

The Identity Quest: from the Babel of the Worlds to the Coffers of the Body – Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Tricephalos*

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Abstract

Due to her academic qualification, Ruxandra Cesereanu prefers a literary discourse which is closely related to text production and reception theory. Whether she writes poetry, short prose, essays, or literary criticism, the author is totally aware of the permanent confrontation between the immanence of the text and the transcendence of the ego. Her second novel, *Tricephalos: Cartea licornei. Peripețiile Alisei în Țara NewYorkeză. Cuferele trupului meu* (2002), mixes in the autofictional register two essential themes of her writing: identity and lust. The romanesque pattern is not that of the trash autofiction: at the narrative level the story of visiting the erotic cabarets from Paris or the New York slums which abound in sexuality might be considered the perfect plot for consumerist literature; at the discourse level this plot is subdued by imagism and bookish inroads, by aesthetic and elitist rhetoric. From this point of view, we shall analyse the specificity of writing in relation to the feminine autofiction grid and to the identity of the postmodern subject.

Keywords: autofiction, body, identity, subject, feminine writing

A poet, a prose writer and an essayist, Ruxandra Cesereanu [1] (b. July 17th, 1963) has her debut in 1981, with poems published by *Tribuna*. In 1985 she is a contributor to the collective volume *Alfa* with the poetry sequence “Amiaza mare” (The Afternoon). She considers herself firstly a poet, then a prose writer or an essayist, and gathers her inspiration from daily tribulations which she enriches with academic touches. However, as she admits, all these areas make up a homogenous space in which the obsessions circulate from literary to theoretical texts without losing their intensity. Following the principle of communicating vessels, the authoress’s poetry, prose and research activity communicate, whether reference is made to the Expressionist, Surrealist or Dadaist veins equally displayed by her poetry or prose, or to the violent imagism [2], feminine, aggressive and obsessive, of her poetry inspired from her *Panopticon*.

Her activity carried out at the Centre for Imagination Studies “Phantasma” and her connection with Romanian Oneirism [3] have directed the reception of her works towards a form of literature which builds its meanings in the vault of fiction, where the laws of logic and reason are deformed by the confusing and

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meaningless image mosaic. The author, nevertheless, prefers the “delirium” of Oneirism, which she has mastered as a construction technique of poetic imagery while organising it on “phantasm layers”. The plethora of reveries and hallucinations and the unbound invasion of phantasmatic material result in an imagistic conglomerate which is, at times, difficult to assimilate.

On a different level, Ruxandra Cesereanu’s literature reconstructs, from biographically assumed hypostases, the image of a pluriform femininity in search for identity in the many facets she displays in her works, from the neurotic little girl “*cu coapse paranoice și sâni de anticar*” [with paranoid thighs and antiquarian breasts] (*Cretina deliciilor/ The Idiot of Feasts*), to “*femeia-scrib*” [the scrivener woman], “*femeia-cruciat*” [the crusader woman], from “*Femeie, tu ești o febră cu măruntaiele în afară*” [Woman, you are a fever with the bowels out] (*Trupul (Iezuita)/ The Body (The Jesuit Woman)*) to the courtesans La Malcontenta and La Cesarina from *Veneția cu vene violete/ Venice with violet veins*. The fascination which springs from such poetry comes especially from discovering the body which the woman has constantly fought.

Pe de altă parte, este adevărat că eram fascinată de trup, întrucât mi-era necunoscut, era încifrat atunci pentru mine, l-am descoperit târziu, iar poezia mea îmi este martora pentru aceasta. Până la vârsta mea de acum am fost mai mult obsedată de trup decât de suflet, spirit etc., fiind eu, pare-se, o trupelnică.

[On the other hand, it is true that I was fascinated by the body, as it was unknown, cyphered to me at that time, I discovered it quite late, and my poetry avouches for this. Up to my present age, I have been more obsessed with the body than with soul or spirit. Apparently, I had greater interest in the body] (Cârstean, 2002).

Tricephalos in the reception mirrors

Tricephalos is introduced by its authoress as an experimental novel which aims to be a trilogy of the body, with no connection with Cărtărescu’s trilogy. It brings together three initiation journeys made by three key-characters: licorna (the she-unicorn), Alisa and the Minotaur. The critics understand it from the same corporeality perspective – for example, C. Rogozanu associates it with the three power lines of Romanian recent literature – Gh. Crăciun’s textual corporeality, M. Nedelcu’s modular and textual body and M. Cărtărescu’s visionary body:

La Ruxandra Cesereanu, corporalismul urmează linia cărtăresciană. Poate părea surprinzătoare filiația. O apropiere de Simona Popescu ar fi părut mult mai justificată. În fond, găsim cam aceleași jocuri lexicale, la un moment dat găsim același joc cu diferite „euri” biografice. Și totuși, lucrurile nu stau așa. În cele trei mari povestiri cuprinse în această carte, cele trei metamorfoze sunt false schimbări. Sunt, de fapt, aventurile picarești ale unui uniform personaj-narator.

[With Ruxandra Cesereanu, corporealism follows Cărtărescu's patterns, although the association may seem surprising. A connection with Simona Popescu would have been more justified. After all, one finds the same lexical games, and, at some point, one even finds the same game with various biographical "selves". And yet things are not quite like this. In the three large stories comprised in this book, the three metamorphoses are fake changes. They are, in fact, the picaresque adventures of a uniform character-narrator] (Rogozanu, 2002).

On a different note, Irina Petraș does not see in this conversion to body materialism a genuine attitude of the authoress but one sprung from her efforts of synchronising with the younger generation:

In Tricephalos (2002) autoarea acționează, cum am spus deja, bulimic – înghite rapid orice și mult, bibliografie ori proprie imaginație, apoi răstoarnă în pagină nedigerat; o curiozitate pentru tot ce are legătură cu trupul, dar o curiozitate artificială, oarecum trucată, care nu-și lasă răgazul să experimenteze pe cont propriu mai nimic. Atinsă iremediabil de pudori și inhibiții ale generației precedente, cu o educație «cuminte», Ruxandra Cesereanu vrea să fie în pas cu generația următoare pe care o asistă și o sprijină cu program.

[In *Tricephalos* (2002) the authoress acts, as stated before, as a bulimic – she swallows fast a lot of anything, bibliography or her own imagination, then she throws it on the page undigested; a curiosity for everything that has to do with the body, an artificial one, somehow faked, which does not allow itself to experiment too much on its own. Irremediably touched by the elder generation's prudishness and inhibitions, "decently" educated, Ruxandra Cesereanu *wants* to keep up with the next generation, which she programmatically assists and supports] (Petraș, 2013: 160).

Another direction in the reception of the novel concerns its mosaic composition determined by a postmodern fragmentation of the discourse. The three distinct parts, "*Cartea licornei*" / "*The Book of the She-Unicorn*", "*Peripeziile Alisei în Țara NewYorkeză*" / "*Alisa's Adventures in New York Country*" and "*Cuferele trupului meu*" / "*The Coffers of My Body*" conjoin by virtue of a split identity (programmatic in the case of the authoress of *Oceanul Schizoidian* / *The Schizoid Ocean*), despite the uneven tone, perceived as artificial:

Diferența de ton, de atitudine, de viziune creează o ruptură clară. Ochiul femeii călătoare din primele două părți e prea rece, prea stăpânit, puțin naiv, martor curios, nepreocupat de sine și interesat doar să înregistreze, pe când ochiul celei care pleacă în căutarea minotaurului este scormonitor, pasional, implicat, fragil și trăind intens fiecare percepție. Or, nimic nu explică transformarea sau glisajul. Toate semnele conduc către aceeași concluzie: textele devenite capitole ale aceleiași cărți sunt, de fapt, bucăți distincte, scrise din motive diferite, în perioade diferite (jurnal, note memorialistice, excerpte eseistice și proză). De aceea, mișcările textului sunt rupte și nu funcționează ca un întreg, fie el și fragmentat. Materialul e bun, croiala grăbită. Deși un proiect ratat, demersul românesc al Ruxandrei Cesereanu e însă demn de laudă măcar pentru că e îndrăzneț.

[The differences in tone, attitude and vision create an obvious break. The eye of the woman traveller of the first two books is too cold, too restrained, a little bit naïve, a curious witness, unconcerned with herself and interested only in recording information, whereas the eye of the woman in search for the Minotaur is scrutinising, passionate, involved, fragile and intensely living all perceptions. Nothing justifies this change or slip. All signs lead to the same conclusion: the texts that became chapters of the same book are, in fact, distinct pieces, written for different reasons at different times (diary, memoir notes, essayistic excerpts and prose). This is the reason why the textual movement is broken and does not function as a whole, be it a fragmented one. The cloth is good but the tailoring is haste. Though a failed project, Ruxandra Cesereanu's novelistic endeavour is worth praising at least because it's daring] (Chivu, 2003).

Simona Popescu's bird's eye view on Cesereanu's textual network reveals an interesting project of the latter, one that may be termed "Ruxandrism", from Ruxandra and the Alexandrism of her prose, a niche of her own. Alongside with the unmistakable stylistic mark, Simona Popescu places the thematic universe of the journeys with far and strange topoi, present both in *Tricephalos* and *Nebulon*. However, she does not construe them as oneiric breakouts, as labelled by Matei Călinescu. Instead, she places them under the sign of stories shaped from real facts, associating Cesereanu's autofiction texts with, as she claims, some by Mircea Horia Simionescu and Mircea Cărtărescu.

A high piece of autofiction

Autofiction, a minor genre, marks literature's entrance into the age of show, of the consumerist society which minimizes, on the one hand, the auctorial authority, and maximises, on the other hand, the role of the reader, who must be allured towards the text. It is not too often in literature that writers who "practise writing seriously" (Mircea Chivu includes Cesereanu in this category) adhere to a writing mode that makes a spectacle out of literature. It is, however, certain that major literature sees its territories more and more often invaded by the media show, and autofiction follows the patterns of this new movement. The mirage of autofiction seems to have allured Ruxandra Cesereanu, although the motivation of her choice is not notoriety.

A first aim of this paper is to track some of the signs that lead the reading towards the autofictional grid, whilst also considering the condition of autofiction born from the conjunctions and disjunctions of the fictional with the referential. Due to her many research scholarships abroad and to her many academic projects, Ruxandra Cesereanu is well-travelled. One finds in *Tricephalos* ample fictional displays of her experiences in summer schools or creative camps in Greece, or during her Fulbright scholarship at Columbia University of New York, which she 'directs' in the novel: "Îmi plăcea să desfășor uriașa hartă a Americii și, punând degetul

pe câte un orașel, să-mi închipui, să inventez, să mă joc." [I used to like laying out the huge map of America and randomly put my finger on a small town, to imagine, to invent, to play] (Cesereanu, 2002: 59). There are some *identifiers* [4] (Philippe Gasparini's phrasing) in the novel, which place the text into the referential. Nominal identity is not performed by the instruments existing at the surface level of the text, which is why onomastic identification functions indirectly, in the sense of establishing a series of external homonymies in the relation between author, narrator and character. It is to be sought for in other directions: maybe in the name of "*bărbatul meu, Cobra, pe care am să-l numesc astfel pentru că i se dusese buhul despre cât era de înțelept*" [my man, Cobra, whom I'll call this way because he was famously wise] (Cesereanu, 2002: 6) and who becomes Korin in the third part, or in other categories of operators: the age of 30, symbolic for the discovery of her own femininity, the socio-cultural space of the libraries where the character used to go, etc. In this case, biographical identification is much more effective, setting out a dynamic identity through the representation of the places, times and other particular individual or social signs. Thus, what is left to unveil is the identity of the narrator-character, which, most often than not, reveals a fictional strategy. By refusing to give the hero a name, the author eludes the traditional idea of character, choosing instead the subjectivity of an uncertain, labile voice, on the edge of postmodern dissolution. It is also what Ruxandra Cesereanu does, apparently inviting the readers to recognize themselves in this depersonalised voice of an alienated character which clandestinely migrates to an absurd world.

Familiar with psychoanalysis and fully convinced of the text's ability to excavate the depth of the human being, Ruxandra Cesereanu adheres with *Tricephalos* to an autofiction that matches the model of Doubrovsky. In a second self-critical article on *Fils, Autobiographie/ vérité/ psychanalyse*, Doubrovsky emphasises the intimate connection between archetypal representations and the attempts to recover individuality: thus, autofiction becomes a fictional genre which must "give me back to me" (Doubrovsky, 1988: 43), not only through theme but also through textual production. In truth, the most important concern of the authoress is to generate text, as if word order supported the world itself. Aware that the text generates, in turn, other texts, the authoress makes use of the chaining principle:

Pe mijlocul străzii treceau viermi și gândănișii uriași, puzderie de drăcușori și diavolițe, vrăjitoare șagalnice, homosexuali cu harnașament femeiesc, Adam și Eve, regi, brahmani, gravide cu pântece închipuite, fachiri, obeze, androizi, buni sălbatici cu salbe de gheare, gheșe europene, samurai inautentici, bebeluși sexagenari, suflători de foc pe picioaroange, vampe decrepite, felliniene cu dosuri incredibile a căror cărnărie dereglă simțurile, schelete ambulante

[In the middle of the street there were worms and giant bugs, an army of little devils and she-devils, jesting witches, gays with women's harness, Adam and Eve, kings, Brahmas, pregnant women with fake bellies, fakirs, obese women, androids, good savages with claws-made necklaces, European geishas, inauthentic samurais, sexagenarian toddlers, fire-blowers on stilts, decrepit vamps, Fellinians with incredible behinds whose flesh was upsetting the senses, walking skeletons] (Cesereanu, 2002: 103).

Last but not least, Ruxandra Cesereanu, as other academics practising literature, believes in sentence and style, but not in the rough style. In *Tricephalos*, and also in other writings, she possesses a traditional, elegant, refined rhetoric which turns abstruse at times. From this perspective also, one may note a series of differences which place this novel in another spot than that of the common place of feminine autofiction signed by the young women writers of the 2000s. Even when the image pertains to sick sexuality, the rhetoric outdoes vulgarity, producing genuine linguistic ecstasies. Watching a sex cabaret, for example, becomes an exercise in linguistic virtuosity:

Fiecare era specialistă într-un anumit fruct pe care îl introducea în sex, prin atracție magnetică, și, apoi, îl devora. Am asistat, astfel, la performanțele unor kivieuse, bananeuse – aceasta era loc comun –, kakieuse – kaki fiind un fruct ca o roșie de seară – pecheuse, abricoteuse, pruneuse, framboiseus, fraiseuse și figueuse (în traducțiune valahă ar suna astfel: kiwioasă, bănănoasă, kakioasă, piersicoasă, caisoasă, prunoasă, căpșunoasă, zmeuroasă, smochinoasă)

[Each one of them was an expert in a certain fruit which she introduced in her vagina, by magnetic attraction, and then she devoured it. Thus, I witnessed the performances of some *kivieuse, bananeuse* – this was commonplace – *kakieuse* – *kaki* is a fruit like a greenhouse tomato – *pruneuse, framboiseus, fraiseuse* and *figueuse* (translated into Wallachian, these would sound like this: *kiwioasă, bănănoasă, kakioasă, piersicoasă, caisoasă, prunoasă, căpșunoasă, zmeuroasă, smochinoasă*)] (33).

As D.C. Mihăilescu rightfully remarks, pan-sexualism is absorbed by the exuberant linguistic and imagistic carnation which is one of Ruxandra Cesereanu's attributes:

Exultând de sincerități și cruzimi egofile, dar și de un ludic pufos, malițios, melancolic și autopersiflant uneori, pansexualismul din Tricephalos nu este niciodată obscen, nici vulgar. Și nici excitant. Este un uriaș exercițiu mintal – prolix, ce-i drept, uneori până la lehamite – un eseu indirect despre subteranele casei cu fantasma care este trupul – creier al fiecăruia.

[Exulting with egophile sincerity and cruelty but also with a fluffy, viperous, melancholic and sometimes self-mocking ludic, the pan-sexualism of *Tricephalos* is never obscene or vulgar. Nor is it arousing. It is a huge mental exercise – wearily

prolix, to be fair – an indirect essay on the underground of the house of phantasms that is everyone’s body and brain] (Mihăilescu, 2006: 330-331)

Aside from confusing history through discourse, the narrative allows for a number of intertextual allusions. For example, there are investments in the mythological cultural imaginary or in major literature, which the reader almost feels compelled to align in an order of symbolic significances. Cultural allusion is present starting with the title, which justifies, on the one hand, the narrative triptych of the novel and, on the other hand, a *mise-en-abyme* of the identity construction. The elitist title could not have been chosen by a ‘trash’ author because it might have appeared as lacking authenticity. Nonetheless, it resonates with the literature of an authoress who knows how the textual mechanism works. The bookish prose is constant along the three parts of the autofiction, subsuming episodes with a symbolic potential. Thus, the peregrine couple identifies with Orpheus and Eurydice, with Dante and Beatrice in search of the Grail, guided from behind by the spirits of Allen Ginsberg and Ezra Pound. But perhaps the most significant episode is the intertext with the tapestry *La Dame à la licorne* in Cluny Museum, where the significance of the journey through the Parisian subways is explained with the tools of symbolic images encapsulated in a discourse which abides by mediaeval customs. The search for the friend Zizou (the *doppelgänger* theme meets here an identity quest) is equivalent with the search for her own sexuality, and the tapestry calls upon the image to mark the battle fought with the five “senses of misfortune”:

Grădina edenică a rămas aceeași, cu fiare trăind laolaltă, fără să se rănească. Mure, mere, alune, portocale. Cine ești tu? Sunt cea care am renunțat la tot, dar mai ales la mine însămi. S-au dus pasiunile și văzurile, mirosurile, auzurile, atingerile. Capră corcită c-un cal, cu singurul corn răsucit ca o turlă subțiratică, licorna e ultima ispită și martorul acesteia. Doamna s-a războit cu simțurile-i. Roșu, verde, auriu, albastru. Văd, aud, ating, miros și gust. A mon seul désir je renonce pour toujours. Cruciada fecioarei sfârșită-i. [The Garden of Eden has remained the same, with the beasts living together without doing harm to each other. Blackberries, apples, peanuts, oranges. Who are you? I’m the one who gave up everything but especially me. Gone are the passions and the sights, the smells, the hearings and the touches. A goat half-bred with a horse, with its only horn twisted like a thin spire, the she-unicorn is the last temptation, and its witness. The lady fought her own senses. Red, green, gold, blue. I see, I hear, I touch, I smell and taste. *A mon seul désir je renonce pour toujours.* Ended is the maiden’s crusade] (Cesereanu, 2002: 51).

The reader should not fall in the trap of this intertextual game: the directed narrative in *Tricephalos* is not the novel *Tricephalos* but a staging which, on the one hand, draws attention to literary practice, to literature as opera, and on the other hand, invites questions on the fictional truth.

Identity and the world by steps

Thematically, the narrative triptych is conjoined by two fundamental themes: identity and lust. If lust manages the relation with the body better, identity is the main coordinator of the entire novel. A concept designed around two terms, *idem* and *ipse*, where the former is essentially defined as an identity of the 'same' type (therefore as a form of constancy, of faithfulness to the self), whereas the latter stimulates change and alterity, 'identity' is built in steps, in accordance with new construction of the contemporary subject. The writing thematises the reflected self, the existential drama of the individual who confronts himself/herself with his/her own conscience and with the world. The self in autofiction is necessarily a **subject** who confronts him-/herself and the system. (In comparison with 'individual', the term 'subject' reflects the existential drama of someone placed in relation with a preordained system.) The subject can constantly see him-/herself in the mirror s/he is offered by the exterior world but also in that offered by his/her consciousness – it is, therefore, a double existential drama.

This is also what the voice of *Tricephalos* does: through the glass she carries with her, the learned narrator gives access to a completely sexual world with mythological iridescence on whose surface lies the specular layer in which the narrated I is glimpsed. This is the reason why 'the Wallachian' who feels "*spaima ancestrale de femeie de cavernă*" [a cave woman's ancestral fears] also feels her inequality in relation to the others. The journey to Paris, which gives her the chance to visit the Museum of Sex and the search for the lost friend in the sexual cabarets of the city are not narrative threads but rather pretexts for staging an identity game. Thus, the thorough search through the recesses in Paris becomes a search for the double:

Adevărul este, zise Cobra în cele din urmă, că te-ai pornit pe drumul acesta sucit, ca și cum ai fi pornit, de fapt, în căutarea dublului tău. Ca și cum aș vrea să mă descotorosesc de mine însămi? Cam așa ceva. Dar sexualitatea orașului mă copleșește și mă depășește. Cum aș putea să mă opun, cum aș putea să mă fac că nu pricep aceste semne din care Zizou face parte și ea? Prea bine, hotărî Cobra, dacă nu poți fi întoarsă din cale, atunci să pornim în căutarea acestei femei. Mă bucur că îi spui femeie și nu cocotă, pentru că mă simt mai în apele mele astfel. Eu caut, prin urmare, o femeie pe care am cunoscut-o odinioară și care mi-a ținut de cald în nopțile reci ale adolescenței mele întârziate

[Truth be told, Cobra eventually said, that you've taken a twisted path as if you started, in fact, searching for your double. As if I wanted to get rid of myself? Something like that. But the sexuality of the city is overwhelming and gets beyond my understanding. How could I fight it, how could feign that I don't understand these signs Zizou is a part of? Very well, Cobra decided, if you can't be turned, then let's start looking for this woman I'm glad that you call her a woman, not a cocotte, I feel more comfortable this way. Therefore, I'm searching for a woman

whom I once met and who warmed me in the cold nights of my late adolescence] (Cesereanu, 2002: 14)

A proof for the fact that the episode is inscribed in the identity quest is the end of this first journey: Zizou is not found (this hypothesis becomes certainty as early as in the middle of the journey), but the meaning of the exploratory journey towards one's own sexuality is underlined:

Am răsuflat ușurați și am tăcut, mai apoi, o zi întreagă, întrucât poveștile ne mâncaseră limba. Astfel avea să se încheie, pare-se, călătoria mea pariziană în țara trupelniciei și a senzualității, fiind eu împăcată că aveam să-i pun la punct. Căci eram frântă de oboseala căutării și a neaflării a ceea ce căutasem

[We breathed freely again and kept silent for a whole day, as the stories had eaten our tongues. This is, apparently, how my Parisian journey in the country of the body and sensuality was to come to an end, and I was content to put an end to it. For I was exhausted with the search and with not finding what I had been searching for] (47).

The relationship of the self with the world in the construction of the identity profile is equally important in the second part of the novel. New York reveals itself as a strange world populated with half-human half-animal beings, hard to understand for the European. The centre has shifted and, with this new reference, the voice also changes, as the relationship involves new parties: from the Wallachian self in relation to the Western European world to the European self in relation to the American world. And the American world opens up for all senses: street shows delight the eye, jazz evenings flatter the ear, the feast in the Indian restaurant arouses the taste buds, and the visit to Sephora floods the nostrils. New York opens up epidermically at first, and then turns more and more spiritual, bookish, as the narrator-protagonist enters the privileged areas of the libraries, and the old body and soul dichotomy reappears:

Oricine s-ar putea întreba pe bună dreptate: care eram eu, adevărata? Nocturna în bejenie, sporovăielnică, sau fata studioasă din Templu? Eu zic, însă, că viața mea în NYC se aranjase ca două jumătăți de inimă reîntâlnite: nocturnă eram cu trupul și toate simțurile lui, diurnă eram cu mintea în bibliotecile Qulumbiei, cu cărțile în spinare.

[Everyone is entitled to wonder which one was me, the true one. The nocturnal in exile, the chatty one or the scholarly girl at the Temple? But I'd say that my life in NYC had settled in two reunited halves: I was nocturnal with my body and with all its senses, and I was diurnal with my mind in Columbia's library, with the books on my back] (99).

Just like in Paris, sexuality remains external, unassumed and, perhaps for this reason, perceived as inauthentic: in the Temple library, the narrator reads, under Socrates's eyes, bawdy limericks carved on the reading desks or printed in the

New York newspapers. It is, however, worth mentioning that these encounters of the character's common sense and prudishness with the excrescences of orgiastic New York are rendered in terms such as "*scufundare*" [diving] or "*cufundare*" [indulging].

The third part of the novel, *Cuferele trupului meu/ The coffers of my body*, further subdivided into *Uterus* and *Jurnal cu minotaur/ Diary with the Minotaur*, might represent a distinct novel in itself. After the writing exercise in the first two parts, the voice eventually sounds authentic, rendering a story of the self with a fully assumed feminine identity. However, it is not about femininity in a feminist tune, as the authoress does not agree with feminism at all times:

Feminismul decent este o treabă bună și îl agreez. În ce mă privește, însă, questa mea este de altă natură: am voit să-mi gădesc și să mă întorc la rădăcinile de femeie și să îmi iau în posesie propria-mi condiție. Altfel, lumea bărbaților mi se pare la fel de captivantă ca și aceea a femeilor; dar, fiindcă sunt femeie, m-am aplecat asupra a ceea ce mă durea pe mine mai mult. La fel de mult mă interesează, de pildă, relația dintre bărbat și femeie, androginia. [...] Un alt sens al posibilului meu feminism este unul la nivel fantasmatic: femeia-cruciat, gonflabila, curtezanele etc. Ce să fie toate acestea? Firește, eu nu sunt nici curtezană în realitate, nici femeia gonflabilă (ipostaza este atât de amuzantă încât deja mustăcesc); poate că sunt o femeie-cruciat, dar doar în sensul căutării credinței, nu altfel. Fantasmele mele sunt, însă, niște nivele ale inconștientului pe care doresc să le iau în posesie. Cred că trebuie curaj pentru așa ceva.

[Feminism is good and I care for it. As far as I'm concerned, however, my quest is of a different nature: I wanted to find and to return to my roots as a woman and to possess my own condition. Otherwise, men's world seems to me as captivating as women's world, but since I'm a woman, I chose what had bothered me the most. I'm equally interested in the relationship between man and woman, in androgyny. [...] Another sense of my alleged feminism is at the phantasmatic level: the woman-crusader, the inflatable woman, or the courtesans. What are all these? Naturally, I'm neither a courtesan, nor an inflatable doll (this image is that funny that I'm already smiling); perhaps I am a woman-crusader, but only in the sense of faith-searching, and not in any other way. My phantasms are, however, some unconscious levels which I want to possess. I guess it takes courage for this] (in Cârstean, 2002).

Thus, the authoress does not programmatically adhere to the *écriture féminine* pattern but she is relatively close to it through her practice of writing, as her writing is born from that *non-locus* of the dream, as in the case of Hélène Cixous. Placing the feminine condition in relation with the body, subjectivity and language, Hélène Cixous directs the discourse analysis towards the intimate relationship between writing and the biologic. By exploiting all these elements with psychoanalytical tools [5], Cixous demonstrates that bisexuality exists in every being, and, along these coordinates, that women have the exceptional

chance of expressing themselves in writing because they have never repressed this bisexuality, and have accepted the presence of “the other” within their own psychic configuration.

Uterus sets out with a story of the shared origin:

Fiecare bărbat a fost la început femeie. În țara uterului ascuns, am fost cu toții gemeni de un singur fel femeiesc, deși amorfi încă și nedesprinși din tenebre. Apoi, ne-am desfăcut din plăselele trupului pe drumuri diferite. Așa am rămas femei, cele care a fost să rămânem astfel, și așa s-au născut bărbații, cei care și-au uitat începuturile femeiești de odinioară.

[Every man was, at first, a woman. In the country of the hidden uterus, we all were twins of a sole gender, female, though still amorphous and unchained from the dark. Then we unbound ourselves from the body hilt and took different paths. Thus those who had to be women remained women and thus men were born, the ones who forgot their feminine beginnings of old] (Cesereanu, 2002: 173).

What follows is an ample episode of corporeal self-representation which results from the split of the biologic from the social, the cultural and the mythological. All those experiences which hallmark feminine identity are present: the discovery of the feminine sexual signs, menstruation, the impossibility to procreate, childhood, adolescence, the acceptance of the body, etc. The exuvial ego is rippled from everywhere: “*Viața mea era învăluită în foi uriașe de ceapă albă, pe care le desfășam ca niște bandaje de pe trup, dar care îmi erau așternuturi răcoroase pentru reveriile trupești și netrupești la un loc.*” [My life was veiled in huge white onion peels which I was unswathing from my body as if they had been bandages but which used to be my cool bed sheets for both my bodily and non-bodily reveries] (191). The ego obstinately searches for its unitary structure, impossible to attain after trauma: “*Identitatea mi se pulveriza în cioburi, cu o violență imediată, apoi plutea în derivă ca o corabie ciumată. Avusesem parte de două traume, una de a fi pe cale să-l pierd pe Korin și alta de a nu putea avea un fiu cu el, dar ele mă maturizaseră, adâncindu-mă.*” [My identity shattered to pieces with immediate violence, then floated adrift as a ship of plague. I had been through two traumas - almost losing Korin, then not being able to have a son with him, but they had made me grow and had deepened me] (228).

An unusual identity profile results from this quest - a femininity of the palimpsest body, one could name it, as “the subterranean and lunar areas” of her body are just replicas of Kora Persephone, Virgin Mary, or the mother. Invisible threads bind women together in a magic way, rewriting the signs of life on their bodies:

Când, mai târziu, trecută de treizeci de ani, am purtat eu însămi fosta rochie de mireasă a mamei, dar ca pe o rochie de vară, am simțit cum în foșnetul acelei rochii se suprapuneau două trupuri: unul feciorelnic, al mamei pure, celălalt al panterei care devenisem acum și care își mișca trupul sălbatic. Alchimia acelei rochii făcea să iasă la iveală un palimpsest de

femeie, o mamă-fică, unde imaculata era, însă, mama de odinioară. Apoi mai era o altă senzație ciudată: mi se părea, purtând acea rochie de fluture de varză, că o parte din trupul meu este chiar trupul mamei care mi se concentrase în sâni. Brațele, trunchiul, picioarele erau ale mele, dar sânii aceia albi și pufoși erau ai mamei-codane. Îi simțeam cum își ivesc ochii de mură și eram stingherită de bucuria femeiască ce mă răscolea, adică de trufia de a fi femeie.

[When, later, after the age of 30, I dressed myself with my mother's bridal dress, but as if it were a summer dress, I felt two bodies overlapping in the rustle of that dress: a virginal one, of my pure mother, and the other, of the panther that I had become, which was moving its wild body. The alchemy of that dress took out a palimpsest of a woman, a mother-daughter, where the immaculate one was the mother from the old times. Then, another strange sensation: it seemed to me that, wearing that dress of a butterfly, a part of my body was my mother's body, concentrated in my breasts. The arms, the body and the legs were mine, but those white, soft breasts belonged to the girly-mother. I felt their blackberry eyes popping out and I was abashed by the feminine joy which was rummaging through me, by the conceit of being a woman] (210).

As a whole, *Tricephalos* is an eccentric, multi-layered novel, in perfect harmony with the portrait of a polymorphous femininity: the autofictional discourse, with travelogue and intimate diary infusions and with an essayistic core, as well as the diversity of narrative techniques (metanarrative techniques, palinodes, metalepses, etc.), provide the aspect of a postmodern literary experiment. The clearly intentional heterogeneous character of the text is also underlined by the narrative structural mixture, which, at times, seems to turn into journalistic reportage or film script. The idea of eclecticism is also supported both by the fragmentary "archetypal" condition (Braga) of the modern subject, itself subjected to a permanent movement illustrated both by the frequent changes in its relationship to the world (the Parisian world, the New York world) and by the triptych structure of the novel.

Notes

[1] She graduated from the Faculty of Letters of Cluj in 1985, she has been a Philology Doctor since 1997, editor for *Steaua* journal and professor of comparative literature at the Faculty of Letters, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj.

[2] The poetess motivates the specificity of her writing by underlining the resorts which generate poetry: on the one hand, the energy of living, of the sentiment, and, on the other hand, the strength of the image: "*Poezia mea este agresivă în primul rând asupra mea însămi, iar aceasta este o forma de exorcizare. Și de defulare, desigur.[...] Iată de ce sunt, deci, agresivă ca poetă. Pentru că scriu despre lucruri care mă chinuiesc fie pe mine, fie pe alții și înțeleg să scriu toate acestea într-o formă pe care o consider a fi adecvată, foarte vie adică. Imaginile sunt șocante, fiindcă motorul poemelor mele mizează enorm pe imagine. Tăria simțământului și a imaginii fac poemul, pentru mine. Există apoi un ritm interior, un vuiet al poemului. Și acesta contează mult, îmbinat cu imaginea și forța simțirii.*" [My poetry is aggressive to me, first and foremost, and

this is a form of exorcism. And one of release, of course. [...] This is the reason why I'm an aggressive poetess. Because I write about things which torment either me or the others, and I understand to write them in a form that I see adequate and very vivid. The images are shocking because the engine of my poems places its stake on the image. The strength of the sentiment and that of the image are what does the poem for me. Then, there is also a rhythm, a roar of the poem, which also matters a lot, combined with the image and the strength of the sentiment) (Svetlana Cârstea, 'Toate poemele mele sunt niște bătălii' [All my poems are battles], interview with Ruxandra Cesereanu in *Observator cultural*, no 131 August 2002.)

[3] In 2000, Ruxandra Cesereanu is the editor of an anthology of Romanian Oneirism. She signs the preamble and the mini-portraits, and makes up the selection of the texts: *Deliruri și delire. O antologie a poeziei onirice românești* [Deliriums and Deliria. An Anthology of Romanian Oneiric Poetry], Cluj: Paralela 45.

[4] In his ample work *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (Éditions de Seuil, Paris, 2004), Philippe Gasparini maintains that autofiction is a genre rooted in the autobiographic novel, with which it shares a series of common techniques. In order to determine the constants of the biographic novel and, implicitly, those of autofiction, Gasparini takes into account a number of aspects, which he tackles from various perspectives. Firstly, he accounts for a series of *identifiers*, which he considers when he analyses the relation between the character in the narrative and author.

[5] Cixous considers the psychoanalytical grid as one of the most important in approaching literary texts, as she maintains that any written text involves the subconscious, and that all written texts are actually the products of the subconscious. Jung's theory on *animus-anima* imprints the entire work of the French authoress, as she considers that any human being has this dichotomy within, and that, from this point of view, the feminine style is not conditioned by the male gender (in Conley 1991).

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