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# Major Language, Minor Destiny? The Space of Francophone Liberty

Simona MODREANU<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

As a semiotic being, producing sense, man lives in a symbolic universe, where language plays an essential part. For a writer, the choice of a “major” language, like French, is problematic because it represents the beginning of a complex process, sometimes conflicting, involving two or several cultural traditions, history and life experience. But it is also a chance to define a francophone polyphonic “space”, beyond all geographical or institutional considerations, beyond physical space or concrete time, where a writer (like the Romanian-Swiss one, Marius Daniel Popescu) feels free to develop, throughout a language which is different in many ways from the classical French, a new literature, disregarding traditional genres and usual constraints.

*Keywords:* francophone literature; dialogism; polyphony; in-between; linguistic over-awareness; deterritorialization.

## Introduction

Man is a semiotic being, an *enunciating subject* (Coquet, 1997: 224) who generates sense and, in his turn, interprets the meaning of the words and gestures of another person. In spite of the material appearance which surrounds us, man lives in a symbolic universe in which language plays an essential part. Since a very long time – not to say since always – the social being has no longer found himself in the immediate presence of reality, his knowledge is intermediated by language, which has as a consequence the fact that, according to Ernst Cassirer (1975: 43) he “converses constantly with himself. He has so much surrounded himself with linguistic forms, artistic images, mythical symbols, and religious

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rites, that he cannot see or know anything without interposing this artificial mediating element.” (Cassirer: 44)

It is by means of language that man inherits a complex system of values in the form of traditions, religions, morals, arts, etc., a system he carries on and/or transforms. This process is especially obvious in the field of literary creation which, transposed in a “major” language (Deleuze, 1975), may touch and influence a greater number of persons and, little by little, change their mental frames or the life vision.

Another direction of our approach focuses on Francophonie, especially francophone literature, which we consider to be problematic in more than one respect. To begin with, the Francophonie seems to engender paradoxes: on the one hand, it reunites around one language, a major one – French –, on the other hand it expresses more than ever before the linguistic and cultural diversity of people. The Francophonie is also problematic as, seemingly glossocentric, in reality it configures an identity starting from multiple and not always convergent or harmonious elements. Dressed in monolingual arrays, but in order to speak about multiculturalism and otherness. Fiercely defended in its virginal purity at home, but in other regions constantly and deliberately associated with the most creative activity, the one which gives a language its primary liveliness and richness. The supreme paradox is perhaps the one of this logic of exclusion: the Hexagon turned the French language into an enclave surrounded by academic and legislative walls, while elsewhere it is a fertile ground, a generative matrix, a flexible and malleable flesh, promised to all, accepting sacrileges and twisting in the name of the liberty of thought and writing. Nothing is more refined but also more difficult to get to than the classic French, nothing richer and more effervescent than this creolized language, born from the mix of all the frustrations, the humiliations and the dreams of beauty. The French does not really feel at ease with the French language, the francophone does. The former hardly has the right to touch the language, to feel it, to abuse it, to love it, and to hate it. He has to respect it, to look after its eternal endurance, to contemplate it on a pedestal. The francophone may undertake any audacity that his language often forbids and discovers with wonder a space without fixed strings, a moving root.

It is in this area of exceptional liberty given only by language, without geopolitical or institutional limits, that one can find the specificity of the “francophone space”, brilliantly illustrated, among others, for several years, by the Romanian writer established in 1990 in the French-speaking Switzerland, Marius Daniel Popescu. He did not know any French before arriving in Lausanne, today he writes all his texts directly in this “no man’s langue”, as it was called by another great stateless Romanian, the poet Gherasim Luca. He feels free and he refuses any literary yoke – a type of liberation which did not manifest itself in his first writings in Romanian. Perceived as an area of cognitive, pragmatic, and emotional freedom, the Francophonie is open to the linguistic and even symbolic delights

forbidden to native speakers. As the contours of this notion remain vague, the great writers who illustrate it (Kundera, Makine, Chamoiseau or Mabanckou, for example) take advantage of it in order to create for themselves a fictitious because fictional identity, relatively free in comparison with the mother tongues as well as with the adopted tongue. A word-play, a play with time, with the “I,” everything is allowed. It seems that we have more freedom in the language of the other, which, after all, very soon is no longer completely the language of the other, as it receives a transplant of cultural weight and becomes embellished.

### Methodology

The research areas of this study are quite broad, as they include Francophone studies (under the larger cover of the Cultural Studies), linguistics, semiology, theories of identity, especially of the identity space, and francophone literature. Two are the main background theoretical pillars of our approach: on one hand, the epistemological model centered on the *root-rhizome* and *detrterritorialization* concepts, as developed by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the notion of *in-between* as a specific feature of every literature issued from two or several cultures and extremely familiar to the Romania psychic structure; on the other hand, on the *creolization* theories lately explored mainly by Lise Gauvin, Edouard Glissant and Michel Beniamino, concerning the creation at the *crossroads of languages* and different cultural influences.

Our study proceeds by applying these notions to the novels of a Romanian-Swiss writer, Marius Daniel Popescu, in order to prove that real literature goes far beyond theories, introducing an infinity of shades and that the fictional identity and space thus created constitute a “land” of exceptional freedom and a very rich intellectual, cultural and linguistic experience.

### The Constraints of a Major Language

The meeting of two different cultural areas, although related, belongs to the field of cross-cultural semiotics which encounters the set of issues belonging to *detrterritorialization* (Deleuze, 1975), and favours the notion of the *in-between*. It seems that this non-space has always been a fertile ground and an area privileged by the archaic Romanian mentality and, later, by these writers who knew the glory in and by means of French as an adoptive language, like Cioran, Ionesco, Panait Istrati and many others.

Daniel Sibony (1991) defines the *in-between* as “a type of break-link between two terms, with the distinctive feature that the space of the break and the one of the link are greater than we believe them to be.” In other words, in the space of the

in-between the break appears where the space of another link opens, the one of recruitment and of integration. Any piece of writing practices the in-between of two languages, a symbolic and mythical area where the source language, silenced and relegated, is potentiated, it invests the field of the unconscious, while the linguistic code of the new language of expression is actualized, giving birth to a new language and to the author's style.

For the francophone writer, the existence of this intermediary area with vague contours brings to the front the issues of the *écart* in the novel. What is this frontier writing, floating between fragments reminding of its strangeness, either by its ontological charge of a vision nourished by the experience which is unknown to the receiving language, either by a metalinguistic plunge to the primary roots of the word? Lise Gauvin (1997) has already discussed about the *linguistic over-awareness* of which the francophone writers testify in various manners, in the sense that they offer, at the heart of their identity issue, an analysis of language and the manner in which the connection language/literature is articulated in different contexts. According to Gauvin, these complex relations are at least competitive, if not conflicting, an opinion with which we disagree, as the scope of the reasoning of those who choose French as literary language is much beyond the agora of a bilingual confrontation. A proof, among others, is this example of *ars poetica* by Marius Daniel Popescu:

*You tell yourself that you have just written a text with a girl and a woman, with poetry and prose in its words, before the words which you have just written, before the words that you are going to write, there is a sort of embryo of the text to come, of the text which can be published-the published text and you place this embryo before the words begin to inscribe themselves somewhere: any piece of writing needs perceptions, plans or mental spontaneities which form in your case the beginning of every text: once you begin to transform the embryo of the text into words, you subject yourself to rules which disrupt this embryo, which invite it to grow, to become a text which can be published following the traces which we call words and which, strangely, join together without forming crossroads, squares, sidewalks.*

*The genes of literature, of a published text, poetry or prose, are not the words; words represent only one of the means undertaken by human beings until now in order, at the same time, to translate, express, keep, interpret, form, and develop this embryo made of perceptions, which is the root of all forms of language. [...] Any word, all by itself, is an accomplished literary text which can be published. It is you, the embryo of the text, and you try hard, as many others did, do and will do, to transform this embryo into words, to define, by means of words, everything that this embryo represents before words, without words; fortunately, you are an embryo among other embryos, there is an infinity of embryos, there isn't an infinity of words. (Popescu, 2012)*

A study of the Eastern European discourse in the novel in general, Romanian in particular, underlines the mechanisms of the crossing of languages and cultures which are very different from the ones which characterize the African literature of French expression, for example. It does not have, for example, the inferiority complex of the dominated as, far from being the language of the colonizers, the French language represents (or, at least, it represented) an elitist aesthetic choice, a royal road to “play in the backyard of the powerful”. However, there is still ambivalence, fueled by the strangeness felt in the in-between of the two languages, two cultures. In other words, the imaginary and the expression of these writers are marked at the same time by the desire of opening to the world and by the growing of roots in the original cultural territory. It is not always comfortable to become a moving root and this causes a permanent conflict between authenticity and readability. This struggle manifests itself, on the one side, by a kind of systematic breaking-in which consists of subverting the French language so as to make it short of breath and the odor of hay and dung, this wild malleability of the Romanian language, on the other side, by a paradoxical disarray, formulated by Panait Istrati in the following manner: “I have come to the French literature with a Romanian soul, but I had to lend it a French mask. When I tried to give back to this soul its Romanian face, I was no longer able to do that; it had distanced itself because of the foreign face.” (Klener, 1970)

In addition, the original language revenges like an abandoned mistress and rejects the body which has become estranged. This has been the emblematic case of Istrati, warmly welcomed by the French, while the attitude adopted by the Romanian critics before and after the war proved to be extremely divergent, depending on the socio-cultural horizon of expectation. Essentially, the attacks against the writings of Istrati are based upon the idea of the mystification of the Romanian realities, which this writer accomplished in another language than his own, a reason for which, according to great critics such as Nicolae Iorga or George Călinescu, he cannot be considered a Romanian writer, in spite of the literary qualities that everybody agrees that he possesses.

Envisaging a field of study for the novel largely opened to the relations between cultural products coming from different civilizations, Semunjanga (1999) introduces new operative concepts which he names *transculturality* and *transgenerity*, with the purpose of studying the transversal relationship negotiated between different cultural products in a novel, the manner in which an artistic work unveils the culture of the Self and of the Other.

It has been obvious for a very long time – even before the concept of *intertextuality* was coined – that every artistic work is influenced by its relations with other works, on the formal plan as well as on the thematic plan. Based upon this postulate, many researchers contemplate the study of the francophone discourse in the novel as a transcultural object which is formed in the margin of the French

language and culture. It is obviously true for the francophone African literatures, but it is not the case of Romanian francophone writers, who do not bear upon their shoulders the weight of a traumatizing history with the French language and do not conceive, when leaving, any need of a revengeful *alteration* of the vocabulary, only the pleasure of *variations, rephrasing, and word plays* (Popescu, 2012) with, in the writing of the text, an easiness of increasing and intertwining several types of discourse and several enunciating instances.

Marius Daniel Popescu told us that he had often been asked, in Switzerland, why he inserted poems or word plays based on sounds in his writings. The interviewers thumbed their noses at the beginning, as if it had been a lack of taste or clumsiness resulted from his insufficient familiarity with the uses and the habits of the space of francophone literature. But the author has always answered, with the most matter-of-fact air in the world, that it was in this manner that he felt and that he was perfectly free to follow his inspiration, even if it meant offending “the orthodox” of the novelistic style. It is *his own style*:

*This girl had back shoes, the sidewalk was asphalted, it had been raining for half an hour, she was walking between the road and the high barrier of a private propriety, you believe that one word contains all the other words, you tell yourself that all the words can be concentrated in only one word, any word, you take the word girl, this girl you have just seen, she must have a mother and a father, somebody who waits for her at home, home is an apartment, in this apartment she has her own room, she walks with her pink schoolbag held above her head toward the entrance of the building where she lives with her parents or only with her mother, or only with her father prose – “1. Ordinary form of spoken or written language, which does not submit itself to the rules of rhythm and musicality specific to poetry. 2. Manner of writing which is specific to somebody, a school, etc. – Fam. Spoken or written words, no matter which.” – who is there with you and this little girl who has finished her second-grade classes today, she went out of her class then out of her school then she lifted her arm holding the schoolbag, she protects herself from the rain as she can, you keep looking at her in some area of your memory these words and their syllables and their letters, you say “g from girl who has left school, the rain is not a fool, g from greed of the soil for water, the rain on the schoolbag: g g g g g gleaming g g g giddy g g g g great g generations g g g g g g g g g g girl” who doesn’t care at all about poetry and prose and she doesn’t care about these literary genres, she goes home in this rain, she hasn’t been educated indoctrinated emancipated manipulated lead into this labyrinth without exit which offers along its way the walls poetry and prose. (Popescu, 2012: 62)*

Conformism amuses him, as he does not feel any false modesty in front of a “major” language. He uses it as he pleases, he feels at ease inside this new mental and linguistic space he has created, but he does not see any chain and he could not bear any hindrance in the crystallization of his creative drive. The tension center-periphery as regards the languages, he does not know it. Certainly, he is a minor writer, but there is no trace of pejorative connotation in this epithet, on the contrary, as in the case of music, the presence of a semi-tone in a major, Olympian structure, which risks becoming tedious, introduces this original and disquieting note which, far from breaking the harmony of the whole, elevates it. After a breaking wave of words which swirl and gush from everywhere, he thrusts phrases like: “The most disagreeable thing is that we have to use words in order to prove the uselessness of words.” (Popescu, 2007: 168) Or, if he is ever pompously asked about “the truth of words,” he has a staggering answer: “My words, all the words, shouldn’t exist!” (Majorel, 2012) Which does not prevent him from speaking during the same interview about the “vibration” of words and about the fact that they are “always signifying” for him, who has chosen to “move away from their non-sense, their absurdity” (*Idem*).

It is the case of an ethnical contamination of the French imaginary by the imaginary of the Romanian language. In the former, it is practically unthinkable to mock the aesthetic force of the word which creates a stable universe, according to the Aristotelian law of the excluded third. For the Romanian, the actual and the virtual of the words’ connotations, fixed by speech, have an equal force and the same ontological value, as they do not act separately or in an opposing manner. Essentially, the absurd does not exist in the Romanian vision of the world, as nothing could contradict a logic which allows (without naming it thus) the included third and several levels of reality, which maintains, consequently, an organic relation with time, non-linear, of a natural come-and-go between conventional delineations. Popescu’s narratives are confusing to an occidental reader, as he uses with ease and at every moment these temporal shifts, without any warning, following the functioning of his associative thinking, without caring to know whether “it is done” or not. The *forma mentis* of his texts is circular, but not of that circular symmetry of the circle which turns on itself, it would rather be the open one of the spiral. A kind of “endless column” by Brancusi. In addition, Marius Popescu drops apparently at random, at the end of a phrase, that: “The word ‘end’ should not exist.” (Popescu, 2007: 168) Another one. But the wave of words nonetheless submerges us in his texts. He is another paradox.



## Literary Francophonie under the Sign of Freedom

The notion of *francophone literature(s)* has been much discussed, as in spite of its singularity, it corresponds to a vast heterogenic body which resists any simplifying grid. It is the world-wide case of young literatures, and their writers find themselves at the “crossroads of languages” (Gauvin, 1991) and in cases of “culture contact” (Beniamino, 1999). It is however difficult to define this phenomenon, to which Michel Beniamino attaches three main factors, i.e. space, history, and language. We cannot speak about literary Francophonie as a space, the institutional borders being questioned and having little in common with the open dialogue of cultures at this time of globalization. As to history, it is not a better criterion, as even the title of francophone studies sends in the subtext to a relation of dominating/dominated, centre/periphery. Incidentally, all the literature written in French should be integrated in the category of French literature. And wouldn't it be easier to speak about French literature simply, in the sense used by Salman Rushdie for the English literature (“which I have always understood to mean simply literature written in English”) (Rushdie, 1993)?

The recent theories concerning language as a common denominator for the francophone writers, especially the ones of Lise Gauvin, talk about a certain paradigm of the ratio of foreignness to the language. This is certainly true for this category of “minor” writers, but is it not an emblematic case for any authentic writer? Wherever they come from, they have an exacerbated and fertile relationship of love-hate with the common language, that they cultivate incessantly, that they re-invent, in order to come – to use Gilles Deleuze's words – to “make the language itself shout, stammer, stutter, murmur.” (Deleuze, 1993) The writer who expresses himself in another language than his native one has a unique experience of interiority-exteriority, which is unknown to the native speaker, for obvious reasons. The foreigner is “condemned” to think the language, actually the languages, as any linguistic questioning arisen from the intimate contact with another universe sends him back in a loop to his own language, of which he acquires an extended vision. We believe that the linguistic over-awareness mentioned by researchers does not apply only to the new field of expression – with this area of creative casualness and of not knowing innate taboos –, but also to the old sphere, of which the weaknesses and the incredible resources become evident to the one who has detached himself from it.

In this respect we partly disagree with authors such as Michel Beniamino, who defines literary Francophonie as

*the modern form of a set of phenomena related to seeking the perspective of the Other – of whom we can question the historic origins (perhaps the Renaissance) – but whose specificity – that which marks its break with previous issues – would be to link the perspective of otherness to the issue of language in the socio-symbolic and socio-linguistic sense in a perspective of domination.* (Beniamino, 2002)

Thus considered, francophone literature is not the spearhead of a cultural dialogue, based upon the use of the same idiom, which would transcend national forms of expression, historically determined, but a sly, perverse way of dominating by means of what we call the “cultural influence”. Or, as we have already seen, there are thousands of nuances other than the ones with a colonial stench in the choice (voluntary or imposed) of the French language by foreign writers, including in the former colonies, where the new generations do not hold the same grudge, the more so in the countries which have never regarded the French language as an instrument of the oppressor, but as the means to obtain access to universality. Certainly, it is difficult to escape from the historical context, and in this sense, the term of “francophone literature” seems to be tainted by the imperialist seal, bearing heavy misunderstandings, this is the reason for which an important group of writers writing in French, having as promoters Michel le Bris and Jean Rouaud, launched in 2007, during the Festival “Etonnants Voyageurs” in Saint-Malo, the concept of “world-literature in French”, which led to the writing of a book (Le Bris, 2007). We do not insist on the force and the real interest of this phrase, which produced as many enthusiastic followers as hostile reservations. The fact is that in discarding the direct reference to the French language, it creates another ambiguity and a conceptual vague which eventually complicates things even more.

Theoreticians have built arguments which are valid on paper, but which do not hold in front of the dynamic of the writer’s own discourse, as our epoch forces us to change the mental coordinates. See, for example, the words of Nimrod, writer, essayist, and poet from Chad:

*We are hybrids; it is no use trying at all costs to track down the African in us. On the contrary, let us use this great probes which, following the comma and the phrase, inform us about the acclimatization of Rimbaud and of Claudel, of Chateaubriand and of Proust under the tropics. (...) This literature named African owes everything to the French literature. In any case, it owes it the beginning of a modern tradition* (Nimrod, in Le Bris, 2007).

This new understanding of literature implies the abandoning of the dialectics centre/periphery, and of entering in the era (or area) of the literature written in French (or other literature, opened to the world, but also aware of the diversity of its influences, and which aspires to move elsewhere and in other ways than the frame which has been traced for it for a too long, even if it is a prestigious one. The result is a process of rewriting the traditional genres from it, a cross-genre outburst and especially an understanding of the novel in terms of *diffraction*; it is at the level of the fracture in the discourse, of this impossibility to inhabit completely the French that we may notice the unique adventure of francophone writings, a literature of cultural, linguistic, and ontological crossroads, an interbreeding which does not lead to an impasse, but to an infinitely flexible and malleable space.

When the French, as a literary language, does not correspond to the native language of the author or if the language of writing and the first language do not coincide, there will be of necessity a discrepancy to the widely acknowledged norm. A new type of novel tends to emerge on the margins of canons established by the French literary tradition, between the classical perfection, heir of the *Belles Lettres*, and the creative tension marked by diffuse non-native elements. The consequence is a different treatment of space, time, characters, actions, and especially of the words which designate them.

The emergence of the ethno-linguistic substratum in the narrative fabric produces complex works, which belong to the tradition of dialogism characteristic for the discourse in the novel developed by Bakhtine (1978), for whom “the novel is the social diversity of speech types or the specific social dialogue of speech types.” In other words, discourse in the novel is the place where living and various genres meet and interact, the result of which is that “the novel as a whole is a pluristylistic, plurilingual, plurivocal phenomenon.” (Bakhtine, 1978: 87) It is a widespread phenomenon of dialogism, which is designated by Bakhtine by the concept of *heteroglossia*, stating that the power of the novel originates in the coexistence of and from the conflict between different types of speech: the speech of characters, the speech of the narrator and even the speech of the author. He defines heteroglossia as “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way.” (Bakhtine, 1981) It is exactly what we discover in the two novels of Marius Daniel Popescu (*La Symphonie du loup- The Symphony of the Wolf* and *Les Couleurs de l’hirondelle- The Colours of the Swallow*), the speech types which form its heteroglossia comprising voices of the past and of the present, as well as voices coming from different, meaning divergent, cultural environments.

A writer can always assimilate a literary genre from the world to which he adheres, as was the case of, for example, Hélène Vacaresco and her poetry with heavy Parnassian influences, or for Cioran and the borrowing of short, aphoristic

forms, or for Eliade and his Gidean existentialist narratives. But in our days the writing of novels falls more and more in the line of what we already designate as the “francophone tradition”, which allows us to speak about a hybrid production of novels, bringing together different symbolic universes, aspiring to a synthesis which guarantees the richness of culture interactions.

Thus, the ethnic stereotypes from the two sides overlap in order to contribute to the building of one world, autonomous, representative for a no man’s land and of a no man’s language which come into being and state their different but recognizable status. Here are, in the form of a summary which is both ironic and tender, which says much about contemporary mentalities and realities in Romania, some of the 19 reasons identified by Marius Daniel Popescu for staying in “that country”, as he calls it:

1. *Because you can always leave the country, no matter when... Nobody forces you to stay in the country.*

2. *Because in the country everybody is ready to share with you everything they have: the stupid songs played at maximum volume in their cars, flu in public transportation, their women who stay at home [...]*

4. *Because only in our country there are more Jeeps than millionaires and more millionaires than firms.*

5. *Because only in our country it seems normal to receive without giving anything in exchange.*

6. *Because our country is the only country where if you do nothing more than look at those who work, you receive a spectator’s bonus called “supervising allowance”. [...]*

8. *Because we are the only people in the world for which “thief!” is an endearing word. [...]*

14. *Because only our country can organize the World Championship of 3000 km slalom with having as obstacles: carts, hen-nests, hungry stray dogs, drunkards.*

15. *Because in our country snow is considered to be a saint only because it falls from the sky; once it falls on the roads, nobody dares to touch it.*

16. *Because in our country the working day begins with a break. [...]*

19. *Because when all the places in Hell are taken, our country will become a destination to replace Hell; those who will remain in our country won’t have to pay transportation expenses to Hell” (Popescu, 2012: 120-121).*

The other world – France, in this case – is well oiled and functional, only that people, even in couples, even in groups, feel lonelier than ever and a discreet indifference reigns in their hearts:

*People who sit at their table at the terrace do not mind the man who is alone in the street, passers-by do not look at him, cars slow down and overtake him, he makes pirouettes, he kneels, he gets up, he jumps in the air. It is the first time that I see such a scene in Paris, I have the feeling that this man wants to revenge himself on the entire planet, I see him making signs to passers-by, I drink coffee and I think about the miseries of the human race. (Popescu, 2012: 144)*

The assumption that we defend is that the space - at the same time confined and unlimited - offered by the French language to foreigners leads to original modes of writing, to the use of figures of speech such as the mix of genres and speech types, producing eventually a renewing of the depth of the novel. The polyphony is articulated around memories – conscious or involuntary – of the socio-cultural and linguistic universe of “that country”. The link is never completely broken, on the one hand the root is never deeply fixed, and on the other hand, we are dealing rather with a rhizome-like structure, to recall the epistemological model defined by Deleuze and Guattari (1972). Any element can influence another element and vice-versa, without having hierarchical presuppositions and without the suffocating co-existence of the specificity of the one or the other. The image of Marius Popescu’s library appears to us as an edifying metaphor in this regards (our underlining):

*I arrange my books, my library, it feels as if I’m moving away. There are several hundreds of books in Romanian and maybe two thousands in French. I will make separate book-shelves for the Romanian books, they will be together and they will touch the books in French only through the wooden wall of the bookcase. I take these bilingual books in my hands and I shake with my hands the dust which has covered them. I had mixed the books in Romanian with the books in French. [...] I will translate for you the titles of books in Romanian and I translate from Romanian to French. Here is another title that I have just translated: “Treatise on the Blind Blind”. As I have many books in French, I quote for you the title of a book in French: “Poems of Youth.” (Popescu, 2007: 299-300)*

## The Francophone Audacities of Marius Daniel Popescu

He writes novels as he used to glue posters in the beginning, after his arrival in “this country”, Switzerland. He writes juxtaposing episodes which flow all along the temporal spiral, in all directions, trying very hard the attention and the judiciousness of the reader, loosening Ariadne’s thread in order to prompt him to find the exit from the labyrinth all by himself.

In *La Symphonie du loup* and *Les Couleurs de l’hirondelle*, Marius Daniel Popescu offers unusual autobiographic narratives, actually deconstructing them - in comparison with the traditional image that we have of them - and giving them back in the form of a puzzle. A little in the manner of Julio Cortazar, or of Jean Genet, he creates a kind of textual hopscotch, disdaining the chronological order of events, jumping from one subject to another, at the mercy of fanciful associations of ideas or even sounds. The two books begin with dramatic moments: the death of the father, in *La Symphonie*, the death of the mother, in *Les Couleurs*, the two texts end with the beginning of a new game. Between death and life, under the sign of the ludic, unrolls the entanglement of thousands of scenes which tell, bit by bit, with a seriousness never exempt of irony, about life during the communist regime, the liberty regained, love, family, children, in “this country”. From the one to the other, he traces a path that we could call, to paraphrase Lise Gauvin, a road of the “unrest,” (2003) with the difference that he does not distance himself from the French language in particular, but from any language, the literary field appears to be a place where an affirmation of identity and a type of liberation express themselves at the same time. The setting free of the word by the word, as suggested by the last metaphor used at the end of *La Symphonie*, the one of the schoolbag made of white iron that his daughter is supposed to show to her classmates and “if they ask her why she has a schoolbag made of white iron, she will answer them, as you taught her, that it is because words shouldn’t exist.” (Popescu, 2007: 399)

With Popescu, we have the feeling that the word is a mental construct we can do without, in the same manner as the francophone space is a mental construct of France, as Orientalism was invented by the Occident. It remains however dependent and fascinated, following the example of any other writer, and he yearns for, paradoxically, silence, by increasing the power of the words, by breaking up any daily gesture into thousands of verbal sparks, like the labels of Swiss products, all of them written in three languages. Certainly, his writings remind us inevitably of the New Novel, of Le Clezio making the inventory of Monoprix in his *The Interrogation*, and nonetheless, in this “sacralisation of the commonplace” (Majorel, 2012), it is not the accumulation of things which hails the author, but the accumulation of words which chase the concrete which, in its turn, eludes us. And this experience is completely personal, man is confronted with things in his quality of “enunciating instance”, individually, every verbal person being a specter

of virtual values which is activated in a particular context, but this referential oscillation is not at all collective.

In the polyphonic narratives that he offers, there is no sign of the *doxa*, there is never *one* (and even the *we* and the *you* which designate the plural are rather rare). The existential adventure and the bookish adventure are experienced with all the suffering and the passion of a bodily being which gives itself in the flesh of the words, proving that literature does not force us to associate it with a principle of territoriality, opening on the contrary on a great area of contact, of the *in-between*, where the imaginary of the languages makes the law. The texts of Marius Daniel Popescu are inhabited by plurilinguism in a subterranean manner and by dialogism in an obvious manner, in the constant symbolic journeys between “that country” and “this country”, the temporal serpent which often uses the written word as a vehicle:

*This book, I no longer remember when and where I bought it. It is old and worn like one of my great-grandfather's belts, its pages are yellow and fragile on the last page which contains where the literary text is printed “231” then there are seven more pages of which the seventh is “PRINTED ON THE TWENTYETH OF MARCH NINETEEN SIXTY SEVEN IN THE PRINTING PRESS OF H. MESSEILER IN NEUCHZTEL.” I was almost four years old and my mother and all the other members of my family didn't think and couldn't even dream that one day the kid that I was then was to see another country and in a more conclusive manner than as a tourist or a student [...] I read in the language which is not my mother tongue but which has become my language. I always read very well in the language I have learned since my childhood but for the past twelve years I have been reading mostly in French. [...] I do not search pleasure in words. [...] Loving books does not mean taking pleasure in words. [...] There is no layout for words or a page layout that could allow me to feel pleasure. (Popescu, 2007: 365-367)*

Marius Daniel Popescu presents us this French language in which he has plunged body and soul, moving in a kind of linguistic Moebius band, having a view at the same time exterior- neuter, impartial - and an axial view, which goes to the root of words and searches for the reason of their existence. Neither a straight jacket, nor an object of silent dull adoration, the French language is for him a here-elsewhere, a nice comfortable jacket, the fundamental usefulness of which remains questionable, as with any language. He does not suffer because of this any more than it makes him happy. His heteroglossia is pronominal, the latent tensions of his personality, the aspects of his relation with the world and with language are translated in this unpredictable shifts of *I, you, he...* Multiple points of view, certainly, but no clear sign of shifting from one instance of discourse to another, this constant game builds a masterly composition, to take one's breath

away, from lack of stable landmarks. There is no use in trying to see in the distancing due to the use of *you* or *he* a wish to distinguish between the *I* of the present and hypostasis of the past, or vice-versa, as Popescu cheats all the time: *I* is now the omniscient narrator, now the voice of the grandfather, now in a kind of *mise en abyme*, the narrator of another text; *you* is either the narrator, or the natural person addressed in speech, with the difference that the real dialogue hardly exists; *he* is now the narrator, now a non-person exterior to the conversation talk but enjoying a surplus of referential determinants. Here are several examples:

*He sent me a text typed at the writing machine, he would like me to publish his text in the literary journal "le persil," he wrote to me several words on a postcard, he is a writer, he has published several texts, he tells me "it is a fragment from my next novel," I read:*

*"I began my days looking at the objects placed on the bedside table. [...]"*  
(Popescu, 2012: 171)

*I'm telling you, son, that neither objects nor beings are responsible for the miseries in the world. The only misery in the world comes from words.* (Popescu, 2007: 127)

*You are in the street with your two girls, at your right you hold the older one by hand, and the younger one has her arm around your neck [...]* (Popescu, 2007: 367)

*He reads sever newspapers a days, some of them he buys in kiosks, others he receives in his mailbox, by subscription. He reads them from one end to the other, he spends around two hours to read them. The titles and the subtitles of every heading, he pronounces them in a loud voice, until he finds for them a linguistic charm or a deontological flaw.* (Popescu, 2012:34)

The polyphonic mosaic which results from this produces an impression of multiplication of "corporal" characters, this various connotations coming from areas so different the one from the other from every point of view, creating an atmosphere which mixes casualness and dreams, the funny and the absurd, smiling lucidity and heavy anxiety. This pronominal linguistic dissipation is a proof of a need of equal recognition of multiple points of view, not necessarily opposing which reflects a personal, poetical approach of the world across a multiple *I* which refuses to surrender in front of the request of the unique option. The internal coherence of the universe of Marius Daniel Popescu is not at all affected.



## Conclusions

The literary francophone space is a good opportunity. The opportunity of a meeting between two cultures, two ways of thinking, two (or more) languages. The opportunity of transcending them towards a new horizon. Words are there in order to express perceptions, not to impose them, and it that is exactly what it is about: becoming aware of what life is, in its unity and diversity, in its mental, affective, physical manifestations. It is made of these little and great realities which man perceives in his conscience and in his unconscious, in the memory of his spirit and body, which travel like a bird which is given the colors of time. Facts and objects. It is in them, by them, with them, apparently given in a raw state, in reality divided with minuteness like notes on a musical sheet, that emotion is created, by the intervention of numberless words populating the phrases of a narrative which are forever extended by memory.

Taking into consideration the multiple debates and nuances evoked, we believe that the francophone space is a “free zone”, beyond a concrete spatiality and geo-historical temporality, a complex area in which the writer who plunges inside lives a major experience: the dismay in front of the strangeness of the language and the pleasure of creating a new one.

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