, de ce v-a fost frică?

– Ivan! șopti Darie.

– Nu mă cheamă așa, dar nu mă supăr. Spuneți-mi cum vreți. Spuneți-mi Ivan.

Darie făcu încă un pas spre el.

– Așadar, știai românește, și nu ne-ai spus nimic. Ne-ai lăsat să ne chinuim...

– Acum înțelegem toate limbile, îl întrerupse Ivan. Dar nu mai are importanță, că nu mai avem nevoie de ele... Spuneți totuși că suntem indestructibili. Nu trebuia să vă fie frică...

Darie își trecu încurcat mâna pe frunte.

– Nu mi-a fost frică. M-a luat deodată cu frig și nu știam ce am, și atunci am început să fug... Asta a fost tot...

Ivan îl privi lung, cu simpatie, și zâmbi din nou.

– Mi-ai vorbit frumos adineaori, ieri, alaltăieri, când o fi fost asta. Mi-a plăcut mai ales pentru că ai înțeles, atât de tânăr! că suntem indestructibili.

– Vasăzică, ai înțeles tot, șopti Darie.

– Ce n-am înțeles, continuă Ivan, a fost deznădejdea dumitale, domnule filozof, frica dumitale, că nu te vei odihni niciodată. Dar de ce vrei să te odihnești? De-abia am început. Ce-avem în spatele nostru? Poate nici un milion de ani și încă! Dacă începem să numărăm de la *homo sapiens*, doar câteva zeci de mii de ani. Și uită-te în fața noastră, miliarde și miliarde de ani!...

Darie îl ascultase surprins, concentrat.

– Miliarde de ani, repetă în șoaptă. Știu, știu, dar ce să facem cu ele, cu miliardele de ani?

– Să însuflețim Pământul, și apoi sistemul solar, și galaxiile, și tot ce-o mai fi pe-acolo, și pe care nu le știm încă. Să le însuflețim, adică să le aducem la viață și să trezim spiritul care zace alienat în orice viață. Să binecuvântăm întreaga Creație, așa cum vă place la unii dintre dumneavoastră să spuneți.

– Vasăzică, Zamfira avea dreptate. Ne-ai binecuvântat și pe noi.

– Da și nu. Cum prea bine spunea doctorul Procopie...

– Dar de unde știi dumneata de Procopie? îl întrerupse Darie.

Ivan îl privi curios, aproape cu surprindere, apoi zâmbi ridând când din umeri.

– Acum știm tot. Mai exact, tot ce ne interesează. Și dumneata mă interesezi pentru că ți-a fost milă de mine și mi-ai vorbit. Și de asemenea mă interesează Zamfira și Iliescu pentru că s-au ostenit să mă ducă în sat. Și apoi m-au îngropat, nu, că mi-ar fi păsat dacă sunt sau nu îngropat, dar m-a mișcat gândul lor...

Darie începu deodată să se frece pe frunte.

– Băieții! șopti. Unde-or fi băieții?

– Sunt mai încolo, pe câmp, te așteaptă. N-ai grijă; se odihnesc și ei. De altfel, n-am să te țin nici eu prea mult, că în curând trebuie să plec mai departe. Dar voiam să mai stăm de vorbă. Ne-am întâlnit atât de rar în ultimul timp, în marginea porumbiștii, dar atunci nu ne-am recunoscut, nu puteam vorbi, la doamna Machedon, apoi pe munte, sub Piatra-Craiului... Erau timpuri când ne întâlneam mai des. Darie își dădu deodată seama că râde.

– Îmi pare rău dacă te contrazic, începu încurcat, dar sunt sigur că te înșeli. Pe Procopie și Arhip i-am cunoscut de curând, iar pe dumneata, te-am întâlnit ieri, alaltăieri, cum spuneai, în marginea porumbiștii.

– Ne cunoaștem de mult, îl întrerupse Ivan, nici nu îndrăznesc să-ți spun de când ne cunoaștem. Dar nu ne recunoaștem decât când e prea târziu.

Darie îl privea adânc, concentrat. Și, ca de obicei când îl interesa discuția, băgă automat mâna în buzunar, să-și caute pachetul cu țigări. Dar de data aceasta gestul îi fusese de-ajuns.

– Cred că înțeleg ce vrei să spui, șopti clătănând din cap. În fond, o viață, o întreagă existență umană se poate dezvolta, împlini și încheia în câteva luni, uneori poate chiar și mai puțin.

– Și, e curios, aceleași probleme reveneau neconținut în discuțiile noastre, continuă Ivan. Bunăoară, seria de evidențe mutual contradictorii. De câte ori și în câte limbi nu mi-ai vorbit de asta...

– Ce e mai grav, adăugă Darie cu melancolie, ce e mai grav e că nu mai mi-aduc aminte ce voiam să spun cu asta. Mai precis, nu mai mi-aduc aminte de *urmare*. Începusem fraza aceasta, mă pregăteam să-ți prezint un întreg sistem, când m-au chemat băieții și am pierdut firul.

– Ai spus tot ce trebuia spus. Ce trebuia spus *deocamdată*, sublinie cu înțeles. Restul ai să-l spui mai târziu. Mi l-ai mai spus, și ai să vezi că are să-ți placă și dumitale când l-oi descoperi din nou...

Îl privi cu căldură și totuși cu ironie, aproape provocator.

– Când te ascult, Ivan, am impresia că ascult pe Arhip. Ultima oară când am vorbit cu el...

– Când a fost asta? îl întrerupse Ivan. Acum câte sute de ani, sau câte luni? În ce viață?... Nu trebuie să mă înțelegi greșit, adăugă văzând că Darie îl privește încruntat, nedumerit. Nu e vorba de timp, ci de decalajul între evidențele mutual contradictorii, cum îți place dumitale să spui. Îmi pare rău că te-am întrerupt, reluă după un răstimp căci Darie continua să tacă. Te-am mai întrerupt o dată, nu-ți mai aduci aminte acum, pentru că e prea mare decalajul între evidențe, te-am întrerupt tocmai când te pregăteai să ne explici în ce sens folosești expresia *agnostos theos*. D-ta aveai în față, ca pe un ecran interior, imaginea unui Ivan oarecum înmormântat în propriul lui trup. Și voiai să spui că așa arată uneori Dumnezeu. Spiritul Suprem, capturat, închis de Materie, orbit, alienat, ignorându-și propria lui identitate. Dar ce Dumnezeu era acesta? În orice caz, nu

Dumnezeul lui Pavel, și nici al grecilor. Dumneata te gândeai la miturile gnostice, la concepțiile indiene despre Spirit și Materie.

– Evident, evident. Asta a remarcat și Procopie.

– Și cu toate acestea, ceva era adevărat în comparația dumitale, dar numai dacă privim lucrurile dintr-o cu totul altă perspectivă. Spiritul e întotdeauna camuflat în Materie, dar rostul lui acolo – dacă e prizonier, sau se află acolo provizoriu, pentru că e activ, și câte altele – rostul lui ai să-l afli mai târziu. Asta că de altfel Enigma – Enigma cu majusculă – care ne confruntă pe toți, ghicitoarea care se pune, inexorabil, oricărui om: cum să recunosc Spiritul dacă e camuflat în Materie, adică, în fond, dacă e irecognoscibil? Și așa suntem și noi, noi toți, domnule filozof: nu numai indestructibili, cum spuneai, ci și irecognoscibili... Dar văd că ești așteptat, adăugă întorcând capul.

În semiîntunericul care prevestea zorile, Darie zări la vreo douăzeci de metri, în plin câmp, o siluetă familiară, pe care nu izbutea totuși s-o identifice. Mult mai departe, în direcția șoselei pe care o traversaseră în noaptea aceea, se întrezăreau grupuri răzlețe, înaintând încet, parcă ar fi șovăit.

– Și trebuie să mă duc și eu, continuă Ivan. Mă așteaptă și pe mine, acolo.

Întinse mâna spre răsărit, dar deși Darie cercetă încordat zarea nu desluși nimic. Câinele pornise înainte, fără grabă, cu capul plecat și atunci Darie îl recunoscuse deodată și zâmbi fericit. I-l arătă lui Ivan.

– El te-a recunoscut, șopti. El a fost singurul care te-a recunoscut...

– Încearcă și dumneata, d-le filozof, spuse Ivan privindu-l adânc în ochi, cu gravitate. Încearcă data viitoare – când va fi asta? Și unde? În vreun salon la Iași, la Tokyo, sau pe munte, sau într-un spital, sau într-o altă planetă? Dacă te-ai recunoaște eu întâi, ți-ai face semn, dar nici eu n-am să te recunosc. Iar dacă totuși te-ai recunoaște și ți-am face semn, nu mă vei înțelege. Asta-i povestea, domnule filozof, suntem irecognoscibili și față de noi înșine, și unul față de altul...

Înainta încet, parcă pierdut în gânduri, și văzând că Darie îl urma, se opri.

– Nu, adăugă zâmbind, acesta-i drumul nostru. Drumul dumitale este de cealaltă parte, și înălță brațul înapoi, spre apus. Grăbește-te. Ești așteptat...

Îl salută cu un gest scurt, apoi se întoarse și se îndreptă spre câmpie, călcând agale, cu câinele înaintea lui.

*

Își aduse deodată aminte de Zamfira și Iliescu și grăbi pasul. Simțea că dintr-un moment în altul se va face ziuă, căci câmpia se vedea acum destul de limpede, întinzându-se, nesfârșită, în toate părțile. Cerul era turbure, fără stele, semănând mai mult cu o negură de munte. Și deodată, apropiindu-se de pom, dădu cu ochii de locotenent.

– Nu v-am recunoscut adineaori, domnule locotenent, începu încurcat. Era încă întuneric.

– Nu mă grăbeam. V-am ascultat discutând, și mă interesa și pe mine. Ai învățat multe de la Ivan. Probabil c-a fost și el, cândva filozof, adăugă zâmbind. Dar de-acum înainte trebuie să ne grăbim. Ne așteaptă ceilalți.

Porniră amândoi, îndreptându-se spre șosea.

– Într-adevăr, de ce mi-o fi fost frică? exclamă deodată Darie. Știam de mult că suntem indestructibili. Și totuși, reluă el după o pauză, gânditor, și totuși...

Atunci își recunoscuse plutonul și se opri, fiindu-i teamă să nu-i coplesească emoția.

– Vasăzică, veniți și dumneavoastră, domnule elev, începu Manole, zâmbind. Cum vedeți, ne-am adunat din nou, aproape toți.

În acea clipă, își aduse din nou aminte de Iliescu și Zamfira și întoarse capul.

– Băieții! șopti el agitat.

– Au luat-o înainte, îl liniști locotenentul. Fiecare se întoarce acasă cum poate, adăugă melancolic. Noi ne îndreptăm întâi spre fluviu, ne concentrăm acolo...

Darie își dădu seama că mergeau cu toții, de câtva timp, dar nu înțelegea când porniseră. Ridică din umeri, bine dispus, și grăbi pasul. Se trezi în dreptul plutonului. Nu-i auzea vorbind, și totuși știa că vorbesc, pentru că înțelegea ce-și spun între ei. Cerul rămăsese tot atât de turbure, dar era destulă lumină, și oriunde privea, înainte, la stânga sau la dreapta lui, în urmă, descoperea alte grupuri răsfirate, înaintând tăcut, cu același pas măsurat, și totuși i se părea neînțeles de repede. Se opri de mai multe ori să privească în urmă. Cât putu pătrunde cu ochii, câmpia părea a fi aceeași, întinzându-se nesfârșită sub cerul aburit și turbure, cu câțiva arbori crescuți singuratici la mari distanțe unul de altul. Și i se păru deodată curios

că nu aude nici paseri, nici avioane, nici măcar uruitul surd al camioanelor rusești pe care le văzuse de curând trecând pe șosea.

– Asta-i Ucraina, îl auzi lângă el pe locotenent. O fi frumoasă pentru ei, pentru că e țara lor. Dar să vezi cum o să arate când o să ajungem la noi.

– Mai avem mult? întrebă Darie, și în aceeași clipă își dădu seama că pusese o întrebare fără rost, pentru că știa că, într-un anumit fel, sunt deja acolo. Ar fi vrut să rădă și să-și ceară iertare, când îl auzi vorbind.

– Este mult, și totuși nu este. Va fi mai greu până la fluviu așa s-a spus. Dar știi, divizia noastră e din Oltenia. Oamenii vor să se întoarcă acasă, fiecare în satul lui... Să se odihnească, adăugă zâmbind din nou.

– Dar după aceea, domnule locotenent, întrebă Darie cu o nestăpânită feroare, ce se întâmplă cu noi după ce ajungem acasă, unii la Iași, alții la București, alții în Oltenia? Căci, v-am spus, suntem indestructibili. Îi spuneam asta și lui Ivan, și-mi dădea dreptate. Și i-am mai spus-o lui Zamfira, și Zamfira, în felul lui, Zamfira și Iliescu...

Se întrerupse brusc, văzându-i la vreo douăzeci de metri înaintea lui, înaintând încet, cu un imens efort, căci purtau rănitul pe carabine, și drumul din marginea porumbiștei era zdrențuit de gropi, și-i îneca praful fierbinte al nămieții de vară. Alergă după el și le strigă:

– Măi băieți, voi sunteți nebuni, nebuni de-a binelea! O luați de la început? Nu v-a fost de-ajuns Ivan, ați găsit acum un altul?

Se apropie de ei și împietri văzându-se încovoiat pe cele două carabine, cu o batistă plină de sânge pe față, cu tunica descheiată, lăsând să se vadă cămașa însângărată, sfâșiată.

– Ce s-a întâmplat? șopti. Ce-i cu mine?

În acea clipă se opri și, cu grijă, îl așezară pe marginea drumului. Zamfira își făcu cruce.

– A dat Dumnezeu și v-ați venit în fire, domnule elev, șopti, răsuflând greu.

– A fost așa cum am spus eu, îl întrerupse Iliescu. Vodca lui Ivan.

– Am avut noroc, reluă Zamfira, că am dat peste ei dormind, beți, și le-am luat tot ce-am găsit la îndemână – și apă, și vodcă, și tutun.

– Dar ce s-a întâmplat cu mine? întrebă Darie în șoaptă, speriat. M-a rănit cineva?

– Ceasul rău, continuă Zamfira. V-ați împiedicat, ați căzut și s-a descărcat carabina. Glonte v-a trecut prin subțioară. Nimica toată, dar ați leșinat, și până am dat de dumneavoastră, ați pierdut mult sânge. Dacă v-am fi legat brațul pe loc, era ca și cum nimic nu s-ar fi întâmplat...

Darie privi în jurul lui. Se aflau între lanurile de porumb, pe marginea drumului, și deasupra lor plutea aceeași pulbere fină și aspră, înecăcioasă, pe care o cunoșteau parcă de totdeauna, dar acum mai încinsă ca niciodată. Cu mâna validă căută în buzunar pachetul de țigări. Îl găsi rupt, teșit, dar Iliescu îi întinse pachetul cu țigări rusești, așteptă să-și aleagă una, apoi i-o aprinse.

– Mă băieți, începu după ce trase câteva fumuri. Voi sunteți oameni foarte buni și devotați și v-ați dat destulă osteneală cu mine. Acum o să ascultați de ordinul meu: trebuie să-l ascultați, căci va fi ultimul meu ordin.

Se întrerupse brusc și trase repede din țigare, ca să-și ascundă emoția.

– Suntem ostași, începu din nou, am văzut toți moartea. Eu cel puțin, pot spune c-am văzut-o cu ochii. Vă vorbesc foarte sincer: nu mi-e teamă de moarte. Pe de altă parte, am să vă fac și această mărturisire: eu n-am noroc, pe mine, de când mă știu, mă urmărește piaza-rea.

– Da, interveni Laura, a fost destul să le vorbească despre nenoroc și piaza-rea, ca să-l întrerupă amândoi deodată, ridicând speriați brațele în sus, parcă ar fi rostit un sacrilegiu. Aveau, de altfel, dreptate, adăugă întorcând capul și privindu-l. Căci ne cunoscusem de trei ani, eram într-un anumit fel logodiți. Dacă domnul filozof numește asta nenoroc și piaza-rea...

– Fapt este, continuă Darie, că nu voiau să mă asculte când le-am cerut să mă împuște, sau să-mi încarce carabina și să mi-o dea mie. Le-am mai spus că, dacă vor cu orice preț, le îngădui și asta: să-mi sape groapa, cum i-am săpat-o lui Ivan. Și câte altele nu le-am mai propus: să rămânem de vorbă până seara, să le explic ce trebuie să spună la Iași, când vor ajunge, cu cine trebuie să vorbească întâi... Zadarnic. Și atunci mi-e teamă că mi-am pierdut cumpătul și am început să-i ameninț.

Luase a doua țigare, și Iliescu i-o aprinse umil, cu ochii umezi.

– Vă mănâncă Curtea Marțială, reîncepu cu un glas neașteptat de ferm. Dacă ajungem batalionul, cer imediat să fiți trimiși în fața Curții Marțiale pentru nerespectarea ordinului și insulta superiorului.

– Cum o vrea Dumnezeu, făcu Zamfira, neîndrăznind să-și ridice privirile. Sunt și-acolo oameni buni, la Curtea Marțială. O să le spunem că ne-am făcut datoria.

– Că dumneavoastră pierduserăți prea mult sânge și aveăți febră, și poate de aceea ne-ați cerut să reîncărcăm carabina, că nu mai știati pe ce lume sunteți, slăbit și nemâncat, și ostenit.

Darie îi mai privi o dată, cu o mută exasperare, apoi zvârli țigarea și se ridică brusc. Se îndreptă hotărât către locotenent.

– Ce ne facem cu ei, domnule locotenent, că acum nu mai ascultă ordinele?...

Locotenentul îl privi lung, ca și cum ar fi încercat să-l recunoască, apoi înălță din umeri și porni mai departe. Darie grăbi pasul și-l ajunse din urmă.

– Eu sunt Darie, domnule locotenent, elevul T. R. Darie Constantin din compania dumneavoastră. Mă cunoașteți bine. Am stat de vorbă și azi-noapte, în câmpie, după ce m-am despărțit de Ivan.

Locotenentul se opri și-l privi cu căldură, și totuși sever.

– Darie, vorbi el rar, subliniind fiecare cuvânt, după șase zile de foc dumneata ar fi trebuit să știi ce înseamnă un ordin.

– Și asta mi se pare fraza cea mai grea de înțeles, interveni din nou Laura. Ce-o fi vrut să spună că trebuia să știi ce înseamnă un ordin?...

*

– ...Strada Toamnei numărul 11, Iași. Strada Toamnei numărul 11! De câte ori nu le-am repetat adresa asta, de teamă ca nu cumva s-o uite, sau s-o confunde cu atâtea alte adrese pe care le șoptiseră atâtea alți răniți, trăgând să moară, în ultimele luni. Căci erau în al doilea an de front, și făcuseră parte, pe rând, din nu știu câte plutoane, decimate unul după altul, până în iulie, când se alcătuiseră, din rămășițe, plutonul pe care-l comandam eu, și care avea să fie și el decimat, după numai șase zile de foc, cum spunea locotenentul. Iași, strada Toamnei numărul 11, numărul 11.

– La domnișoara Laura, clătină din cap, zâmbind Zamfira. Să n-aveți grijă, domnule elev, că dacă ajungem noi înaintea dumneavoastră, acolo mergem întâi. Și-i spunem că veniți curând, curând, și veniți cu galoane de sublocotenent.

– Să nu-i spuneți asta, îl întrerupse Darie, să nu-i spuneți de galoane. Să-i spuneți ce v-am rugat eu, adăugă.

Se simți deodată sleit de puteri și-și privi brațul rănit. I se părea mereu că sângerează. Și uneori i se părea că hemoragia începuse de

mult, că era, sub tunică, learcă de sânge, și tot aștepta să vadă șiroaiele de sânge scurgându-se, calde, pe pământ.

– Dacă n-o să ții minte, reluă târziu, aproape în șoaptă, să-i spuneți măcar esențialul. Că deși ne-am cunoscut numai trei ani, ne-am cunoscut de totdeauna, și am fost fericiți, de la începutul lunii, și tot așa vom fi până ce se va stinge ultima stea din ultima galaxie. Țineți bine minte ce vă spun eu acum, că lucrul acesta e cel mai important: să-i spuneți că teiul pe care-l știm noi, la Iași, teiul acela *ne-a fost de-ajuns*. Noaptea dintâi, când ne-am oprit acolo, a rămas cu noi și va rămâne așa, noaptea noastră, până la sfârșitul lumii. Teiul nu-și va scutura niciodată florile. *Nu și le mai poate scutura*. E al nostru, și tot ce-i al nostru nu-i în timp, n-are durată...

– Spunem, domnule elev, îl liniști Zamfira udând batista și ștergându-l încet, cu mare grijă, pe buze, pe față, pe frunte. Dar acum să vă odihniți, că au început să se aprindă stelele, și curând după miezul nopții trebuie s-o pornim din nou...

Erau, ca de obicei, ascunși în porumbiște, cu pulberea fină, amăruie, mirosind a fum, deasupra lor, vorbind în șoaptă și îndrăznind să ridice glasul numai când îi asurzea larma greierilor.

– Este extraordinar cum au rezistat, atâtea zile, interveni din nou Laura. Și este de neînchipuit cum au izbutit să se strecoare printre trupele rusești, cum au reușit să găsească apă, și chiar rachiu, ca să-i spele rana, și au avut întotdeauna de mâncare...

– Porumb uscat, rădăcini, câțiva pesmeți, o întrerupse Darie zâmbind. În a cincea zi, o bucată de ciocolată, pe care a găsit-o Iliescu în buzunarul unui soldat german, mort. Treceau convoaie de prizonieri pe șosea, și erau mulți răniți, cădeau și rămăneau pe marginea șoselei, până se îndura Dumnezeu sau vreo santinelă din convoiul următor și nu se mai chinuiau. Iliescu învățase acum unde să caute și cum să găsească lucrurile folositoare: apă, pesmeți, chibrituri, tutun. Numai pâine nu găsea.

– Cum de nu s-au rătăcit? exclamă Laura. Cum de-au izbutit, atâtea zile, să nu se întâlnească față în față cu oamenii din sat? Căci începuse culesul porumbului.

– Am avut desigur noroc, continuă Darie. Dar Zamfira avea instinct de jivină sălbatecă, parcă simțea de departe apropierea omului și ne ascundeam pe loc. Am stat ascunși o zi întreagă într-o clăie cu fân, și auzeam cum lucrează femeile la câte sute de metri în preajma noastră... Dar ce mă tortura mai mult era accidentul meu. Nu știu cum au reușit să mă transporte atâtea nopți, când pe carabine când într-o manta rusească. Nu-mi mai amintesc. Probabil

că ieșeam, sau eram atât de secătuit încât nu-mi mai dădeam seama de nimic. Dar mă gândeam la Ivan, la discuția noastră, care mă impresionase atât. Unde i-a fost binecuvântarea? Că pe el l-au purtat mai puțin de un ceas, iar pe mine după norocul pe care ni-l adusese binecuvântarea lui Ivan mă purtau noapte după noapte. Mi-aduc aminte că m-am întrebat odată dacă nu cumva Ivan a ^{trei} dorit accidentul, numai ca să mă poată întâlni și să-mi spună tot ce avea de spus. Dar ce erau de vină Iliescu și Zamfira în toată controversa aceasta filozofică?...

– N-a fost filozofie, domnule elev, șopti Zamfira. Ceasul rău...

*

– Iar au început să se adune corbii, spuse târziu Iliescu. Ce semn o mai fi și asta?

Darie privi, cu mâna streășină la ochi, căci cerul era încins și lumina difuză îl orbea.

– Sunt avioane, spuse.

– Sunt și avioane, dar zboară sus, foarte sus, adăugă Zamfira. Corbii sunt pe-aci, pe-aproape...

Darie căzu pe gânduri și zâmbi.

– În fond, asta făceam și noi. Ne țineam după ei, după ai noștri, dar de departe, tot mai de departe... La câte zeci de kilometri credeți că se află acum frontul? Căci de câteva zile nu se mai aud nici brandturile, nici artileria noastră...

– Dacă se dezlănțuie curând contraatacul german, făcu Iliescu, ne pomenim cu frontul peste noi într-o zi, două.

– *Nous sommes foutus!* șuiera printre dinți Darie. *Foutus pour l'éternité!*

Încercă să adoarmă din nou, dar arșița i se părea mai înăbușitoare ca altădată, și oricum ar fi încercat să se așeze între porumbi, brațul rănit zvâcnea, parcă tot mai plin de sânge, și auzea sângele zvâcnind în tâmpile, bătându-i să se spargă în urechi. Ceilalți admiseră, cu batista pe față, cu mâna pe carabină, dar se trezeau pe rând, la răstimpuri scurte, și-l cercetau cu privirile, câteva clipe. Târziu, după apusul soarelui, Darie își dădu seama de ce nu poate dormi. Se aflau în aceeași porumbiște în care intraseră cu multe zile înainte, nu-și mai putea aminti cu câte; se aflau la câteva sute de metri, sau poate mai puțin, de locul unde fusese îngropat Ivan. Recunoscuse porumbiștea în zori, când se tupilaseră istoviți, suflând greu, înaintând cu teamă printre porumbi. O recunoscuse, dar era prea extenuat ca să mai vorbească. În noaptea aceea încercase

pentru a întâia oară să meargă, sprijinindu-se într-un fel de baston rupt dintr-un băț de cort, gros și solid, pe care-l găsisese Iliescu. Umblase anevoie, călcând cu frică, pe marginea șoselei, ajutat la răstimpuri de unul din ei, și odihnindu-se la fiecare cinci, zece minute. În aproape cinci ceasuri de mers, nu făcuseră nici zece kilometri, dar tot făcuseră mai mult decât în celelalte nopți, când îl purtaseră ei.

– Ne-am întors de unde am plecat, șopti cât putu mai încet, ca să nu-i trezească. Ne-am întors lângă Ivan. Aproape că-i venea să rădă, atât de absurdă i se păru deodată aventura lor. Dacă ar fi fost sigur că nu-i trezește, s-ar fi furișat printre porumbi și i-ar fi așteptat acolo, pe groapa lui Ivan.

– În fond, n-are nici o importanță, șopti din nou. Nimic n-are importanță. *Nous sommes foutus!* Din toate punctele de vedere. Știam asta de la început. Tot ce s-a întâmplat după 8 noiembrie...

Altă dată, într-o seară, tot în porumbiște – dar când? când? – tresărise auzindu-l pe Zamfira întrebând:

– Ce s-a întâmplat după 8 noiembrie, domnule elev?

– Tot felul de lucruri, începuse el zâmbind. Lucruri care m-au făcut și m-au desfăcut, și m-au făcut din nou...

– Dar recunoaște că n-ai îndrăznit să le vorbești de mine. Le-ai vorbit de Laura lui Petrarca, și mă întreb ce-au înțeles ei din acea lungă și laborioasă fenomenologie a Muzei, mai ales că aveai febră. Nu că n-ar fi putut înțelege, dar ce i-ar fi putut interesa pe ei o romanță de la începutul Renașterii italiene? Dacă le-ai fi vorbit de mine, de Iași, de strada Toamnei numărul 11, ar fi fost altfel. L-ar fi interesat, pentru că, foarte probabil, asta era și povestea lor...

– O luăm din loc, domnule elev, șopti Zamfira.

Se ridică anevoie, ajutat de Iliescu, dar deși se simțea mai obosit ca de obicei, porumbiștea, aproape nerăbdător. La un pas înaintea lui, Zamfira îi înlesnea trecerea printre porumbi. Pentru întâia oară, cerul nu mai era acoperit de stele, și totuși nu se ghiceau norii, ci numai o boare fumurie plutind foarte sus. Și pentru întâia oară nu se mai auzeau greierii. La răstimpuri, foile de porumb tresăreau cu un sunet surd, metalic, ca atinse de o adiere pe care ei n-o simțeau.

– Nu pe-acolo, domnule elev, făcu Zamfira văzându-l că se îndreaptă hotărât, grăbind pasul, către un luminiș între lanurile de porumb, strejuit de doi arbori singurateci. Pe-acolo ieșim în drumul de căruță pe care am venit azi-dimineață.

– Asta voiam și eu să vă arăt, spuse Darie fără să se oprească. Să vă arăt că ne-am întors acolo de unde am plecat acum zece, douăsprezece zile, când o fi fost asta. Uite, la câțiva metri mai în sus, pe stânga, în dreptul pomului, acolo i-ați săpat voi groapa! Groapa lui Ivan, adăugă simțind că Zamfira îi prinde brațul sănătos ca să-l oprească.

– Nu e asta groapa, domnule elev, șopti el, Ivan odihnește la mulți kilometri în spatele nostru, spre răsărit. Cel puțin la patruzeci de kilometri...

– Și totuși, acolo v-am văzut săpând, reluă Darie. Veniți cu mine, să v-o arăt, că nu e departe.

După câțiva metri, se opriă toți. Groapa nu era adâncă. Parcă cei care o săpaseră și-ar fi dat seama că era prea mare și renunțaseră s-o termine. Sau poate nu mai avuseseră timp.

– Asta nu e groapa, domnule elev, vorbi târziu Zamfira, în șoaptă. Asta a fost săpată pentru altceva. Pentru ce, nu-mi pot da seama. Dar nu vedeți, e mai lungă de trei metri, și acolo, alături, este încă una la fel, dar s-ar zice că nu e dreaptă, parcă ar coti, parcă s-ar desface în cruce, și poate mai sunt și altele, mai departe, dar nu le vedem de aici.

– S-o luăm din loc, șopti Iliescu, după ce mai cercetă o dată cerul. Să nu ne apuce ploaia.

*

N-a început să bureze decât după ce-au ajuns în șosea, și au traversat-o ca să nu-i ajungă din urmă camioanele rusești. Umblau la vreo două sute de metri, pe un drum îngust, paralel cu șoseaua.

– Dacă se întetește ploaia, șopti Iliescu la o haltă, avem noroc că găsim fluviul și o să fie mai greu la trecere.

Ploua mărunț, lin, fără grabă, și Darie înainta tot mai greu, încleștându-și dinții ca să nu geamă. Zamfira umbla alături de el, Iliescu la vreo douăzeci de metri înainte. Târziu, aproape de 3, le făcu semn să rămână pe loc. Se întoarse repede, aproape alergând.

– Intrăm în sat, șopti. Trebuie să traversăm din nou șoseaua și să încercăm pe dincolo, arătă întinzând brațul. Darie își îngăduia acum să sufle greu, dar își stăpânea cu furie geamătul.

– Ne apropiem cu băgare de seamă de șosea, continuă Iliescu, și stăm la pândă. E o cotitură în spatele nostru, și când ne vine, între două camioane, traversăm șoseaua în fugă. Eu o iau înainte, adăugă depărtându-se.

Așteptau, îngenunchiați, sub ploaie, la câțiva metri de șosea, ascunși sub niște bălării pipernicite. Camioanele treceau, parcă tot mai rar, cu farurile stinse. După vreo zece minute, Iliescu se ridică brusc și, plecat din șale, începu să alerge. Îl văzură cum se pierde în întuneric.

– Să fiți gata, domnule elev, șopti Zamfira că acum e rândul dumneavoastră. Să lăsăm să treacă și camionul ăsta... Acum! șopti el din nou câteva clipe în urmă. Acum! Săriți, domnule elev!...

Cu efort, gemând de durere, Darie se înalță brusc și porni, cât putu mai repede, spre șosea. Ținea strâns în pumn bastonul, gata să se sprijine de va fi nevoie, dar foarte curând își dădu seama că poate alerga și, dându-i drumul din mână, o porni la goană peste câmpie. Zărise de departe fluviul și ar fi continuat să alerge dacă nu s-ar fi auzit strigat de locotenent. Se opri, întoarse capul și dădu cu ochii de el.

– Am ajuns, domnule locotenent, îi spuse, apropiindu-se. Am ajuns la timp. Dar unde e podul? întrebă.

Locotenentul zâmbi și întinse brațul. Fluviul curgea lin, majestuos, tăcut, la câteva sute de metri în fața lor. Nu i se zărea celălalt mal, căci ploaia continua să cadă, mărunță, țesând parcă o perdea de negură, pe care lumina incertă, palidă, în care se ghiceau deja zorile, nu izbutea s-o străpungă. Din spatele lor, apăreau neconținut grupuri risipite, șovăiau câteva clipe, apoi coborau spre mal, unde se alcătuiseră deja convoaiele, așteptând parcă semnul de plecare.

– Dar unde e podul? întrebă din nou Darie. Nu se vede nimic... Locotenentul ridică din umeri.

– Uită-te mai bine, Darie. Sunt fel de fel de poduri pe lume. Acesta de-aici, din fața dumitale, duce la noi acasă.

– Acasă, repetă Darie. Duce la noi acasă. Și după ce ajungem acasă, ce se întâmplă cu noi, domnule locotenent? V-am mai întrebă o dată, și nu mi-ați răspuns. Ce se întâmplă după ce ajungem acasă? Ar fi îngrozitor să nu ne putem odihni niciodată...

Cobora alături de locotenent, și când ajunse foarte aproape, își dădu seama că mulțimea aceea tăcută, ale cărei convorbiri le auzea totuși, convoaiele acelea care i se păruseră că așteaptă semnalul de plecare se mișcau deja, înaintau, și încă destul de repede, pe deasupra fluviului, ca și cum ar fi trecut pe un pod nevăzut. Ajunsese acum chiar pe marginea fluviului.

– Vii și dumneata, Darie? îl întrebă locotenentul.

Apoi se îndreptă către un grup care-i aștepta, neîncercând să-și ascundă nerăbdarea, deși îi priveau pe amândoi cu căldură, aproape cu fervoare, zâmbindu-le. Cei dintâi începuseră să treacă și atunci parcă soarele răsări din toate părțile, căci lumina îl orbi, și văzu podul pe care ceilalți înaintau din ce în ce mai repede, pod crescut parcă chiar din lumina aceea de aur care-l orbise, și tot în acea clipă îl asurzi o explozie sonoră nefiresc alcătuită, parcă din sunete de gigantice clopote de cristal, și talgere de aramă, și flaute, și țuit de greieri.

Simți mâna Laurei pe frunte, se auzi strigat, dar nu deschise ochii.

– Nu mă trezi, Laura, șopti. Mai lasă-mă să-i văd. Să-i văd trecând podul...

– Nu e domnișoara Laura, domnule elev. Suntem noi, Iliescu și Zamfira, din plutonul dumneavoastră.

– Vasăzică, e-adevărat? Întrebă Darie fără să deschidă ochii. De data aceasta e *adevărat*?

– E adevărat, domnule elev, șopti Zamfira cu vocea sugrumată de emoție. Ce să-i spunem domnișoarei Laura?

– Să-i spuneiți să nu-i fie frică. Că toate sunt așa cum trebuie să fie, și e frumos. Să-i spuneiți că e foarte frumos. E ca o lumină mare. E ca în strada Toamnei...

Se ridică brusc și, fără să-i privească, porni din nou repede, aproape alergând. Nu mai era lumina de aur de la pod, și nici fluviul nu părea atât de aproape. Îl zărea, îl ghicea mai mult, departe, în fața lui, spre apus. Dar alerga cu o bucurie uitată, copilărească, simțindu-se copleșit de o beatitudine totală, fără nume, fără înțeles.. Și atunci își aminti „Nu i-am binecuvântat...”

Se opri, aproape cu părere de rău. Auzea cum i se bate inima din ce în ce mai puternic. Mai privi o dată către fluviu și i se păru că începe să se topească încet în negură. Șovăi câțva timp, apoi întoarse hotărât spatele și se îndreptă, încercând să grăbească pasul, către lanul de porumb unde-l ascunseseră – *dar când? când? în ce viață?...*

UNIFORME DE GENERAL

Înaintau amândoi în vârful picioarelor, cu mare grijă, și de câte ori podeaua scârțâia mai puternic, se opreau brusc, ținându-și răsuflarea. Și în acea clipă, aproape fără să-și dea seama, Ieronim apăsa butonul lămpii de buzunar și rămâneau pe întunec.

– Să nu-ți fie teamă, îi șopti când, puțin timp în urmă se împiedecă de-o frânghie pe care nu o putuse vedea și, rezemându-se, ca să nu cadă, de un dulap, una din uși se deschise încet, scâncind prelung, cu un geamăt înfundat. Să nu-ți fie teamă. Nu e nimeni în toată casa...

– Atunci de ce vorbești atât de încet? îl întrebă celalt.

Ieronim reaprinse lanterna și roti de câteva ori conul de lumină în jurul băiatului, fără să-l înalțe totuși până în dreptul figurii. Dar nu avea nevoie. O vedea destul de bine: fața ofilită de licean, cu ochii adânciți nefiresc în orbite, buzele subțiri și părul tuns scurt, cu un început de breton pe frunte.

– Spuneai că te cheamă Vlad, nu e așa?

– Vlad. Vladimir Iconaru.

– Află de la mine, amice Iconaru, spuse apropiindu-și puțin capul, că niciodată, nimeni, în nici o piesă de teatru, în nici un roman, în nici o poezie, nimeni, repet, n-a cutezat să vorbească cu glas normal când se introduce, noaptea, în podul unei case străine, și se introduce, ca noi, cu un scop bine precizat: să găsească lada în care văduva eroului de război, generalul Iancu Calomfir, a păstrat cu pietate uniforme de gală ale soțului ei; să găsească, zic, lada, să-i spargă lacătul și să fure cele două uniforme. Repet, să fure două uniforme de general.

Appendix B: “Ivan” (French)

Eliade, Mircea. “Ivan”. *Uniformes de général*. Paris: Gallimard, 1981, pp 85-139.

Zamfira fut le premier à le voir. Il passa son fusil dans sa main gauche et s'approcha de lui. Il le toucha du bout de sa godasse.

- Il se meurt.

Le blessé les regardait, les yeux grands ouverts, écarquillés. Il était jeune, blond, des taches de rousseur aux pommettes, et ses lèvres ne cessaient de trembler comme s'il s'efforçait de sourire. Zamfira poussa un profond soupir et s'agenouilla à côté de lui.

- Ivan ! cria-t-il. Ivan !

Il détacha sa gourde et l'approcha doucement des lèvres du blessé. Darie se tenait derrière lui. Il retira son casque et s'essuya le front avec la manche de sa vareuse.

- Il se meurt, dit-il. Dommage pour l'eau.

Brusquement, comme affolé, le bras du blessé se souleva, fendit l'air convulsivement en semblant chercher quelque chose puis retomba, inerte, et les doigts se crispèrent sur une motte de terre, trop loin de l'étui. Zamfira tendit la main, saisit le revolver et dit en souriant :

- C'est pour vous, mon lieutenant. Ça vous fera un souvenir.

L'aspirant remit son casque, prit le revolver et le soupesa.

– Le chargeur est vide, dit-il. Il ne vaut plus rien.

Il allait le jeter dans le champ de maïs, mais se ravisa soudain.

Il le soupesa de nouveau, indécis.

Iliescu les rejoignit.

– Il se meurt, dit-il lentement en hochant la tête. Sans cierge, comme un chien. Comme les autres, ajouta-t-il en baissant la voix.

Il tourna la tête et cracha au loin. Darie examina une dernière fois le revolver puis ouvrit la main. L'arme tomba, avec un bruit sourd, à côté du bras immobile.

– Si vous avez pitié de lui, dit-il, mieux vaut l'achever. Au lieu de le laisser souffrir...

Il fit quelques pas vers le champ de maïs en jetant un regard las autour de lui, comme s'il cherchait un endroit à l'abri du soleil pour se reposer. Mais, gardant toujours aux lèvres sa cigarette pas encore allumée, il revint aussitôt, maussade.

– Filons, dit-il.

Zamfira, debout, ne quittait pas des yeux le blessé.

– Si on savait le russe, on lui demanderait de nous bénir, murmura-t-il si bas qu'il semblait ne parler qu'à lui-même. C'est ce qu'on dit par chez nous : la bénédiction d'un mourant, ça porte bonheur.

– Oui, confirma Iliescu, c'est ce qu'on dit. Mais seulement si c'est fait de bon cœur. Tandis que là, c'est un bolcheviste...

– Il peut être n'importe quoi. Ce qui compte, c'est qu'il te bénisse dans sa foi et dans sa langue...

Et, s'adressant à Darie :

– Peut-être bien que vous, mon lieutenant, vous parlez tellement de langues...

Darie allumait sa cigarette. Il haussa les épaules et esquissa un vague sourire.

– Pas tellement. Maintenant je le regrette. J'aurais dû apprendre le russe.

Les yeux sur le blessé, il tira sur sa cigarette et dit :

– Mais il comprend peut-être, lui. Il connaît peut-être d'autres langues...

Il hésita une seconde puis haussa les épaules encore une fois. Mais, déjà, Zamfira murmurait :

– Essayez, mon lieutenant. Essayez, il comprendra peut-être...

L'aspirant jeta sa cigarette, s'approcha sans y croire et soudain éclata, d'une voix sèche, étouffée :

– *Nous sommes foutus, Ivan ! Nous sommes des pauvres types* ! Save our souls ! Bless our hearts, Ivan ! Car nous sommes foutus* !...*

Le mourant gémit et sa bouche s'illumina d'une sorte de sourire. Il posa sur chacun un regard interrogatif.

– *Blagoslovénié !* s'écria Zamfira en s'agenouillant à ses côtés. *Boïé Christou !* Bénis-nous, Ivan...

Il fit le signe de la croix, le plus lentement qu'il put, leva les yeux au ciel, joignit les mains et baissa les paupières comme s'il priait. Puis il le regarda avec insistance, dans le blanc des yeux.

– Fais pareil, Ivan ! cria-t-il. Fais le signe de la croix, comme moi. *Boïé Christou !*

Il se tut et tous trois attendirent, les yeux fixés sur le visage du blessé.

- Il ne comprend pas, soupira Zamfira. Si on pouvait lui parler dans sa langue...

- Un enfoiré de bolcheviste, oui, grommela Iliescu. Il fait semblant de pas comprendre !

Darie se tourna vers lui et dit, avec un sourire contraint :

- Si on le traite d'enfoiré, il ne risque pas de nous bénir.

- Ça fait rien. Les mourants, ça comprend plus rien et ça pardonne tout.

Il s'agenouilla et se pencha sur l'oreille du blessé.

- Pardonne-nous, Ivan, pardonne, chuchota-t-il.

Il s'aperçut alors que l'homme ne le regardait plus, et, tournant la tête, il vit un chien à quelques mètres d'eux, à l'orée du champ de maïs.

- Il vient du village, dit-il en se relevant et il le siffla amicalement. Il doit y avoir un village pas loin.

C'était un chien efflanqué, famélique, au pelage fauve décoloré par la poussière. Il s'approcha timidement, la queue entre les jambes. Le blessé avait tourné la tête et l'attendait. Ses lèvres cessèrent soudain de trembler et son visage paraissait à présent étranger, figé.

- S'il est bolcheviste, personne lui a appris, il peut pas savoir, dit Zamfira en se levant à son tour. Mais il aura quand même bien entendu parler du bon Dieu et de Jésus-Christ et il est pas possible qu'il sache pas faire le signe de la croix...

Il recula d'un pas et appela : Ivan ! Puis il écarta les bras tout droits et demeura immobile, les yeux sur le blessé.

- Christou ! cria-t-il encore une fois. Le Christ sur la croix ! Fais un signe de croix. Lève trois doigts et bénis-nous...

La figure du blessé s'illuminait de nouveau, adoucie par un large sourire - le chien léchait la main crispée sur une motte de terre.

- Il veut pas comprendre, dit Iliescu et il cracha au loin, avec dépit.

Zamfira s'éloigna, pour revenir quelques instants plus tard avec deux épis de maïs, qu'il disposa perpendiculairement, en croix.

- Ivan ! cria-t-il en cherchant les yeux de l'homme, regarde-moi, Ivan. Regarde bien et rappelle-toi. C'est la croix de Jésus-Christ, le Rédempteur. Jésus, qui a été crucifié. Tu comprends, maintenant ? demanda-t-il en s'approchant, les deux épis de maïs aux mains. Tu te rappelles ?

Le blessé suivait ses gestes avec un intérêt inattendu, mais non sans crainte. Il essaya de soulever la tête mais gémit et ferma les yeux de douleur. Il les rouvrit quelques secondes plus tard et sourit en voyant Zamfira qui attendait toujours devant lui, ses deux épis en croix.

- Christou, murmura-t-il enfin, Christou.

- Dieu merci ! s'exclama Zamfira en retombant à genoux à côté du mourant, et il lui posa la main sur le front. Tu as compris ce qu'on te demandait. Bénis-nous...

- Bénis-nous*, Ivan ! s'écria Darie avec ferveur. Bénis-nous*, bless our hearts ! Tu t'envoies au ciel. Au paradis, Ivan, auprès de Dieu le Père. Auprès de la Vierge*... Sainte Vierge Marie, pleine de grâce..., ajouta-t-il en roumain, d'une voix soudain très lasse.

Le blessé l'écoutait en frissonnant. Il les dévisagea ensuite à tour de rôle. Il n'osait plus essayer de soulever la tête, mais il remuait les doigts comme s'il tentait d'indiquer quelque chose.

– *Maria*, finit-il par articuler doucement. *Maria...*

– Il comprend, murmura Iliescu.

Il suivit son regard et vit le chien s'éloigner lentement, la tête basse.

– Il connaît peut-être le chien, dit-il. Ils sont peut-être du même village.

Le blessé se mit à chuchoter, il remuait nerveusement les doigts, fermait les yeux par moments, les rouvrait brusquement et semblait de plus en plus effrayé de retrouver à chaque fois les trois hommes à ses côtés.

– Moi, je crois qu'on devrait essayer de le porter au village, dit Zamfira.

– Ce sera dur, répondit Darie avec une moue incrédule. Il se meurt.

– Ça serait dommage maintenant qu'il comprend, dit Iliescu. S'il vit encore une heure ou deux, le temps d'arriver au village, il nous bénira peut-être.

Le chien s'était arrêté à une dizaine de mètres et les attendait, assis au bord du champ de maïs.

Leurs fusils servaient de brancard. L'aspirant s'était chargé des havresacs, suspendus aux deux extrémités de son fusil, qu'il portait en travers des épaules. Le blessé frissonnait et geignait, ne cessait de fermer et rouvrir les yeux. Par moments, Zamfira l'appelait :

– Ivan, bénis-nous puisque nous te ramenons chez toi ! On ne t'a pas laissé crever au bord du chemin.

– Dis rien que ça, tenta Iliescu, dis Jésus ! Jésus ! Marie !

Ils s'arrêtèrent au bout d'une centaine de mètres afin de reprendre haleine, sans toutefois poser leur fardeau. Le blessé gémissait, le corps parcouru de spas-

mes. Il fixait d'un air implorant les yeux de Zamfira.

– Causez-lui, mon lieutenant. Dites-y quelque chose, qu'il voye qu'on lui veut pas de mal.

Furieux, Darie eut un bref haussement d'épaules qui fit sauter les havresacs aux bouts de son fusil.

– Lui dire quoi ? En quelle langue ? Comment me faire comprendre puisque je ne parle pas le russe ?

– Dites-lui n'importe quoi, insista Zamfira. Juste pour qu'il voye qu'on se donne du mal, qu'on le laisse pas crever comme un chien. Parlez-lui dans n'importe quelle langue puisque vous êtes un philosophe, vous...

Darie ne put s'empêcher de soupirer.

– Tu parles d'un philosophe ! fit-il en esquisant un sourire désabusé. Ivan ! s'écria-t-il en se retournant brusquement, et il chercha le regard du mourant. Te souviens-tu de *Faust* ?

*Habe nun, ach ! Philosophie,
Juristerei und Medicin,
Und, leider ! auch Theologie
Durchaus studiert...*

Ça, c'est moi, Ivan, celui qui est en train de te parler. *Le Philosophe*. Tu m'entends ?

– Continuez, dit Iliescu alors qu'ils se remettaient en route. Parlez-lui – il vous écoute et ça suffit.

– Tant qu'il vous écouterait, il mourra pas, ajouta Zamfira.

– Je pourrais te raconter bien des choses, Ivan, parce que ça en a, des choses à raconter, un jeune licencié en philosophie. Qu'est-ce qui ne lui est pas passé par la tête ? Combien d'aventures, en deux volumes, en trois, parfois même en vingt-deux – Proust, par exemple, n'a-

t-il pas vingt-deux volumes ? A moins que je ne me trompe, j'ai peut-être mal calculé, j'ai dû compter les œuvres de jeunesse. Tu vois de quoi je parle ? *Pastiches et mélanges** et les autres...

– Continuez, mon lieutenant, c'est bien parti, dit Iliescu.

Après quoi il tourna la tête et cracha vigoureusement, loin dans le maïs.

– Ivan ! s'écria Darie, ému, je pourrais passer toute une nuit à t'exposer les preuves de l'inexistence de Dieu. Quant à Jésus-Christ, dont tu n'as sans doute plus entendu parler depuis ta première journée d'école, Jésus le Rédempteur, notre Rédempteur à nous et à vous et à tout le monde, Jésus et sa mystérieuse existence historique, ou son inefficacité politique, je pourrais t'en parler des nuits durant, rien qu'entre nous deux, sans commissaires ni théologiens, car tu le sens aussi, Ivan, *nous sommes foutus, nous sommes tous foutus** ! Nous comme vous. Mais surtout nous, qui descendons de ce brave Trajan. C'est lui qui a eu l'idée saugrenue de nous faire venir au monde ici, aux confins de la terre, comme s'il savait que vous deviez arriver un jour, fatigués après tant d'errance à travers les steppes, et que vous tomberiez sur nous, sur nous, beaux, intelligents et riches, et que vous auriez faim et soif, comme nous en ce moment...

– Continuez, mon lieutenant, il vous écoute, dit Zamfira en constatant que l'aspirant s'interrompait et s'essuyait machinalement la figure avec la manche de sa vareuse.

– Et tout ce que je pourrais encore te raconter... Et pourtant, je me demande si j'oserais jamais te raconter les aventures du 13 mars et celles du 8 novembre et tout

ce qui s'en est suivi. C'est trop intime, Ivan, c'est ce qui m'a fait et m'a défait et puis m'a refait, pour que je devienne ce que tu vois, le philosophe errant, tout juste bon à te tenir compagnie tant que le bon Dieu et vos mortiers auront pitié de nous – *car nous sommes foutus, Ivan, il n'y a plus d'espoir. Nous sommes tous foutus** ! Comme dans une nouvelle célèbre, que personne n'a encore écrite, mais qui sera certainement écrite un jour, parce qu'elle est trop *vraie*, si tu vois ce que je veux dire, elle ressemble trop à tout ce qui est arrivé de nos jours et elle ressemble aussi à ce qui nous arrive en ce moment et je me demande comment l'auteur osera ensuite regarder en face sa femme et ses enfants ou même ses voisins, comment il osera aller dans la rue, parce que, tu comprends de quoi je parle, chacun se reconnaîtra dans le personnage principal et alors comment pourrait-on encore vivre après, comment continuer à jouir de la vie quand on a compris qu'on est *condamné*, qu'il n'y a pas d'issue, *qu'il ne peut pas* y avoir d'issue parce que, pour chacun d'entre nous, il y a eu, avant nous, un empereur Trajan, quel que soit son nom, un Trajan en Afrique, un ou plusieurs en Chine, où qu'on regarde on ne voit que des gens condamnés parce que quelqu'un, un empereur Trajan, bien longtemps avant eux, des milliers et des milliers d'années avant eux, a décidé de les faire venir au monde là où il ne fallait pas...

Il se tut brusquement et se passa la main sur le visage.

– Continuez, mon lieutenant, mais moins vite, moins vite, qu'il vous comprenne.

Darie le regarda en souriant, comme s'il le reconnaissait soudain, et assujettit le fusil sur ses épaules.

– Repartons à zéro, Ivan, repartons au 13 mars. C'est

ce jour-là que tout a commencé. Si j'étais mort le 12, j'aurais été heureux, parce que je serais allé au ciel ; *au ciel, Ivan auprès de la Sainte Trinité**, là où tu vas bientôt te retrouver, avec l'aide d'un prêtre, s'il en reste un... Mais si je dois mourir aujourd'hui ou demain ou après-demain, où irai-je, moi ? En tout cas pas au ciel parce que j'ai appris le 13 mars que le ciel *n'existait pas*. Il n'existe plus, Ivan. A l'instant où tu comprendras, comme je l'ai compris un 13 mars, que le ciel est une simple illusion, tout sera fini. Il n'y a plus de ciel, ni de haut ni de bas, car l'univers est infini, il n'a ni début ni fin. Et alors, je te le demande, *où vais-je, moi ?*... Oui, je sais, je ferais aussi bien de ne pas te le demander puisque tu as décidé de ne pas répondre. Mais je vais te répondre moi-même. Te répondre avec mon 8 novembre, mon deuxième commencement. Parce que, le 8 novembre, je pense que tu l'as deviné, j'ai compris quelque chose d'au moins aussi important. J'ai compris qu'il n'était pas nécessaire d'aller quelque part – car *on y est déjà*. A l'infini, Ivan, je réponds par un autre infini. Parce que, écoute-moi bien, toi et moi et tous les autres, moi, nous, les hommes, nous sommes *indestructibles*. Vos canons, les avions allemands, rien ne peut nous anéantir. Nous sommes ici depuis le début du monde et nous y resterons après que se sera éteinte la dernière étoile de la dernière galaxie. Et alors, tu comprends, Ivan, *nous sommes foutus, nous sommes foutus pour l'éternité**. Car, puisque je suis indestructible, où que j'aie, aujourd'hui, demain ou après-demain, mon tour à moi, quand viendra-t-il ? Je ne peux aller nulle part puisque j'y suis déjà, puisque je suis partout en même temps. Mais c'est atroce d'être partout et cependant, d'une certaine façon, de *ne pas* être parce qu'on n'est

plus vivant. Atroce de ne jamais pouvoir se reposer comme se reposaient nos aïeux et nos bis ou trisaïeux. Car ils allaient là où il était écrit qu'ils iraient, les uns au ciel, les autres sous terre, les autres encore aux confins du monde – mais, tu comprends, ils pouvaient se reposer. Tandis que *nous*, Ivan, que va-t-il advenir de *nous* ?

Il cala de nouveau son fusil et repartit d'un grand pas.

– Et maintenant, si tu te décidais à rompre le serment du silence, tu me demanderais sans doute : mais *après* le 8 novembre, qu'est-il arrivé *après* le 8 novembre ? Et comme les lois de la guerre veulent que nous soyons sincères et honnêtes les uns envers les autres, je serais obligé de te répondre. Mais me comprendrais-tu ? Car nous nous heurtons aussitôt à *une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires*, si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi...

A ce moment-là, il s'entendit héler, se retourna et s'aperçut qu'il marchait loin devant, le chien à ses côtés. Les deux soldats, ayant déposé le blessé à l'ombre parcimonieuse d'un bouleau, avaient retiré leurs casques et s'essuyaient la figure. L'aspirant rebroussa chemin, gêné, un sourire forcé aux lèvres.

– Il a pas arrêté de baragouiner dans sa langue, en russe, annonça Iliescu.

– On aurait dit qu'il demandait de l'eau, précisa Zamfira, mais on n'en a plus. Et quand je lui ai montré le sucre, il a fermé les yeux. Il n'en veut pas.

– Il a beau avoir l'air jeune et maigre, dit Iliescu, il est lourd, et nous, on fatigue. Alors on s'est dit qu'on pourrait se reposer un peu là, à l'ombre. Parce que, le village, on le voit toujours pas.

– Et puis, comme ça, il va peut-être récupérer aussi, ajouta Zamfira.

Darie posa les havresacs sur l'herbe brûlée, poudreuse. Il s'accroupit auprès du blessé et écouta son souffle lourd, précipité.

– Je me demande comment ça se fait qu'il vive encore.

Il respire à peine...

Il tendit le bras, prit un sac et fouilla dedans. Le mourant l'observait, en tressaillant fiévreusement par moments. Darie s'adressa à Zamfira, à voix basse :

– Qu'est-ce qu'on en fait ? On ne peut pas continuer à le porter... En plus il se fait tard. Nous le laissons souffrir ici ou nous l'aidons à mourir ?

Zamfira hésita, baissa les yeux.

– Puisqu'on s'est donné la peine de l'amener jusqu'ici... Si Dieu le veut, il lui donnera la force de nous bénir. Parce que, à mon avis, maintenant il *veut* nous bénir...

– Moi, dit Iliescu, je l'ai entendu. Je l'ai entendu quand il a dit *Christou*. Si on continue à lui causer, il tiendra peut-être encore une heure. Le village n'est plus loin.

Une cigarette aux lèvres, Darie regarda les trois hommes en souriant.

– On ne voit rien, dit-il, rien d'autre que des champs de maïs, des champs à perte de vue...

Le chien s'était arrêté à quelques mètres et jappait timidement, les yeux sur les morceaux de sucre. Zamfira soupira.

– Racontons-lui comment ce sera au village, il comprendra peut-être mieux. Parlons-lui tout le temps, tant qu'on se repose là.

Iliescu se tourna vers le blessé et se mit à lui parler d'une voix nouvelle, inconnue, comme s'il s'adressait à un enfant malade.

– Y en a plus pour longtemps, Ivan, on va bientôt arri-

ver au village. Et ça sera bien dans ton village, tu verras, aussi bien que dans le nôtre...

– Dis-y ce qu'on lui donnera, fit Zamfira. De la bonne eau bien fraîche tant qu'il en voudra...

– Ivan, reprit Iliescu en se penchant sur le mourant, dans ton village y a des vergers avec toutes sortes de fruits, des prunes et des poires et plein d'autres et on t'en apportera autant que t'en auras envie...

– Et les femmes te laveront la figure, dit Zamfira, et elles te coucheront dans un lit...

Le blessé ferma les yeux et remua les lèvres, péniblement mais de plus en plus vite.

– Mais ne nous oublie pas, continua Zamfira, oublie pas ce qu'on t'a prié...

– Il oubliera pas, affirma Iliescu, il peut pas oublier. Après tout le mal qu'on s'est donné pour lui, on a été comme des vrais camarades. *Tovaritch* ! Ivan, *tovaritch* ! cria-t-il en souriant. T'oublieras pas, Ivan, tu lèveras le bras, tu lèveras le bras vers nous et tu nous béniras.

Le chien se mit soudain à gémir, jeta quelques regards apeurés autour de lui et, les poils hérissés, détailla en tremblant sur le bord du chemin. Le blessé ouvrit les yeux mais il ne lui restait plus assez de force pour tourner la tête et le regarder. Il fixait maintenant le ciel, avec une intensité telle que rien ne pouvait le troubler, pas plus la forte lumière de cet après-midi d'août que la poussière fine qui flottait au-dessus d'eux comme une vaste toile d'araignée. Ils gardèrent le silence pendant quelques instants. Darie se rapprocha de l'homme, lui posa la main sur le front et le regarda dans les yeux.

– Je crois qu'il est mort, murmura-t-il. Dieu ait son âme, ajouta-t-il en se relevant.

A son tour, Zamfira posa la main sur le front du soldat russe, lui tapota la joue, lui secoua le bras.

– Dieu ait son âme, dit-il en se signant. Il ira au paradis, parce qu’il nous a bénis et ça nous portera bonheur.

– C’est ce qu’il faisait tout à l’heure quand il remuait les lèvres, confirma Iliescu. Il nous bénissait...

Darie ramassa son havresac et lança un regard las sur le chemin, dans la direction prise par le chien.

– Allons-y, dit-il. Nous avons assez perdu de temps comme ça.

– S’il vous plaît, mon lieutenant, juste un peu, murmura timidement Zamfira tout en détachant la bêche à manche court attachée à son sac à dos. On va tout de même pas le laisser là, à se faire bouffer par les corbeaux. Le temps que vous fumiez une cigarette, on lui aura creusé son trou...

Darie le regardait sans comprendre, les yeux ronds.

– S’il vous plaît, mon lieutenant, dit à son tour Iliescu, c’est de la terre pauvre et on aura creusé le trou en un rien...

– Vous êtes dingues, les gars, répondit Darie après un silence. Vous êtes complètement dingues... Mais ça doit être ma faute aussi, ajouta-t-il à voix basse en se dirigeant vers le champ de maïs. Ça doit être ma faute aussi.

Quelques minutes plus tard, lorsqu’il se retourna, il les vit creuser à grands coups de pelle, en nage, sans échanger un mot. Et il lui sembla rêver, car ils creusaient à plus de deux mètres l’un de l’autre, comme si la fosse devait contenir plusieurs corps, et, en même temps, il entendit le sifflement aigu des chasseurs allemands qui volaient en rase-mottes, accompagné dans son dos, derrière les champs dans lesquels ils s’étaient enfoncés à l’aube, peut-être sur la route que toute la

compagnie avait abandonnée la nuit précédente, par les coups saccadés et sourds des canons russes.

– ... Evidemment, poursuivit-il en ouvrant un nouveau paquet de cigarettes, à ce moment-là je me suis rendu compte que je rêvais et je me suis réveillé. Mais, aussi incroyable que ça paraisse, ce qui m’a le plus impressionné, ce qui m’a réveillé, ce n’était ni les avions allemands ni la canonnade, c’était ce trou énorme que Zamfira et Iliescu avaient entrepris de creuser. Au fond, je me demande à quoi ils pouvaient bien penser en s’y mettant. Car, je vous l’ai dit, nous avions soif, nous avions faim et nous tombions de fatigue. Pourquoi tenaient-ils à se compliquer la vie ?

– En tout cas, c’était votre faute, dès le début, dit le capitaine sur un ton dont la cordialité tranchait avec l’apparente sévérité du propos. Vous n’auriez pas dû les laisser le transporter. Vous battiez en retraite et chaque minute perdue pouvait vous être fatale. S’ils avaient pitié d’Ivan, il fallait l’achever sur place...

– Tu ne crois pas qu’on pouvait encore le sauver ? demanda Laura.

– Non. Je vous l’ai dit : quand nous l’avons trouvé, il agonisait. Je me demande même comment il a encore pu vivre aussi longtemps. Quand on rêve, bien sûr, les choses se passent autrement...

– Après six journées de feu, dit le capitaine, vous aviez assez d’expérience. Vous n’aviez plus l’excuse, comme au début, de ne pas oser donner des ordres à des soldats qui se battaient depuis un an ou deux en première ligne.

– C’est vrai, répondit Darie, un sourire distrait aux

lèvres. Mais, d'autre part, chaque fois que j'avais osé donner des ordres, durant ces six journées, ça avait mal tourné. J'étais parti avec une section et, d'ordre en ordre, nous nous sommes retrouvés à trois...

– Je sais de quoi vous parlez, mais ce n'était pas votre faute. Toute l'Ukraine grouillait de partisans et de détachements spéciaux parfaitement camouflés. Dès qu'une unité se séparait du gros de la division, elle risquait de se faire encercler et décimer. Vous avez même eu de la chance de vous retrouver à trois sur seize.

– Quoi qu'il en soit, reprit Darie, je ne voulais plus prendre de responsabilité. Et d'ailleurs, puisque nous sommes entre nous, je vous avouerai une chose : me croyant poursuivi par la guigne, par la malchance, je craignais d'en faire subir les conséquences à mes deux derniers hommes. J'avais donc décidé de leur donner un seul et dernier ordre : nous séparer ; ils se seraient dirigés vers le front par un chemin et moi par un autre... C'est peut-être pourquoi je me suis laissé aller à espérer comme eux, bêtement, que la bénédiction d'Ivan, qui se mourait, nous porterait bonheur...

Sur ces entrefaites, Mme Machedon arriva de la cuisine avec une grande assiette fumante, suivie par Adela, qui portait sur un plateau plusieurs verres et une bouteille de tsuica¹.

– Servez-vous vite, tant que c'est chaud, dit Mme Machedon en s'arrêtant au milieu du groupe.

– Qui était Ivan ? Je ne cesse de me le demander, dit le juge. Quelle sorte d'homme ? Et je me pose surtout une question : aura-t-il compris ce que vous attendiez de lui ? Et, finalement, vous aura-t-il bénis ?

1. Eau-de-vie de prune fort répandue en Roumanie. (N.d.T.)

– Il les a compris et les a bénis, naturellement ! répondit Laura. La preuve : il leur a porté bonheur et ils s'en sont tirés.

– On a vu des cas encore plus extraordinaires, dit alors un homme adossé au mur et que Darie n'avait pas remarqué jusque-là. Des soldats qui ont réussi à s'échapper de Stalingrad et à rentrer au pays, à pied, au bout de je ne sais combien de mois. Et je me demande s'ils avaient été bénis par un quelconque Ivan en train de mourir.

Darie l'écoutait attentivement, tout en le dévisageant avec étonnement.

– Je ne pense pas que nous nous soyons rencontrés jusqu'ici, poursuivit l'autre, l'air gêné, comme s'il cherchait à s'excuser. Je m'appelle Procopie. Médecin, mais j'ai fait un peu de philo dans le temps, quand j'étais étudiant. J'aimais bien la philosophie...

Le capitaine les regarda tous deux avec une surprise proche de l'indignation.

– Comment avez-vous donc fait pour ne pas vous rencontrer jusqu'ici ? Vous serviez dans le même régiment !

Darie tourna la tête vers Laura et lui sourit comme s'il en attendait un signe l'encourageant à intervenir.

– Le plus étrange, dit-il brusquement, c'est que, moi, j'ai eu aussitôt l'impression que nous nous étions déjà rencontrés. Mais je n'osais pas m'avouer que cette impression se rattachait à l'histoire que je viens de vous raconter. En effet, plus je vous regarde, Docteur, plus je trouve que vous ressemblez à Ivan...

Quelques-uns éclatèrent de rire et les observèrent à tour de rôle en mimant la surprise. Darie souriait toujours.

– C'est vraiment bizarre, s'écria Laura, je ne voyais pas Ivan comme ça. J'imaginai un jeune homme de dix-huit ou dix-neuf ans, blond et couvert de taches de rousseur. Tandis que notre docteur, regardez-le : brun, pas une tache de rousseur, et deux enfants qui vont déjà à l'école.

Darie se frotta le front comme s'il essayait de se rappeler un détail qui, sur le moment, lui paraissait décisif.

– Au fond, peu importe, continua Laura. Ce qui compte, c'est que tu as l'impression qu'il ressemble à Ivan. Et alors nous pouvons lui demander ce qui se passait dans la tête d'Ivan pendant que vous le portiez sur vos fusils. Pensez-vous qu'il les ait bénis, Docteur ?

Procopie haussa les épaules.

– Que dire ? Réflexion faite, je répondrais oui et non. Il est difficile d'imaginer qu'Ivan n'ait pas deviné ce qu'ils lui demandaient. A preuve : il a dit *Christou*. Aussi est-il probable qu'il leur ait parlé en prononçant des mots qu'ils ne pouvaient pas comprendre, eux, puisqu'ils ne connaissaient pas le russe. Sans doute des mots d'amitié, ou même d'amour, d'amour chrétien ou autre, bref d'amour pour son prochain. Mais, naturellement, Zamfira et Iliescu attendaient autre chose de lui ; au fond, ce n'était pas une bénédiction proprement dite...

Darie leva la tête et jeta un regard inquiet autour de lui.

– Maintenant, je m'en souviens ! s'exclama-t-il. Je me rappelle ce que je me suis dit à un moment donné lorsque, troublé par la foi et l'espérance de Zamfira, j'implorais le mourant en lui criant *Bless our hearts, Ivan ! Save our souls !* Je me suis dit : si c'est vrai, si Ivan, tel qu'il est, paralysé, presque muet, mourant au bord d'un chemin, si Ivan *peut vraiment nous sauver*, alors il

cache un mystère terrible et impénétrable car, d'une certaine façon, incompréhensible pour mon esprit, il représente, ou exprime, le Dieu inconnu, l'*agnostos theos* dont parlait saint Paul. En a-t-il été ainsi ou non ? je ne le saurai jamais. Car je ne saurai jamais si sa bénédiction, ou son amour, a eu ou non quelque importance dans notre existence...

Mme Machedon s'approcha du poêle, l'ouvrit doucement et y introduisit ce qui restait de la bûche fendue dans l'après-midi.

– On dirait qu'il fait froid tout à coup, marmonna-t-elle.

– C'est la fenêtre de la salle de bains qui est ouverte, expliqua Adela. Il y avait tellement de fumée que je l'ai ouverte...

– Ne nous interrompez pas, cria Laura en se retournant. Écoutons le docteur. Car cette idée d'un Dieu inconnu apporte un élément nouveau, que nous ne soupçonnions pas jusque-là. Qu'en pensez-vous, Docteur ?

Procopie haussa les épaules puis se mit la main devant les lèvres comme s'il voulait dissimuler un sourire.

– Curieusement, je me demandais aussi à quoi ressemble toute cette histoire. Car elle ressemble à quelque chose qui me paraît connu, mais je n'arrive pas à me rappeler à quoi. En tout cas, si c'était une nouvelle épiphanie du Dieu inconnu, ce ne pourrait pas être l'*agnostos theos* athénien de saint Paul. Il ne ressemble absolument pas à un Dieu imaginé par les Grecs...

Darie hochait la tête impatiemment.

– Évidemment, évidemment. Mais il y a toutes sortes de dieux inconnus.

– Laissons cela, fit Laura. Je ne regrette qu'une chose : que tu n'aies pas eu le temps d'expliquer à Ivan ce que tu entendais par cette mystérieuse formule : « une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires ».

Darie sursauta et la regarda avec un sourire empreint de ferveur.

– Je crois que ce fut l'auto-analyse la plus profonde, mais aussi la plus impitoyable, de toutes celles que j'ai jamais tentées. Je sentais alors que j'avais l'intuition d'une chose qui m'était toujours restée inaccessible, que je devinais – comment dire ? – le principe même de mon existence ; et peut-être pas seulement de la mienne, ajouta-t-il en baissant la voix. Il me semblait percer le mystère même de toute existence humaine. Et cette formule approximative – « une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires » – représentait simplement une première tentative de traduction du mystère que je venais de pénétrer et que je m'apprêtais à analyser et définir. Mais, naturellement, comme le plus souvent quand il s'agit de rêves, maintenant je ne me souviens plus de rien...

Il regarda autour de lui et eut l'impression que, hormis Laura et Procopie, on l'écoutait surtout par politesse. On venait de les appeler à table lorsque Laura avait posé sa dernière question et les invités ne pouvaient qu'attendre, debout pour la plupart, certains déjà devant la porte de la salle à manger. Il aurait dû se lever aussi afin d'indiquer clairement que son propos était clos, mais une sorte de fatigue étrange et agréable le clouait au fond de son fauteuil. Un sourire béat aux lèvres, il essayait de comprendre ce qui lui arrivait. Laura lui posa la main sur le bras.

– Allons-y, nous sommes les derniers, murmura-t-elle. Il est tard...

Il se leva seulement lorsqu'il se sentit tirer vigoureusement par le bras.

– Il est tard, mon lieutenant, dit Zamfira en souriant. La nuit tombe...

Darie jeta un regard endormi autour de lui puis se frotta les yeux et regarda de nouveau, avec des clignements rapides, en faisant un effort pour se réveiller. Ils se trouvaient dans le champ de maïs et il lui semblait n'avoir jamais entendu autant de cigales à la fois. Audessus d'eux le ciel pâlisait mais les étoiles n'apparaissaient pas encore.

– Où est Ivan ? demanda-t-il.

– On l'a enterré, répondit Zamfira. Il nous a juste manqué de quoi lui faire une croix.

– Il nous a porté bonheur, ajouta Iliescu. Qu'est-ce que ça a pu tonner ! Pire qu'avant-hier au pont. Vous, vous dormiez à poings fermés et nous, on a continué notre boulot.

Zamfira leva le bras au-dessus des tiges de maïs.

– Les avions allemands volaient tellement bas que j'avais peur qu'ils se prennent les ailes dans le maïs. Ils mitraillaient le champ, ils devaient croire qu'il y avait des Russes cachés dedans. Nous, ils nous ont foutu la paix... Ils croyaient peut-être qu'on enterrait un des nôtres.

– Et de l'autre côté, dit Iliescu en désignant de la main la direction opposée, c'est les mortiers russes qui s'y étaient mis. Heureusement qu'ils tapaient pas jusqu'ici. Ils ont tiré pendant un bon moment et puis on n'a plus

rien entendu. Peut-être qu'ils s'étaient fait mitrailler par les chasseurs – y en avait une bonne vingtaine – ou peut-être qu'ils avaient changé de direction. Parce que, si les Allemands ont envoyé tellement de zincs, ça veut dire que les débris de leur division se retirent par ici. Ils auraient mieux fait de les envoyer avant-hier, au pont, ajouta-t-il, ça aurait évité le massacre.

Il tourna la tête et cracha avec dépit. Darie se pencha et ramassa son havresac.

– Et maintenant, dit Zamfira en l'aidant à le mettre sur ses épaules, à la grâce de Dieu. Parce que si les Russes ont changé de direction, ils nous coupent le chemin et on va devoir se glisser tout le temps dans leur dos avant de retrouver le bataillon.

– T'en fais pas, dit Iliescu. On se fauilera. On s'en tirera cette fois-ci aussi.

Ils arrivèrent à un large sentier bosselé, qui paraissait courir jusque très loin à travers les champs de maïs.

– J'ai fait un rêve, dit Darie sans les regarder. J'ai rêvé que j'étais à Iasi, pendant l'hiver, avec des amis, et que je leur parlais d'Ivan...

– C'est un beau rêve, dit Iliescu en constatant que le silence se prolongeait.

– Puisque vous avez rêvé d'Ivan, ça nous portera bonheur, affirma Zamfira. Le plus drôle, mon lieutenant, c'est que vous disiez qu'on avait tort, qu'on perdait notre temps. Qu'on aurait dû l'achever si on avait pitié de lui, pour abréger ses souffrances. Mais pas le transporter.

– C'est les ordres, rappela Iliescu. Mais vous avez vu, mon lieutenant, il nous a porté bonheur.

– Faut dire aussi qu'on s'est donné du mal, précisa

Zamfira. On lui a parlé, on lui a raconté des histoires.

Darie s'arrêta brusquement et les regarda.

– Dites, les gars, je me trompe ou bien il y a des millions de cigales dans le coin ? Elles m'assourdissent...

– C'est bien des cigales, *mon lieutenant*, répondit Zamfira. Y en a beaucoup mais c'est toujours comme ça à cette époque. Ça fait sans doute longtemps que vous êtes pas allé l'été à la campagne.

Darie retira son casque et l'examina pendant quelques secondes, l'air indécis. Puis il se retourna soudain et repartit.

– *Drôle de rêve*, dit-il après un long silence. Je n'arrive pas à en comprendre le sens. Pourquoi ai-je eu l'impression, *dans mon rêve*, que ce que je m'apprêtais à dire à Ivan, *ici*, il y a quelques heures, quand vous m'avez appelé, était tellement important ? C'est bizarre, n'est-ce pas ? demanda-t-il en se tournant vers Zamfira.

– Des rêves..., répondit celui-ci. Qui peut les comprendre ?

– Les rêves, ça a un sens si on sait les deviner, dit Iliescu.

Darie hochait la tête, pensif, et hâta le pas.

– Non, je pensais à autre chose, voilà pourquoi j'ai dit que c'était bizarre. Bizarre parce que *dans mon rêve* j'étais certain, d'une part, que les quelques mots que j'avais commencé à dire à Ivan annonçaient des idées très profondes, que je n'ai pas eu le temps de lui exposer parce que vous m'avez appelé et, d'autre part, toujours dans mon rêve, je ne me rappelais plus ces idées si importantes, je me rappelais seulement le début : « une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires ». Quelle révélation extraordinaire était-elle annoncée par cette

formule qui me paraît à présent assez banale et d'un style douteux ? Car je sais fort bien à quoi je faisais allusion. Et, si vous ne m'aviez pas appelé, j'aurais cité à Ivan quelques-unes au moins de ces « évidences mutuellement contradictoires ». Je lui aurais parlé par exemple de Laura, cette jeune fille de Iasi. Elle avait, elle a toujours, sa propre manière d'être *évidente*. Mais il n'y avait pas qu'elle. Il y avait par exemple... Il y avait... Il y avait par exemple, tenez, ma passion pour la philosophie...

Il s'interrompit brusquement et se passa la main dans les cheveux. Puis il se frotta le front machinalement.

– C'est dur, dit Zamfira, c'est dur, la philosophie.

– C'est le plus dur, renchérit Iliescu. C'est le plus dur parce qu'on peut pas comprendre.

Darie, l'air ailleurs, remit son casque.

– Le plus étrange, dit-il d'une voix grave, presque sévère, c'est *qu'à ce moment-là*, dans mon rêve, j'avais raison. *J'ai oublié*. J'ai oublié ce que je m'apprêtais à dire à Ivan. J'étais sans doute inspiré, si je puis dire, par sa présence, par cette invraisemblable agonie dans laquelle il s'éteignait, muré de toutes parts dans sa solitude absolue. *L'exemple* d'Ivan me révélait probablement ma propre condition humaine, alors même que, bien évidemment, je ne m'en rendais pas compte. Je voulais simplement faire ce que vous m'aviez demandé : lui parler, lui dire *n'importe quoi* pour l'empêcher de mourir.

Il s'interrompit de nouveau, s'apercevant tout à coup qu'il avait quitté le sentier et marchait, non sans peine, en plein champ. Il tourna la tête et s'adressa à Zamfira, qui le suivait à quelques pas :

– Dites, les gars, vous savez où nous allons, vous ? Par ici, on s'enfonce dans le maïs.

– C'est le bon chemin, mon lieutenant, répondit Zamfira. Si on suivait le sentier, on risquerait de tomber sur une patrouille russe. Vaut mieux continuer à travers champs jusque vers minuit et ensuite, si Dieu le veut, on rejoindra la route derrière les Russes et on les suivra jusqu'à l'aube. Après, on retournera s'enfoncer dans le maïs et on se reposera.

Iliescu s'arrêta à quelques pas à gauche et leur fit un signe du bras.

– Faut faire gaffe, chuchota-t-il. Avancer en tirailleurs pour pas trop remuer le maïs. Au moins tant qu'il fera pas vraiment nuit. Ensuite, on sera un peu plus peignards... Mon lieutenant, restez entre nous, au milieu. Regardez tantôt à gauche, tantôt à droite, pour suivre les tiges qui se balancent. Quand vous voulez vous arrêter une minute pour vous reposer, sifflez doucement et on vous attendra.

Il y avait moins de cigales ou peut-être, se dit Darie, se taisaient-elles à leur approche. La nuit tombait et pourtant aucune brise ne se levait, l'air était encore brûlant et, à chaque fois qu'il touchait une feuille de maïs, il soulevait un léger nuage de poussière âcre et étouffante. Il essayait d'avancer sans trop agiter les tiges, mais son havresac et son fusil le gênaient, il trébuchait sans cesse sur des mottes de terre sèche, se prenait parfois les pieds dans de longues racines souples et, lorsqu'il tirait d'un coup sec pour s'en débarrasser, il secouait le maïs qui l'aspergeait de poussière, et de légères noctuelles venaient heurter son front.

Au bout d'un quart d'heure environ, il entendit siffler et s'arrêta. Il regarda à droite et à gauche mais ne distingua rien. Il reprit son souffle puis pencha la tête en arrière et retrouva le ciel, criblé d'étoiles et plus clair. Il

respirait lentement, profondément, tout en attendant. Il entendit siffler de nouveau puis, très près à sa gauche, la voix d'Iliescu :

– On repart, mon lieutenant.

– Et nous avons continué à marcher jusqu'après minuit. La fatigue, la faim, la soif, ce n'était rien, mais je ne cessais de me demander ce que nous allions devenir à l'aube ou dans la journée, ou le surlendemain dans le meilleur des cas. Depuis que nous étions entrés dans le champ de maïs, j'avais l'impression de faire demi-tour, en direction du pont où, la veille, nous avions eu la vie sauve par miracle. Nous comprenions que nous ne pourrions pas entrer dans le village si, comme Zamfira le supposait, les Russes avaient changé de chemin après l'attaque de l'aviation allemande : le gros de la colonne russe aurait quitté la grand-route et se serait éparpillé dans les villages voisins. Mais je ne comprenais pas pourquoi nous devions retourner vers le pont. Naturellement, je me fiais à leur sens de l'orientation – ils étaient sûrs tous deux d'aller dans la bonne direction. Zamfira m'avait prévenu que nous aurions à nous glisser dans le dos des Russes, mais au lieu de les suivre, me semblait-il, nous rebroussions chemin... Nous attendons les autres ou nous repartons ? demanda-t-il en contemplant les sapins disséminés parmi les rochers. On ne voit personne.

– Il vaudrait mieux les attendre, répondit Arhip en reposant la tête sur son sac à dos. Franchement, cette dernière paroi m'a épuisé. Il y a quelques bonnes années que je n'avais plus suivi cet itinéraire. Je faisais les crêtes de Piatra Craiului en passant par Omul. J'avais

oublié que c'était aussi abrupt par ici... Et puis j'aimerais entendre la fin de votre histoire. Vous m'avez rendu curieux.

Darie sortit son paquet de cigarettes.

– Laura est évidemment persuadée qu'Ivan nous a bénis d'une façon ou d'une autre et que sa bénédiction nous a porté bonheur.

– Vous ne devriez pas fumer. Attendez un peu, dit Arhip. Reprenez d'abord votre souffle. L'escalade vous a fatigué aussi.

Darie rangea le paquet dans sa poche et reprit :

– Bizarrement, je ne me suis pas demandé un instant ce qu'il pouvait bien chercher là, Ivan, grièvement blessé, seul au milieu des champs de maïs, à un endroit où il n'y avait pas eu de combats et que les chasseurs allemands n'avaient pas encore mitraillé. Qui avait bien pu le blesser ? Et, alors qu'il ne pouvait plus bouger et réussissait à peine à remuer les lèvres, comment expliquer qu'il n'eût pas perdu plus de sang, car la terre était presque sèche sous lui ? Et où se trouvaient son fusil, son barda ? Il avait juste un revolver, mais le chargeur vide. Rien dans ses poches – Zamfira l'a fouillé. Il espérait trouver des papiers : une carte d'identité, une lettre, une photo. Certain qu'il nous avait bénis, il voulait connaître son nom pour prévenir plus tard sa famille et indiquer où nous l'avions enterré. Mais il n'a rien trouvé. Et aucun d'entre nous, ajouta-t-il en reprenant son paquet de cigarettes, aucun d'entre nous ne s'est demandé : *que faisait-il là, Ivan ?* comment avait-il échoué là ?

– Chaque monde a sa structure et sa logique, dit Arhip. Comme vous le savez, les contradictions ou les inconséquences sont de deux types : les premières sont

évidentes de l'intérieur même du système de référence, les secondes nous apparaissent en tant que telles, c'est-à-dire contradictions ou inconséquences, uniquement lorsque nous les envisageons de l'extérieur du système.

Pensif, Darie l'écoutait en fumant.

- C'est drôle, dit-il, en vous regardant mieux je m'aperçois que vous ressemblez beaucoup à Ivan. Bien qu'en apparence vous n'ayez rien de commun. Mais, je le répète et le souligne, *en apparence* seulement.

Arhip leva la tête et le dévisagea, pour la première fois eût-on dit, avec gravité et intérêt.

- Je pourrais vous dire que je m'attendais à cette remarque, commença-t-il en souriant. En quelque sorte, vous êtes encore obsédé par le mystère d'Ivan et, consciemment ou inconsciemment, vous cherchez à tout prix à percer son secret, à déchiffrer son message. Mais, Ivan vous étant inaccessible - non parce qu'il est mort mais parce que, lorsqu'il vivait encore, il ne pouvait presque plus parler et que les quelques mots qu'il a prononcés étaient pour vous scellés de sept sceaux, puisque vous ne connaissez pas le russe -, Ivan vous étant inaccessible, vous essayez de le retrouver dans chaque inconnu que vous rencontrez. Le dernier, vous venez de le rencontrer il y a cinq ou six heures, et c'est moi. Je vous comprends donc fort bien : vous alliez me demander ce qui se passait, à mon avis, dans l'esprit d'Ivan. Il n'y a pas de mal. Questionnez-moi et je tenterai de vous répondre.

Darie eut un petit rire gêné puis tourna la tête, à la recherche d'une pierre pour éteindre sa cigarette.

- Vous autres, technologues, sociologues, psychologues, vous êtes des gens vraiment bizarres. Mais je ne crois pas que les choses soient toujours aussi simples

que vous le pensez. A la vérité, quand je vous ai dit que vous ressembliez à Ivan, ce qui me troublait surtout dans cette découverte soudaine, ce n'était pas l'espoir de deviner par votre truchement ce qui se passait dans l'esprit d'Ivan, mais l'espoir que cette assimilation symbolique de vous à Ivan me permettrait à moi de retrouver le contexte de cette formule énigmatique : « une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires ». La formule que j'ai utilisée pour expliquer à Ivan ce qui m'est arrivé après le 8 novembre. Et dans laquelle je croyais alors avoir surpris, comme dans une simple équation du premier degré, le secret de la condition humaine...

- Vous parlez toujours d'Ivan ? demanda Laura en surgissant derrière eux. Où en êtes-vous ?

- Mais par où es-tu passée ? s'étonna Darie. Comment se fait-il que je ne t'aie pas vue ?

- Je suis allée faire les commissions, dit Laura en s'asseyant avec un soupir de soulagement. Je suis morte de fatigue.

- Où sont les autres ? demanda Darie.

- Ils arrivent. Adela s'est arrêtée au kiosque pour acheter les journaux, tandis que le docteur, maman et les autres passaient chez les voisins pour voir s'ils ne peuvent pas nous prêter encore un peu de bois. C'est qu'il commence à faire froid, on dirait qu'il va neiger.

Darie s'aperçut qu'il caressait machinalement des deux mains le dossier du fauteuil et il sourit.

- Un jour, il faudra que vous me confiez l'histoire de ce fauteuil. Chaque fois que je me souviens d'Ivan ou, plus exactement, chaque fois que je me souviens de lui *dans ce fauteuil*, j'ai l'impression soit de rêver, soit de sortir d'un rêve...

– Cette fois-ci, ce n'était ni l'un ni l'autre, affirma Arhip.

– Que voulez-vous dire ? demanda Darie, troublé, en le fixant.

Arhip haussa les épaules.

– Comment le dire autrement ? Vous avez tenté la formule « une série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires », mais vous n'en paraissiez pas très enthousiaste. Continuons donc à chercher, conclut-il en repartant, continuons à chercher...

Darie le regardait s'éloigner, ennuyé et furieux de ne pouvoir rien ajouter.

– *Alors, nous sommes foutus* !* murmura-t-il. *Il n'y a plus d'espoir. Foutus pour l'éternité* !...*

– *Nous sommes foutus* !* répéta Darie entre ses dents lorsque Zamfira donna le signal de départ. *Foutus pour l'éternité* !...*

Ils marchaient sur un méchant chemin vicinal aux ornières profondes, qui serpentait entre les champs de maïs. On entendit de nouveau éclater, de tous les côtés en même temps, le chant des cigales. Une fois sur le chemin, ils avaient enlevé leurs casques ; Darie tenait le sien à la main, les deux soldats avaient accroché les leurs aux sangles des havresacs. Le ciel commençait à s'étoiler mais on ne sentait pas encore la fraîcheur de la nuit.

– Vous ne dites plus rien, mon lieutenant, chuchota Zamfira. Vous devez être fatigué...

– Maintenant qu'il est minuit passé, on peut parler, dit Iliescu. Tant qu'on n'arrive pas à la route. Là, il faudra faire gaffe.

Darie retrouva son mouchoir dans la poche de poitrine de sa vareuse et s'essuya vigoureusement la figure.

– Dites, les gars, vous êtes sûrs que c'est bien le chemin ?

– Sûrs, mon lieutenant, répondit Zamfira. Regardez les étoiles. On a juste fait un détour pour éviter le village, mais autrement c'est bon. Nous suivons les Russes.

Darie jeta un coup d'œil sur le cadran phosphorescent de sa montre.

– Il est une heure moins vingt-cinq, dit-il. Si nous arrivons bientôt à la route et si tout va bien, nous pourrions marcher jusqu'à quatre heures environ. Ensuite, disiez-vous, il faudra que nous nous cachions encore dans le maïs. Mais, dans une dizaine ou une douzaine de kilomètres, si jamais il n'y a plus que des champs de blé et d'avoine ou de je ne sais quoi... comment ferons-nous pour nous cacher ?

– Vous en faites pas, mon lieutenant, dit Iliescu. Je suis déjà passé par ici ce printemps, quand le grain commençait à pousser. Toute l'Ukraine est comme ça : du maïs sur des kilomètres et, à côté, du blé, du seigle ou autre chose sur quelques kilomètres et puis encore du maïs.

– C'est pour l'eau que ça sera plus dur, précisa Zamfira. On n'en trouvera peut-être pas, peut-être pas du tout pendant un jour ou deux, même pas une mare ou un puits abandonné. Au début ça sera dur, mais on s'en sortira, si Dieu le veut. Je connais des herbes, des racines et puis on trouvera peut-être des baies... On s'en sortira, vous en faites pas.

– Pour la bouffe, ajouta Iliescu, on mangera comme cette nuit : du maïs. Dommage qu'il soye un peu passé

et qu'on puisse pas faire de braise pour le cuire, mais ça ira comme ça. Ça trompe la faim.

Darie remettait son mouchoir dans sa poche quand il marcha dans un trou. Il trébucha, son havresac lui cogna la nuque et il allait tomber lorsque Zamfira le retint par le bras.

– Bon Dieu ! C'est pas le moment de vous fouler une cheville.

– Quand on marche dans un trou sans tomber, c'est bon signe, affirma Iliescu.

Darie enfonça le mouchoir dans sa poche.

– Puisque nous parlons de trou, dit-il en souriant, ça fait un bon moment que je voulais vous demander pourquoi vous vous étiez donné tant de peine à creuser un trou aussi somptueux pour Ivan, je veux dire aussi grand.

– Il était pas si grand que ça, mon lieutenant, répondit Zamfira. Une tombe de chrétien comme toutes les tombes.

– Pourtant, quand vous avez commencé à creuser, vous vous trouviez à plus de deux mètres l'un de l'autre. On aurait dit que vous vous prépariez à enterrer toute une patrouille !

Et il éclata de rire, soudain d'excellente humeur, comme si fatigue et soif disparaissaient miraculeusement. Les deux soldats rirent aussi mais, Darie le vit bien, surtout pour lui faire plaisir.

– Dieu nous en garde, finit par dire Zamfira. Mais, vraiment, ça faisait pas deux mètres...

– Maintenant que j'y repense, dit Iliescu, vous pouviez pas voir le trou, mon lieutenant, puisque vous étiez dans le maïs.

– Non. Ça, c'était plus tard, quand j'ai vu approcher

les avions allemands. Mais au moment où je les ai aperçus et où j'ai entendu en même temps les mortiers russes, je vous voyais creuser. Je m'en souviens parfaitement.

– Vous pouvez demander à Zamfira, insista doucement Iliescu. Il vous dira pas autre chose. On avait à peine donné deux ou trois coups de pelle, pour tâter la terre, quand on a vu les premiers zincs allemands et on leur a fait des signes parce qu'ils se mettaient à canarder le bord du champ. Et après on vous a cherché pour voir si vous étiez pas touché. On vous a trouvé là où on vous a réveillé plus tard. On vous a laissé vous reposer et c'est seulement *ensuite* qu'on est retourné creuser la fosse. Quand la deuxième vague d'avions est passée, peut-être un quart d'heures après, on avait presque fini et on leur a fait signe de loin, avec nos pelles, mais ils nous avaient vus et ils ne tiraient plus... Pas vrai, Zamfira ?

– C'est comme ça que ça s'est passé, comme il l'a raconté, confirma Zamfira.

Darie rit.

– Eh bien, tant mieux. J'aurai donc commencé à rêver avant de m'endormir. Ça m'est déjà arrivé.

Puis il se tut, l'air absent. Au bout d'un quart d'heure environ, Iliescu partit de l'avant, à petits pas rapides, légèrement penché car les tiges de maïs, moins hautes, commençaient à s'espacer. De la main, il leur fit signe de s'approcher prudemment.

– Nous arrivons sur un champ nu, dit Zamfira. La route doit se trouver droit devant nous, pas loin d'ici. Laissez-moi passer devant, mon lieutenant...

Depuis deux heures déjà, ils marchaient en tirailleurs à travers champs. La route trouvée, ils l'avaient traversée en courant car ils entendaient avancer dans leur dos, tous phares éteints, une interminable colonne de camions russes. La nuit était claire et froide. Le ciel semblait soudain très proche, clouté d'étoiles, et un seul nuage, transparent, voguait loin devant eux, à l'ouest. Une brise molle leur apportait par moments des odeurs mêlées d'essence et de foin.

Il aperçut de loin l'arbre solitaire et, pensant y faire une halte, siffla brièvement ses compagnons. Mais Zamfira, d'un geste, lui fit signe de continuer à les suivre.

– *Nous sommes foutus** ! grommela Darie.

Il aurait aimé pouvoir cracher comme Iliescu mais sa bouche était sèche et il constata au même instant, surpris, presque effrayé, qu'il avait brusquement froid. Il hâta le pas mais il n'arrivait plus à se rendre compte de la vitesse à laquelle il avançait. Puis il s'aperçut qu'il courait, le fusil à la main droite et le havresac à la gauche, pour l'empêcher de lui cogner le dos. Il s'arrêta, éreinté, afin de reprendre son souffle.

– Pourquoi avez-vous eu peur, Monsieur le Philosophe ? lui demanda doucement une voix.

Il se retourna en sursautant et découvrit Procopie, qui l'attendait en souriant au pied de l'arbre, le chien à ses côtés.

– Pourquoi avez-vous eu peur ? répéta l'homme en voyant Darie le fixer d'un œil rond.

– Mais que faites-vous là, Major ? Comment êtes-vous arrivé là ?

Sa fatigue disparut d'un coup et il s'approcha sans hésiter, revigoré.

– Où est votre unité ? demanda-t-il quand il se trouva devant lui.

Mais il comprit aussitôt le quiproquo et, confus, bredouilla une excuse :

– Il fait noir, c'est pourquoi je ne vous avais pas reconnu. Vous êtes Arhip. Mais je ne comprends pas ce que vous faites là. Vous cherchez toujours la formule, vous la cherchez toujours ?

L'autre le dévisageait sans se départir de son sourire, serein et ironique à la fois.

– Je vous ai posé une question, Monsieur le Philosophe, mais je constate que vous ne voulez pas y répondre. Vous me disiez que nous étions indestructibles. Alors pourquoi avez-vous eu peur ?

– Ivan ! murmura Darie.

– Ce n'est pas mon nom, mais peu importe. Appelez-moi comme vous voudrez. Appelez-moi Ivan.

Darie avança d'un pas encore.

– Par conséquent, tu parlais le roumain et tu ne nous as rien dit. Tu nous as laissés nous donner toute cette peine...

– A présent, nous connaissons toutes les langues. Mais ça ne compte plus puisque nous n'en avons plus besoin... Vous disiez pourtant que nous étions indestructibles. Vous n'auriez pas dû avoir peur, alors...

– Je n'ai pas eu peur. J'ai eu froid tout à coup et je ne comprenais pas pourquoi, alors je me suis mis à courir. C'est tout.

Ivan l'examina avec sympathie, un sourire aux lèvres.

– Vous m'avez si bien et si gentiment parlé tout à l'heure, hier, avant-hier, je ne sais plus quand c'était. Cela m'a surtout plu parce que vous avez compris – si jeune ! – que nous sommes indestructibles.

- Par conséquent, *tu as tout compris*, murmura Darie.

- Je n'ai pourtant pas compris une chose : votre désespoir, Monsieur le Philosophe, votre peur de ne jamais vous reposer. Mais pourquoi tenez-vous à vous reposer ? Nous n'en sommes qu'au début. Qu'avons-nous derrière nous ? Peut-être un million d'années, et encore ! Si nous comptons à partir d'*homo sapiens*, quelques dizaines de milliers d'années seulement. Tandis qu'il suffit de regarder devant nous : des milliards et des milliards d'années !

Surpris, Darie l'écoutait attentivement.

- Des milliards d'années, répéta-t-il à mi-voix. Je sais, je sais bien - mais qu'en ferons-nous, de ces milliards d'années ?

- Nous *animerons* la terre et puis le système solaire et puis les galaxies et tout ce qu'il y a derrière et que nous ne connaissons pas encore. Les animer, cela signifie les ramener à la vie, réveiller *l'esprit qui dort*, aliéné, dans toute vie. Bénir toute la Création, comme certains d'entre vous aiment à dire.

- Zamfira avait donc raison. Tu nous as bénis.

- Oui et non. Comme disait le docteur Procopie...

- Mais *comment* connais-tu le docteur Procopie ?

Ivan *leva les yeux*, non sans une certaine surprise, puis sourit et haussa les épaules.

- Maintenant nous connaissons tout. Ou, plutôt, tout ce qui nous intéresse. Or, vous, vous m'intéressez parce que vous avez eu pitié de moi et que vous m'avez parlé. Tout comme m'intéressent Zamfira et Iliescu parce qu'ils se sont donné tant de mal pour essayer de me transporter au village et ensuite de m'enterrer ; qu'on m'enterre ou pas, je m'en moquais, naturellement, mais leur intention m'a ému...

Darie se donna une claque sur le front.

- Mes gars ! s'écria-t-il. Où sont-ils ?

- Un peu plus loin, dans le champ. Ils vous attendent. Ne vous faites pas de souci, ils se reposent aussi. Du reste, je ne vous retiendrai pas longtemps car je dois *repartir* de mon côté. Mais nous pouvons encore *bavarder* quelques instants. Nous nous sommes si peu vus dernièrement : à l'orée du champ de maïs, mais nous ne nous sommes pas reconnus et nous ne pouvions pas nous parler, ensuite chez Mme Machedon et puis à la montagne, à Piatra Craiului. Il fut un temps où nous nous rencontrions plus souvent.

Darie ne put s'empêcher de rire puis se reprit, quelque peu *confus* :

- Excuse-moi de te contredire, mais je suis sûr que tu te trompes. J'ai fait la connaissance de Procopie et d'Arhip tout récemment et toi, je t'ai rencontré hier ou avant-hier, comme tu le disais, à l'orée d'un champ de maïs.

- Nous nous connaissons depuis longtemps, je *n'ose même pas dire* depuis quand. Mais nous nous reconnaissons toujours trop tard.

Darie le regardait *fixement*. Et, comme chaque fois qu'une conversation l'intéressait, il fourra la main dans sa poche à la recherche du paquet de cigarettes. Mais, pour une fois, le geste lui suffit.

- Je crois comprendre ce que tu veux dire, murmura-t-il en hochant la tête. *Au fond*, toute une vie, toute une existence humaine peut se développer, s'accomplir et s'achever en quelques mois, parfois encore moins.

- Or, curieusement, les mêmes questions revenaient sans cesse dans nos conversations. Ainsi la série d'évidences mutuellement contradictoires. Combien de fois et

en combien de langues ne m'en as-tu pas parlé, ajouta-t-il en passant soudain au tutoiement.

– Malheureusement, et c'est le plus grave, je ne me rappelle pas ce que je voulais dire par là. Ou, plutôt, je ne me rappelle pas *la suite*. J'avais commencé cette phrase, je me préparais à te présenter tout un système quand les gars m'ont appelé et j'ai perdu le fil de mes idées.

– Tu as dit tout ce qu'il y avait à dire. Tout ce qu'il y avait à dire *pour l'instant*. Le reste, tu le diras plus tard. Tu me l'as déjà dit et tu verras que cela te plaira aussi quand tu le redécouvriras.

Il le regarda cordialement, mais non sans une ironie presque provocante.

– Quand je t'écoute, Ivan, j'ai l'impression d'entendre Arhip. La dernière fois que je lui ai parlé...

– C'était quand ? Il y a combien de centaines d'années ? Ou combien de mois ? Dans quelle vie ?... Ne te méprends pas, précisa-t-il en constatant que Darie fronçait les sourcils, déconcerté. Il ne s'agit pas du *temps*, mais du décalage entre les évidences mutuellement contradictoires, comme tu aimes à dire... Je regrette de t'avoir interrompu, reprit-il après un moment car Darie se taisait toujours. Je t'avais déjà interrompu un jour – tu ne t'en souviens pas parce que le décalage entre les évidences est trop grand –, un jour où tu allais justement nous expliquer dans quel sens tu utilisais l'expression *agnostos theos*. Tu avais sous les yeux, comme sur un écran intérieur, l'image d'Ivan en quelque sorte enterré dans son propre corps. Et tu voulais dire que c'était parfois l'apparence de Dieu, de l'Esprit suprême – capturé, enfermé dans la Matière, aveuglé, aliéné, ignorant sa propre identité. Mais quel Dieu

serait-ce là ? ! En tout cas pas celui de Paul. Pas plus que celui des Grecs. Tu pensais aux mythes gnostiques, aux conceptions indiennes de l'Esprit et de la Matière.

– Certes, certes. Procopie l'avait d'ailleurs remarqué.

– Et pourtant il y avait du vrai dans ta comparaison ; mais seulement si l'on envisage les choses selon une tout autre perspective. L'Esprit est *toujours* camouflé sous la Matière, mais sa raison d'y être – qu'il y soit prisonnier ou qu'il s'y trouve provisoirement, car il est actif et ainsi de suite –, sa raison d'être, tu l'apprendras plus tard. Telle est d'ailleurs l'Enigme – l'Enigme avec un E majuscule – à laquelle nous sommes tous confrontés, la question qui se pose *inexorablement* à tout homme : comment reconnaître l'Esprit s'il est camouflé *sous* la Matière, autrement dit s'il est *méconnaissable* ? Et ainsi sommes-nous tous, Monsieur le Philosophe : non seulement indestructibles, comme tu le disais, mais encore méconnaissables... Tiens, je vois qu'on t'attend, conclut-il abruptement en se retournant.

Dans le clair-obscur qui annonçait l'aube, Darie aperçut, à une vingtaine de mètres, une silhouette familière qu'il ne parvenait pourtant pas à identifier. Bien plus loin, en direction de la route qu'ils avaient traversée pendant la nuit, on pouvait distinguer des groupes épars qui avançaient lentement, comme s'ils hésitaient.

– Et de mon côté, il faut que je parte, reprit Ivan. On m'attend aussi, là-bas.

Il tendit le bras vers l'est mais Darie eut beau scruter l'horizon, il ne vit rien. Sur ces entrefaites, le chien partit de l'avant, *sans hâte*, le museau dans l'herbe. et Darie le montra à Ivan, avec un grand sourire.

– Lui, dit-il, il t'avait reconnu. Il a été le seul à te reconnaître.

– Essaye aussi, mon cher Philosophe, dit Ivan en le regardant dans le blanc des yeux. Essaye la prochaine fois. Ce sera quand ? Et où ? Dans un salon à Iasi, à Tokyo ou à la montagne, ou bien dans un hôpital ou encore sur une autre planète ? Si je te reconnais le premier, je te ferai signe – mais je ne te reconnaitrai pas. Et même si je te reconnaissais et te faisais signe, tu ne me comprendrais pas. Tout est là, Monsieur le Philosophe : nous sommes méconnaissables envers nous-mêmes autant que les uns pour les autres...

Il marchait lentement, plongé dans ses pensées, mais, s'apercevant que Darie le suivait, il s'arrêta et dit en souriant :

– Non, ceci est notre chemin. Le tien va de l'autre côté, et il tendit le bras en arrière, vers l'ouest. Dépêche-toi, on t'attend.

Il le salua d'un geste, tourna la tête et partit vers la plaine d'un pas tranquille, le chien devant lui.

Il pensa soudain à Zamfira et Iliescu et se mit à courir. Le jour allait se lever d'une minute à l'autre et la plaine, s'étendant à l'infini de toutes parts, commençait à émerger de l'obscurité. Le ciel trouble, sans étoiles, évoquait la brume en haute montagne. Tout à coup, à proximité de l'arbre, il aperçut son capitaine.

– Je ne vous avais pas reconnu tout à l'heure, mon capitaine, bredouilla-t-il. Il faisait encore noir.

– Je n'étais pas pressé. Je vous ai entendus bavarder et j'ai écouté, ça m'intéressait. Ivan vous a appris bien des choses. Lui aussi, il a dû être philosophe à son heu-

re, dit-il en souriant. Mais dorénavant nous devons nous dépêcher. Les autres nous attendent.

Ils partirent tous deux vers la route.

– En effet, pourquoi ai-je eu peur ? s'écria Darie. Je sais depuis longtemps que nous sommes indestructibles. Et pourtant, reprit-il après une pause, et pourtant...

A ce moment-là, il reconnut sa section et stoppa net, craignant de ne pouvoir dissimuler son émotion.

– Vous voilà donc aussi, mon lieutenant, cria Manole, son éternel sourire aux lèvres. Vous voyez, on est tous là, enfin, presque tous...

Alors il se souvint de Zamfira et Iliescu et chuchota, anxieux :

– Mes gars...

– Ils sont devant, dit le capitaine d'une voix rassurante. Chacun rentre chez lui par ses propres moyens. Nous, nous nous dirigeons vers le fleuve, c'est notre point de rassemblement.

Darie s'aperçut que tout le monde marchait depuis un moment déjà, mais il n'arrivait pas à se rappeler quand ils s'étaient mis en branle. Il haussa les épaules, de bonne humeur, hâta le pas et rattrapa sa section. Il ne les entendait pas parler et savait cependant qu'ils parlaient car il comprenait ce qu'ils se disaient. Le ciel restait trouble mais la clarté suffisait pour distinguer – où qu'il tournât les yeux : en avant, à gauche, à droite ou derrière lui – d'autres groupes étirés qui avançaient silencieusement, d'un pas mesuré et pourtant, lui semblait-il, étonnamment rapide. Il s'arrêta à plusieurs reprises pour jeter un coup d'œil en arrière. La même plaine s'étendait à perte de vue sous le ciel brumeux et trouble où se découpaient de loin en loin quelques arbres solitaires. Il lui parut bizarre de n'entendre ni

oiseaux ni avions, pas même le sourd grondement des camions russes qu'il venait de voir passer sur la route.

— C'est ça, l'Ukraine, dit le capitaine. Ils la trouvent sans doute belle, puisque c'est leur pays. Mais vous verrez comment ce sera quand nous arriverons chez nous.

— Nous en avons encore pour longtemps ? demanda Darie, mais il se rendit compte aussitôt qu'il posait une question inutile car il savait que, d'une certaine manière, ils y étaient déjà.

Il aurait voulu rire et s'excuser, quand il l'entendit répondre.

— Oui et non. Il paraît que ce sera moins dur après le fleuve. Mais, vous savez, notre division a été formée en Olténie. Les hommes veulent rentrer chez eux, chacun dans son village. Se reposer, ajouta-t-il en souriant.

— Mais ensuite, mon capitaine, qu'advient-il de nous lorsque nous serons à la maison, les uns à Iasi, les autres à Bucarest ou en Olténie ? Puisque, je vous l'ai dit, nous sommes indestructibles. Je l'ai également dit à Ivan et il m'a donné raison. Et je l'ai dit aussi à Zamfira et Zamfira, à sa façon, Zamfira et Iliescu...

Il s'interrompit brusquement en les voyant, à une vingtaine de mètres devant lui, marcher lentement, au prix d'un pénible effort, car ils portaient le blessé sur leurs fusils, trébuchaient dans les ornières du chemin qui longeait le champ de maïs, aveuglés, étouffés par la poussière brûlante de cet après-midi d'été. Il se mit à courir et les appela :

— Vous êtes cinglés, les gars, complètement cinglés ! Vous recommencez ? Ivan ne vous a pas suffi, vous en avez trouvé un autre ?

Il les rattrapa et blêmit en se voyant étendu sur les deux fusils, un mouchoir taché de sang sur la figure, la

chemise également maculée de sang et déchirée sous la vareuse ouverte.

— Que s'est-il passé ? murmura-t-il. Qu'est-ce qu'il m'est arrivé ?

Ils s'arrêtèrent et le posèrent doucement au bord du chemin. Zamfira, haletant, fit le signe de la croix.

— Dieu merci, vous reprenez vos esprits, mon lieutenant.

— J'avais raison, affirma Iliescu, c'est la vodka d'Ivan.

— On a eu de la veine, précisa Zamfira, de les trouver ivres morts ; on leur a piqué tout ce qu'on a pu : de l'eau, de la vodka, du tabac.

— Mais qu'est-ce qui m'est arrivé ? demanda Darie. Quelqu'un m'a blessé ?

— De la guigne, expliqua Zamfira. Vous avez trébuché, vous êtes tombé et ça a fait partir le coup. La balle vous a traversé l'aisselle. Pas grand-chose mais vous vous êtes évanoui et, le temps de vous retrouver, vous aviez perdu plein de sang. Si on vous avait fait un garrot tout de suite, ç'aurait été vraiment un rien.

Darie regarda autour de lui. Ils se trouvaient au bord du chemin, entre les champs de maïs. La même poussière fine et âcre, étouffante, qu'il lui semblait connaître depuis toujours, flottait au-dessus d'eux, plus brûlante que jamais. De sa main valide, il chercha son paquet de cigarettes dans sa poche. Il le trouva, mais déchiré, écrasé. Iliescu lui tendit un paquet de cigarettes russes, attendit qu'il en prît une et la lui alluma. Après quelques bouffées, Darie leur dit :

— Ecoutez, les gars, vous êtes vraiment braves et dévoués et vous vous êtes donné beaucoup de peine pour

moi. A présent, vous allez exécuter mon ordre. Vous devez l'exécuter, parce que ce sera le dernier.

Il s'interrompit et aspira une bouffée de cigarette afin de masquer son émotion.

– Nous sommes des soldats, reprit-il, et nous avons tous vu la mort. Moi, je peux même dire que je l'ai frôlée. Alors vous pouvez me croire : je n'en ai pas peur. D'autre part, je dois vous faire un aveu : je n'ai pas de chance, moi, le mauvais sort me poursuit depuis ma naissance...

– Oui, précisa Laura, il a suffi qu'il parle de malchance et de mauvais sort pour qu'ils l'interrompent tous les deux en même temps avec de grands gestes, comme s'il blasphémait. Ils avaient d'ailleurs raison, ajouta-t-elle en le regardant. Car nous nous connaissions depuis trois ans et nous étions en quelque sorte fiancés. Si Monsieur le Philosophe appelle ça malchance et mauvais sort...

– Toujours est-il, reprit Darie, qu'ils ne voulaient plus m'obéir quand je leur ai demandé de m'achever ou au moins de recharger mon fusil et de me le donner. Je leur ai même dit que s'ils y tenaient à tout prix je leur permettrais de me creuser une tombe, comme pour Ivan. Qu'est-ce que je ne leur ai pas encore proposé ! ? De continuer à bavarder jusqu'au soir, pour leur expliquer ce qu'ils devraient dire une fois arrivés à Iasi, à qui ils devraient parler d'abord... Rien à faire. Alors, je crois bien que j'ai perdu patience et je me suis mis à les menacer.

Il reprit une cigarette, qu'Iliescu lui alluma d'un geste humble, les yeux humides, et il continua d'une voix étonnamment ferme :

– Vous êtes bons pour la Cour martiale ! Si nous rejoignons

le bataillon, je demanderai aussitôt que vous soyez traduits en Cour martiale pour insubordination et outrage à officier.

– A la grâce de Dieu, dit Zamfira sans oser lever les yeux. A la Cour martiale aussi, il y a des braves gens. On leur dira qu'on a fait notre devoir...

– Que vous aviez perdu beaucoup de sang, que vous aviez la fièvre et c'est peut-être pour ça que vous nous demandiez de recharger votre fusil, parce que la faiblesse et la faim et la fatigue vous enlevaient le jugement.

Darie les dévisagea avec une exaspération muette, puis jeta sa cigarette et se leva brusquement. En quelques pas, il fut auprès du capitaine.

– Qu'allons-nous en faire, mon capitaine ? Voilà qu'ils n'obéissent plus aux ordres, à présent.

Le capitaine le regarda longuement, comme s'il essayait de le reconnaître, puis haussa les épaules et repartit. Darie le rattrapa.

– C'est moi, Darie, mon capitaine, aspirant Darie Constantin, de votre compagnie. Vous me connaissez. Nous avons encore bavardé pas plus tard que cette nuit, dans la plaine, après le départ d'Ivan.

Le capitaine s'arrêta et lui parla en soulignant chaque mot, avec une certaine sévérité, que tempérait néanmoins la cordialité du regard :

– Darie, *après six jours de feu* vous devriez savoir ce que signifie un ordre.

– Et cette phrase me semble la plus difficile à comprendre, intervint Laura. Que voulait-il bien dire par « vous devriez savoir ce que signifie un ordre » ?

– 11, rue des Ormeaux, à Iasi. 11, rue des Ormeaux.

Combien de fois leur ai-je répété cette adresse, de peur qu'ils ne l'oublient ou la confondent avec tant d'autres adresses murmurées ces derniers mois par tant d'autres blessés, tant d'autres mourants ? Car c'était leur deuxième année de guerre et ils avaient fait partie de je ne sais combien de sections, décimées les unes après les autres, jusqu'en juillet, lorsqu'on avait formé avec des rescapés cette section que je commandais et qui devait bientôt se faire décimer à son tour, après seulement six jours de feu, comme disait le capitaine. Iasi, 11, rue des Ormeaux, 11...

- Chez Mlle Laura, enchaînait Zamfira en souriant. Vous en faites pas, mon lieutenant, si on arrive avant vous, c'est chez elle qu'on ira d'abord. On lui dira que vous allez bientôt arriver, bientôt, et avec des galons en plus...

- Non, dit Darie, non, ne lui parlez pas de galons. Dites-lui seulement ce que je vous ai demandé de lui dire.

Il se sentit tout à coup à bout de forces et examina son bras blessé. Il avait toujours l'impression de saigner, d'être trempé de sang sous sa vareuse, il lui semblait que l'hémorragie durait depuis longtemps et il s'attendait sans cesse à voir des filets de sang dégouliner, chauds, sur la terre.

- Si vous ne retenez pas tout, reprit-il d'une voix faible, dites-lui au moins l'essentiel : nous nous connaissions depuis trois ans seulement et pourtant nous nous connaissions depuis toujours, nous avons été heureux depuis le commencement du monde et nous le resterons jusqu'à ce que s'éteigne la dernière étoile de la dernière galaxie. Rappelez-vous bien ce que je vais vous dire, car c'est le plus important : dites-lui que le tilleul

qu'elle sait, que nous savons, à Iasi, que ce tilleul-là nous a suffi. La première nuit où nous nous y sommes arrêtés est restée avec nous et elle demeurera notre nuit jusqu'à la fin du monde. Le tilleul ne secouera jamais ses fleurs. *Il ne peut plus les secouer.* Il nous appartient et tout ce qui nous appartient est hors du temps, n'a pas de durée...

Zamfira mouilla le mouchoir et lui essuya doucement, soigneusement, les lèvres, les joues, le front.

- On lui dira, mon lieutenant, vous en faites pas. Mais pour l'instant il faut vous reposer. On commence à voir les étoiles : il va être bientôt minuit et on devra repartir.

Toujours cachés dans le maïs, sous la poussière fine et amère qui sentait la fumée, ils parlaient bas, élevaient légèrement la voix seulement lorsque le chant des cigales devenait assourdissant.

- C'est extraordinaire qu'ils aient pu résister aussi longtemps, dit Laura. Et incroyable qu'ils aient réussi à se faufiler à travers les troupes russes, à trouver de l'eau et même de la vodka pour désinfecter sa plaie, qu'ils aient toujours eu à manger...

- Du maïs desséché, des racines, quelques biscuits, précisa Darie. Le cinquième jour, une tablette de chocolat trouvée par Iliescu dans la poche d'un soldat allemand mort. Des convois de prisonniers passaient sur la route, il y avait beaucoup de blessés, ils tombaient dans le fossé et y restaient jusqu'à ce que le bon Dieu ou une sentinelle du convoi suivant prenne pitié d'eux et abrège leurs souffrances. Iliescu avait appris où chercher et comment trouver ce qui nous était nécessaire : l'eau, les biscuits, les allumettes, le tabac. Mais il n'a jamais trouvé de pain.

- Comment se fait-il qu'ils ne se soient pas égarés ?

s'écria Laura. Comment ont-ils réussi, pendant si longtemps, à ne pas tomber nez à nez avec des villageois ? Car la moisson venait de commencer.

- Nous avons eu de la chance, c'est sûr, reprit Darie. Mais Zamfira avait un instinct de bête fauve, on aurait dit qu'il sentait l'homme de loin et alors nous nous cachions aussitôt. Nous nous sommes terrés toute une journée dans une meule de foin et nous entendions les femmes travailler à quelques centaines de mètres autour de nous... Mais mon accident me torturait plus que tout. Je ne sais pas comment ils ont fait pour me transporter durant tant de nuits, tantôt sur les fusils, tantôt dans une capote russe. Je ne m'en souviens pas. Je m'étais sans doute évanoui ou bien j'étais tellement épuisé que je ne me rendais plus compte de rien. Mais je pensais à Ivan, à notre conversation qui m'avait tellement impressionné. C'était quoi, sa bénédiction ? Parce que, lui, ils l'avaient porté moins d'une heure, tandis que moi, après la... chance que nous offrait sa bénédiction, ils me portaient nuit après nuit. Je me rappelle m'être demandé à un moment donné si Ivan n'avait pas *souhaité* l'accident, rien que pour pouvoir me rencontrer et vider son sac. Mais Iliescu et Zamfira, eux, ils n'étaient pour rien dans cette controverse philosophique !

- C'était point de la philosophie, mon lieutenant, chuchota Zamfira. C'était de la guigne...

- Voilà encore les corbeaux qui se rassemblent, dit Iliescu. Ça veut dire quoi, ça ?

Darie regarda, la main au-dessus des yeux car le soleil brûlait et sa lumière diffuse l'aveuglait.

- Des avions, grommela-t-il.

- Y a des avions aussi, mais ils volent haut, très haut, dit Zamfira. Les corbeaux, ils sont par là, tout près.

Pensif, Darie dit en souriant :

- Au fond, c'est ce que nous faisons aussi. Nous les suivons, les nôtres, mais de loin, de plus en plus loin. Il est à combien de dizaines de kilomètres, maintenant, le front ? Parce que ça fait plusieurs jours qu'on n'entend plus nos mortiers, même plus nos canons...

- Les Allemands, s'ils font partir leur contre-offensive, dit Iliescu, on sera en plein front dans un jour ou deux.

- *Nous sommes foutus* !* marmonna Darie. *Foutus pour l'éternité* !*

Il essaya de se rendormir mais la chaleur lui paraissait plus torride que jamais et il avait beau changer de position, son bras blessé lui semblait toujours plus plein de sang, de sang qu'il entendait battre dans ses tempes, battre à lui en crever les tympans. Zamfira et Iliescu dormaient, un mouchoir sur la figure, la main sur leurs fusils, mais ils se réveillaient à tour de rôle, brièvement, le temps de jeter un coup d'œil sur lui. Tard, après le coucher du soleil, Darie comprit pourquoi il n'arrivait pas à s'endormir : ils se trouvaient dans le champ de maïs où ils étaient entrés bien des jours auparavant, il ne savait plus combien. Ils se trouvaient à quelques centaines de mètres, ou peut-être moins, de la tombe d'Ivan. Il avait reconnu les lieux dès l'aube, lorsqu'ils s'y étaient terrés, épuisés, le souffle court, comme des bêtes traquées. Il les avait reconnus mais était trop exténué pour parler. C'était la nuit où il avait essayé de marcher à nouveau, en prenant appui sur une canne improvisée - un solide piquet de tente déniché par Iliescu. Chaque pas était incertain et il avançait craintive-

ment au bord du chemin, aidé par l'un ou par l'autre et se reposant toutes les cinq ou dix minutes. Ils firent à peine une dizaine de kilomètres en plus de cinq heures, ce qui était toutefois mieux que les nuits précédentes, lorsqu'on le portait.

– Nous sommes revenus à notre point de départ, chuchota-t-il très bas, afin de ne pas les réveiller. Nous sommes revenus auprès d'Ivan.

Il avait envie de rire, tellement absurde lui apparaissait soudain leur aventure. S'il n'avait pas craint de les réveiller, il se serait faufilé entre les tiges de maïs et les aurait attendus sur la tombe d'Ivan.

– Au fond, peu importe, murmura-t-il. Plus rien ne compte. *Nous sommes foutus** ! De tous les points de vue. Je le savais depuis le début. Tout ce qui s'est passé depuis le 8 novembre...

Une autre fois, un soir, toujours dans le maïs – mais quand ? *quand* ? – il avait sursauté en entendant Zamfira lui demander :

– Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé après le 8 novembre, mon lieutenant ?

– Toutes sortes de choses, avait-il répondu en souriant. Des choses qui m'ont fait et m'ont défait et puis m'ont refait...

– Avoue pourtant que tu n'as pas osé leur parler *de moi*. Tu leur as parlé de la Laure de Pétrarque et je me demande ce qu'ils ont pu comprendre de cette longue et laborieuse phénoménologie de la Muse, d'autant plus que tu avais la fièvre. Non qu'ils aient été incapables de comprendre, mais en quoi pouvait les intéresser une romance du début de la Renaissance italienne ? Si tu leur avais parlé *de moi*, de Iasi, du 11, rue des Ormeaux, c'eût été différent. Ça les aurait intéressés

parce que c'était sans doute leur histoire aussi...

– On repart, mon lieutenant, chuchota Zamfira.

Il se leva, non sans peine, aidé par Iliescu, mais, bien qu'épuisé, il partit résolument, mû par une sorte d'impatience. A un pas en avant, Zamfira lui frayait un passage entre les tiges de maïs. Le ciel n'était pas étoilé mais on n'apercevait pas de nuages non plus, si ce n'est, très haut, une nappe de brouillard grisâtre. Et, pour la première fois, on n'entendait pas les cigales. Les feuilles de maïs remuaient par moments avec un bruissement sourd et métallique, comme agitées par un souffle qu'ils ne pouvaient sentir.

– C'est pas par là, mon lieutenant ! cria Zamfira en le voyant se diriger rapidement, avec assurance, vers un endroit dégagé, bordé par deux grands arbres. Par là, on retomberait sur le chemin par où nous sommes venus ce matin.

– C'est bien ce que je veux vous montrer, dit Darie sans s'arrêter. Je veux vous montrer que nous sommes revenus à l'endroit même d'où nous sommes partis il y a une dizaine ou une douzaine de jours, je ne sais plus. Tenez, c'est à quelques mètres à gauche, sous cet arbre, que vous avez creusé sa tombe. La tombe d'Ivan, précisa-t-il tandis que Zamfira le retenait par son bras valide.

– C'est pas sa tombe, mon lieutenant. Ivan est enterré loin derrière nous, à l'est. A quarante kilomètres au moins.

– Et pourtant, c'est bien là que je vous ai vus creuser. Venez, je vais vous montrer.

Ils s'arrêtèrent après quelques mètres. Le trou n'était pas profond. Comme si ceux qui l'avaient creusé s'étaient rendu compte qu'il était trop grand et avaient

renoncé à le terminer. Ou peut-être le temps leur avait-il manqué.

– C'est pas celui-là, mon lieutenant, dit doucement Zamfira. Ce trou-là, il a été creusé pour autre chose. Je sais pas pourquoi, mais regardez : il fait plus de trois mètres et là, à côté, y en a un autre de pareil, sauf qu'il est pas droit, on dirait qu'il tourne comme pour faire une croix. Et y en a peut-être encore d'autres, plus loin, seulement on les voit pas d'ici.

– Filons, dit Iliescu après un coup d'œil sur le ciel. On risque de se faire saucer.

Il commença à bruiner lorsqu'ils atteignirent la route. Ils la traversèrent afin de ne pas se faire surprendre par des camions russes et marchèrent sur un sentier parallèle, à deux cents mètres environ.

– Si ça tombe plus fort, dit Iliescu lors d'une halte, on aura de la veine : on trouvera de la flotte plus facilement. Mais s'il pleut plusieurs jours de suite, les eaux vont monter, ça va gonfler le fleuve et il sera plus dur à traverser.

Pour Darie, sous le crachin dense et transperçant, chaque pas devenait plus pénible et il devait serrer les dents afin de ne pas gémir. Zamfira marchait à ses côtés, Iliescu à une vingtaine de mètres devant. Tard, vers trois heures, il leur fit signe de s'arrêter et revint en courant.

– Y a un village. Il faut retraverser la route et essayer de passer par là-bas, dit-il, le bras tendu.

Darie, haletant, profitait de l'arrêt pour souffler mais il continuait, avec une sorte de hargne, à réprimer tout gémissement.

– On va s'approcher tout doucement de la route, poursuivit Iliescu, et on va guetter. Y a un tournant pas loin derrière. Dès qu'on pourra, entre deux camions, on traversera à toute vitesse. Moi, je passe devant, ajouta-t-il et il s'éloigna.

Ils attendaient, accroupis sous la pluie, à quelques mètres de la route, cachés derrière un maigre buisson. Tous feux éteints, des camions roulaient devant eux, mais de plus en plus espacés. Au bout d'une dizaine de minutes, Iliescu se dressa brusquement, démarra au pas de course, plié en deux, et sa silhouette se perdit rapidement dans la nuit.

– Soyez prêt, mon lieutenant, chuchota Zamfira, ça va être votre tour. On laisse passer ce camion-là et puis... Allez-y ! cria-t-il entre ses dents, quelques secondes plus tard. Ça y est ! Allez-y, mon lieutenant !

Avec un effort, en geignant de douleur, Darie se dressa brusquement et démarra du plus vite qu'il put en direction de la route, sa canne au poing afin de s'y appuyer si besoin. Mais, constatant rapidement qu'il pouvait s'en passer, il la jeta et se mit à courir à grands pas à travers la plaine. Il apercevait le fleuve au loin et, s'il n'avait pas entendu son capitaine l'appeler, il aurait continué sa course. Il s'arrêta, tourna la tête et le vit à deux pas.

– Nous y sommes, mon capitaine, nous sommes arrivés à temps. Mais où est le pont ?

Le capitaine haussa les épaules.

– Regardez mieux, Darie. Il y a toutes sortes de ponts sur terre. Celui-ci, que vous avez sous les yeux, mène chez nous, à la maison.

– A la maison. Chez nous, à la maison, répéta Darie. Et quand nous serons arrivés à la maison, que

deviendrons-nous, mon capitaine ? Je vous l'ai déjà demandé et vous ne m'avez pas répondu. Que deviendrons-nous une fois à la maison ? Ce serait affreux si nous ne pouvions jamais nous reposer.

Il descendait aux côtés du capitaine et, lorsqu'ils arrivèrent très près, il s'aperçut que cette foule silencieuse dont il entendait pourtant les conversations, ces convois qui, lui avait-il semblé, attendaient le signal du départ, s'ébranlaient déjà, avançaient, d'ailleurs assez vite, au-dessus du fleuve, comme s'ils franchissaient un pont invisible. Il s'arrêta sur la rive.

– Vous venez aussi, Darie ? lui demanda le capitaine.

Puis il se dirigea vers les hommes qui les attendaient sans chercher à cacher leur impatience mais dont les regards les embrassaient avec une profonde cordialité. Les premiers commençaient à passer quand la lumière l'aveugla comme si le soleil se levait de tous côtés à la fois et Darie vit alors le pont sur lequel les autres avançaient de plus en plus vite, un pont qui paraissait naître de cette lumière d'or qui l'aveuglait et, au même instant, il fut assourdi par une formidable explosion où s'entremêlaient étrangement de gigantesques cloches de cristal et des cymbales de bronze et le son des flûtes et le cri des cigales.

Il sentit la main de Laura sur son front, s'entendit appeler mais garda les yeux clos.

– Ne me réveille pas, Laura. Laisse-moi encore les voir. Laisse-moi les voir passer le pont...

– C'est pas Laura, mon lieutenant. C'est nous, Iliescu et Zamfira.

– C'est donc vrai ? demanda Darie sans ouvrir les yeux. Cette fois-ci *c'est vrai* ?

– C'est vrai, mon lieutenant, bredouilla Zamfira d'une

voix étranglée. Qu'est-ce qu'on doit dire à Mlle Laura ?

– Dites-lui de ne pas avoir peur. Que tout est tel qu'il doit être, et c'est bon. Dites-lui que c'est très bon. Comme une grande lumière. Comme rue des Ormeaux...

Il se leva brusquement et, sans les regarder, repartit très vite, au pas de gymnastique. La lumière dorée du pont avait disparu et le fleuve ne semblait plus aussi proche. Il l'apercevait, le devinait plutôt, loin devant lui, à l'ouest. Mais il courait, avec une joie enfantine qu'il croyait oubliée, il courait, en proie à une béatitude sans nom ni sens.

Et alors il se rappela : *je ne les ai pas bénis*.

Il s'arrêta, non sans un certain regret. Il entendait battre son cœur, de plus en plus fort. Il eut un dernier regard pour le fleuve, qui lui parut s'évanouir lentement dans les brumes. Il hésita un moment puis tourna résolument le dos et se dirigea à grands pas vers le champ de maïs où ils l'avaient caché – *mais quand ? quand ? dans quelle vie ?*