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Thesis abstract
The Orient image in Princess Bibesco creation

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The use of French outside France as a way of expression among the non-French cultures. Brought up both diverse and appreciated talents, that contributed, through artistic creations, to the development of what we call today “franchophonie”. Romania finds itself among the European countries that manifested a distinctive interest towards this language, representing a territory that for centuries had been in difficult situations due to Turkish domination.

In the end, the Ottoman dependence will stop but there would still remain a pagan influence, that we can find today in the folklore customs and traditions.

Martha Bibesco as well chose to write in French, being aware that on one hand she could stand out in the French saloons, and on the other hand promote her mother land, through the used themes, the structures and the language in her works. Moreover, princess Bibesco, like Panait Istrati, will embellish this language with a new breath, simplicity and orality, and a genuine taste for authenticity characteristics lost long before by the Orient.

Her texts are both the result of artistic calling, or as consequence of her cultural identity and mystic mission, meant to present to the entire world the numerous dimensions of the Orient that she will analyze throughout her writing career.

The affiliation to one of the most renamed dynasty of Levant (the Mavrocordatos , great interpreters of the Ottoman Porte) , the mystic dimension of her trips to Persia, caught Constantinople of Jerusalem to find the ancestors as well as the depth of the Romanian spirituality emphasized through the folklore impregnated with the Oriental culture, are themes that appear constantly in the writer`s works that have the same nucleus: the Orient.

The purpose of the research in question is the approach of this notion. How is the oriental culture presented in the Bibesco creation? Can one talk about a multi-angle Orient? One, inherited (from the Mavrocordatos dynasty), another “created” at the oriental palace Mogosoia, her Romanian residence, one , “real lived“ (materialized in her trips) and another “concern” (in the Romanian folklore, that represents, on one hand, the return to the origins of humankind, and on the other hand the exotic element for the foreign public)? Does Romania belong to the Orient or the Occident in the Bibesco creation? Is princess Martha Bibesco an Oriental in the Occident? And finally what is in fact Martha Bibesco`s Orient? These are questions that got our attention and are the theme of this research. Therefore, the key words of this thesis are: francophone , travelling , literature , Orient , history , geography ,

autobiography , multiple identity , memories , stereotype , prototype , cliché , exotism , ethnography , folklore , qualitative , space-time.

Paradoxically, this thesis about the Orient, starts with a chapter about Europe (as the title *La nymphe Europe* or the *Bibesco memoires* indicate). *Mes vies antérieures* (the first memoires volume) is a fusion of domains that gradually transfers us into the world of fable, mythology , religion, geography and authentic history (confirmed by the chroniclers), reaching the most assumed literary interpretations. Subjunctive and at the same time by princess Bibesco herself.

The volume referred to is , undoubtedly , an intense study that underlines the affiliation one origin the Greek whose successors are the Orient and the Occident. The Mavrocordatos (Greek that lived in the Fanar neighborhood of Constantinople), these famous interpreters of the Ottoman Porte are the ones that changed the destiny of humanity. The affiliation of Bibesco to this dynasty is the leaving point of our thesis that sets to demonstrate that the Bibesco creation on the whole , talks about characters and settings that constantly send us to the idea of Orient. In spite of the fact that her ancestors are Greek, the duty of the Turkish throughout entire centuries make us conclude that the Mavrocordatos impregnated with a strong Oriental influence.

Through their mission as intermediaries between the two great powers - the Oriental and Occidental – the Mavrocordatos become the “voice” of the Ottoman empire around the world and the main binding around between the two entities. They are the “secret keepers” the hospodar`s counselors , the Fanar princess that reigned in Wallachia for two and a half centuries.

The first chapter of our thesis- „The image of the inherited Orient/ Historic of the Bibesco’s Memoirs” approaches theoretical issues (the connection between memoires and autobiography) but also elements related to history, geography, mythology and religion. At the same time, we have established to what degree princess Bibesco’s memoires contain real information, historical certified and to what extent the autobiography is at the limit of fiction. Taking into account the fact that „*Mes vies antérieures*” is a first person narrative writing, but with a shifting protagonist as the story of “Phoenix” is outlined, we have analysed the trio “I-YOU-WE” as an invariable in Bibesco’s literary work. And this is because from the dynasty of Mavrocordatos – (Roxana Scarlatti or “the mother plant”, then Alexander called “Phoenix” together with all his direct or indirect heirs and the martyr prince Constantin Brancoveanu)-until Marta, who receives the mission of preserving the blood of her ancestors, the idea of continuity becomes the nucleus of the memoires. “*Mes vies antérieures*” are told through the

multiplicity of “I” which is often mixed with “We” and “You”. Introduced in the text, their role is to emphasize the writer’s belonging to one of the most famous dynasties of the Orient, thus becoming a moralist for the humanity. The princess begins with the hypostasis of Roxana Scarlatti and then she will become Alexander “The Exaporit” (the hospodar’s secret adviser), Nicolae Mavrocordatos, his sons and grandchildren until Constantin Brancoveanu. From our point of view, the pronouns superpose, link and search for each other precisely to underline the general idea of unity and to emphasize the missionary role of a single person who carries the influence and mark of her ancestors. From the trio “I- You- We”, the only one being resuscitated, like the phoenix, is the I/ the self, having each time a new aspect but the same aim. “I” will often replace “We” which brings together the whole dynasty of Mavrocordatos.

As for the statute of “You”, we have ascertained that it appears in Bibesco’s work having different roles: at the beginning, that of a novice, then that of a witness or spectator to the history it is presented, and then in the end it becomes a strong “I”, initiated, decanted, but never detached from the collective “We”. In addition, it appears under two aspects: an explicit one (in the multiple former existences of the writer) and a deduced one (by the reader, in the last part of “Nymphe Europe” where the princess, after a long journey for identity in the remote past, where she covered three centuries of history, she comes to life). Bibesco is aware of the fact that the impact on the reader is precisely secured by her predecessors, the ones who predestine her further life.

During this research we have pointed out that the interpretation of the ancestors’ oration is highly important in persuading the reader that “the terrestrial mission” of the princess (her entire existence) is not a common literary script (fictional) but a great assumed responsibility which she is permanently interested in. In this respect we have considered important to mention in our thesis that the documents from the famous library of Mavrocordatos, widespread around the world, have been minutely studied by Marthe Bibesco in order to achieve a better acknowledgment and understanding of her origins. She will visit Constantinopol, Bucharest – the Vacaresti monastery (these being the only places where a large number of the phanariot princes’ books are kept) with the aim of preparing her future masterpiece *Nymphe Europe*.

Thus the princess will put side by side “ the self/I identity” (inherited) and “the present I” (current, existing), permanently trying to understand them, because the Bibesco self has its origins at the beginning of the XVIIth century. The idea of the writer’s reincarnation, her rebirth under the motto “Cinere Renascitur” is the basis of our study. All

we are left to do is to analyse the reason why Marthe Bibesco decided to insert in her creation the birds as a symbol of a period from her life. Therefore, the sacred bird, Phoenix, which appears in her memoirs, confirms her inner evolution, her moral rebirth and the projection of her ancestors after experiencing hopelessness and interdiction during her childhood and youth, represented by the image of the green parrot. We will then observe if the identification with all these characters actually emphasize the successive experience of some previous lives with the aim of having a better understanding of her existing one. Taking into consideration the assumption that Marthe Bibesco's goal is to acknowledge her self, to find herself, to return to her origins, this research verifies on one hand, if her attraction is justified and on the other hand, if the link between the princess and the Orient has a real fundament.

At the same time, we have tried to identify the religious aspect of the princess' memoirs in the chapter about the martyr prince Constantin Brancoveanu and his sons. Through their sacrifice, these characters align themselves with Phoenix, because death is a mandatory condition of the rebirth and the past is future generating. After analysing these historical and legendary aspects, our attention is focused on the Mogosoia Palace, a masterpiece of the Romanian architecture, the symbol of prince Brancoveanu's creativity, restored by Marthe Bibesco. We titled this subchapter of our thesis "The created Orient", authentic cultural cradle, artistic and political, whose restoration becomes for the princess a moral necessity. The act of restoring Mogosoia has, on one hand, the meaning of carrying on what Brancoveanu left unfinished because of his premature death and, on the other hand, to bring to completion an action which was part of a Phoenix heir's duties.

The oriental dimension as a geographical reality is exploited in the second chapter of the thesis, where we have approached the image of "the real/experienced" Orient from *Les huit paradis*, the princess' first literary work, having as initial form the poem *Les pavots blancs*.

During our research we had the chance to come into possession of the copy of the original manuscript of the poem mentioned above, from the Bibesco Holdings at the University of Austin, Texas. Thus, this dimension of the Orient wants to prove that the Bibesco journey is a way of rebuilding and acknowledging her remote past. Therefore, the journey along the Orient comes as a consequence and a sequel of the first chapter. It is also a demand in the act of searching the origins. Firstly, we have tried to define the concept of "the Orient" (having as a starting point Edward Saïd's work) and to understand the perception of "the other" in the occidental world. Then, our study aims to analyse to what extent and who approaches the topic of the oriental voyage in their literary works. Moreover, stress was laid on Bibesco's novel as an autobiography. Marthe Bibesco's voyage is not a metaphor of her

writing but a device of finding her “self”, of discovering an other one which has its echo in the History and in this “experienced” Orient, geographically attested.

The new dimension of the Orient entails new questions in our research. Are the notions punctual and objective or is Bibesco’s perspective rather subjective, reaching the idealization of the oriental representation? That is why we have drawn a parallel between *Les huit paradis* and Claude Anet’s work about Persia, or between *Les huit paradis* and Bibesco’s other voyage journals *Jour d’Égypte* and *Croisade pour l’anémone*. The purpose is to demonstrate that through her style, Princess Bibesco presents us another type of Orient, an aspect which has not been outlined by any other writer until her. In her literary work, the notions of “picturesque” and “exotic” go beyond the function of a cliché. Marthe distinguishes herself through the fineness of observing each detail and thorough style, the imagination wherewith she associates things and places which together create special perspectives, sometimes really surprising ones.

We have analysed these three major aspects that the writer insists upon: the flora which appears described in long paragraphs through all her work, then the local colour of Bibesco’s paradises and at last, the image of the woman with the veil. These are constituent parts of the same puzzle which, assembled, shape the image of the Orient in the generic sense of the term. In this case, the notion of “exoticism” appears as a vivid and curious reaction in relation to the oriental picture which the princess “relishes” with an obvious passion. As readers we will notice in *Les huit paradis* the most complex vegetable inventory in the entire literary work of Bibesco.

As for the local colour, our study establishes if there is an exact spatial reference or not, or the princess simply takes the freedom to write down only what she considers significant. Taking into consideration the fact that Bibesco’s work adopts the structure of a personal diary, the chronology is elliptic (because it only appears the number and the month) and the digressions are extensive and numerous, all we are left to conclude is that the subjectivity of the discourse is a defining aspect in the princess’ literary work. However, it seemed important to analyse if by local colour we refer only to chromatics or to more complex aspects (if the presentation of these places also leads to the history and identity of the people).

Simultaneously with the vegetal and the local colour, our attention is focused on the oriental woman as a symbol of her belonging race. Her esthetical representation is not a simple cliché but an archetype. Marthe Bibesco does not customize the Oriental Woman as Nerval, Flaubert, Loti and Barres. In her case we cannot identify a character like Salomé,

Salammbô or Aziyadé. The princess is in search of the *oriental woman* as a defining element of this territory, as a vital part of a whole ensemble. She raises the feminine character to an abstract level which brings together an entire system of mentalities, an overall view of the oriental world; the writer never approaches a certain typology of the female, but the oriental woman as a symbol of her belonging community.

Given the fact that the voyage journal can influence the reader significantly, we have decided to approach its role too, in relation to Bibesco's literary work. What is its statute? That of a witness, accomplice, critic or all three of them? This is why, we must not take into account only one work but all the dimensions of the Orient we approach in this thesis; they imply a continuity and an interdependence which arouse the reader's interest.

Given that the travelling journal can significantly influence the reader, we've decided to approach the latter's role as well reported to the Bibesco creation. What is his or her statute? The one of witness, accomplice, critic or all of them? Therefore, we do not need to take into consideration only one work, but all the dimensions of the Orient analyzed in this thesis; they imply a continuity and an interdependence that draw the reader's attention.

In order to demonstrate that Martha Bibesco's works are diversified taking into account its subjects, the historic inherited Orient and the real lived Orient, we added the conserved Orient from the Romanian folklore. We saw to what extent the Bibesco's interest for the return to origins, to authentic and to the beginnings of humanity (present in the customs, rituals and traditions of the Romanian village) is confirmed in *Isvor , le pays des saules*. Therefore, the third chapter of this study starts by defining the folklore notion in comparison to the ethnography.

Taking as a starting point some theoretician's opinions (such as Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, Arthur Gorovei, Romulus Vuia, Ovidiu Birlea, Dumitru Caracostea, Ovid Densusianu, Ioan Aurel Candrea, Mihai Pop, Arthur van Gennep) we set the common and the distinctive elements of the two subjects above mentioned. The report between the mere existence and the universe of the village was approached from Mircea Eliade and Lucian Blaga's perspective. Due to the fact that the rural space has an important role in this chapter, our intention is to decipher the complexity of these characteristics that make an archetype out of the folklore. As a particular form of exotism and an inexhaustible source of the authentic and primitive, the Romanian village from *Osvor* participates to the identification of a new face of the Orient (conserved) where space and time interfere, it is about the different "journey" that becomes Eliade's eternal return. In this case, the question we must ask is "does this new Bibesco journey to the origins of humanity, to the primitive, preserve the same

strong wish for seeking the origins? It is already known that the princess interest for the traditions and customs from the Romanian folklore makes this novel a complex anthology of cultural and religious elements of the village. They do not lose their identity and meaning, because Martha Bibesco carries out an inventory without modifying and censoring them. Therefore, we can see in this “conserved Orient” the fusion between the temporal and spatial dimension, rituals, superstitions and incantations and also the interference death-wedding, with the mere purpose of creating a special universe, where life and death coexist and where the man becomes eternal. Through the way of thinking and acting, the latter becomes “qualitative”, in Bernea’s terminology, space and time are “Sacred” so that the peasant takes back with loyalty what has already been done, with an unceasing repetition with the conservation of the folklore as its main purpose. In this case, past, present and future are reunited. Due to the fact that in the traditional folkloric mentality, the future is open to the possible, it becomes present and the latter becomes past.

Just as in the other dimensions of the Orient, in the last one, the conserved Orient, the spatial and temporal dimension get together in order to create a “qualitative time-space”, that resembles more a “chora” in the Bakhtian terminology (resulted from the alterity of the multiple self sensitive and receptive to the past beats) rather than a simple place/ “topos”. They fusion becoming an integrative part of the identity of a people that is different through its folkloric specificity.

Another aspect worth analyzing is related to the expression “the populist spirit” or “the spirit of the people” that links us to the individual community relations. We shall see that the Romanian village does not seek originality or individualism. They are guided by the idea of crowd, of harmony and is based on groups memory. Through its behavior, the community protects its values and conserves its traditions that will later become a source of nostalgia for the Romanian reader and a special form of exotism for the “other” (the stranger). Here, the princess is integrated in the rural universe through the old lady Uta (the sage of Isvor) that becomes a bridge between the two worlds. The initiation of the Vallachian princess supposes three stages: firstly, what she sees as a ritual, traditions, customs observer; then, what she is told, playing the role of receiver, and finally, what she learns from the old lady Uta. The three statuses interfere and presume an implication into the village life, a major interest for it, with values different than ours.

Here are some of the numerous leads that represent the topic of our research about Martha Bibesco’s Orient. Due to the fact that personal history meets great History, the voice of the blood (of the Phoenix) doesn’t cease to make itself heard in a Europe that is like a

nymph that lives through centuries guided by the sacred bird's principle and its oriental motto, <<Cinere Renascitur>>. In this context, geography joins the historic line in order to "weave" together the world's destiny. The purpose of our research is to emphasize the inclination of the Bibesco works towards the Orient. This first dimension identified in Princess Bibesco's memoirs, probably, remains in the most important, the pillar of the other two: the one of the lived Orient and the one of the conserved Orient. Consequently, we insisted on her desire of knowing her past, which also explains her need to travel to the Orient and to go back to the most pure origins of humanity (through folklore).

As a consequence, firstly we approached a "previous" experience of her terrestrial existence in this historic inherited Orient from Phoenix. Moreover, we discussed about a created Orient (to the Mogosoiaia palace, that she calls "her Orient corner"), a lived Orient and idealized in her voyage notes where the princess acts rather as a subjective observer and rarely critic' finally we approached the image of the Orient conserved in folklore. The vocation for this culture is constant in most of her works and exploited under different shapes. This concept will never get a depreciatory meaning. Nevertheless, Martha Bibesco seeks the legend, the charm, the Oriental mirage. To her, the term Orient does not define that closed space where everyone wants to escape to, but the authentic land, able to offer to the explorer the most amazing show.

If we were to sum up this thesis in one word, the most suitable would be "Return", as it has a major impact in the psycho-moral universe of the writer. It appears in our research as a key element. Therefore, we identified three main axes: the return to origins (the first chapter), the return to the territories influenced by the ancestors (the second chapter) and the return to the authentic conserved in the Romanian folklore (the last chapter).