



THE ADOPTED CHILD OF THE LATIN GENS: GENEALOGICAL IMAGERY IN B. FUNDOIANU'S WORK

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Abstract – Revisiting the dual, bio-cultural, imagery ingrained in B. Fundoianu's essays, engendering a genealogical narrative of literary history, may help us re-evaluate B. Fundoianu's vision on the Romanian identity, too hastily explained by the "self-colonizing" metaphor. A double perspective, euchronistic and anachronistic, will be engaged to render the complexities and contradictions of his approach. While the biologist vocabulary sends back to the 19th-century essentialist philosophies of identity, the focus on the East-West encounters resulting in the hybridization of cultural heritages invites fresher re-readings from the standpoint of transnational theories.

Keywords: Modernity, Self-colonization, Bovaryism, Genealogy, Transnational

Of all the massive body of non-fiction that B. Fundoianu wrote in Romanian, the sentence that attracted the most critical attention was his contention made in the preface to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [Images and Books from France, 1921] that Romanian literature is "a colony of French culture"¹. Reviled by commentators when the volume was published², the author further developed his position into a vision inviting a more nuanced approach. This paper aims to catch the ambivalence of Fundoianu's position by relying on Georges Didi-Huberman's concept of "polychronicity"³, combining the accuracy of euchronism (i.e., reading an object through the ideological lenses of its time) and the heuristics of anachronism (i.e., reinventing the same object by scrutinizing it in retrospect with new analytical tools). First, in a euchronistic perspective, Fundoianu's essays should be set against the backdrop of the

1900-1920s French and German biologic-vitalist theories, intertwining genetic, genealogical, environmental, and agronomical tropes. Second, in an anachronistic rear-view, we should look at his bio-cultural narrative from today's vantage point of transnational studies to see how he ultimately pleads for cultural exchange and interbreeding in the making of Romanian modernity.

A Jewish-Romanian Intellectual in the Decades of Transition to National Modernity

Before emigrating to France and becoming Benjamin Fondane, B. Fundoianu makes his literary debut in a period when Romania faces a cleavage between the regressive fantasy of re-rooting in domestic traditions and the project of catching up with Western modernization. In the first decades of the 20th century, the local cultural system was split between rural nationalism (*sămănătorism*, i.e., an anachronic post-Romantic idealization of folklore) and urban modernism (usually understood as a concoction of French *symbolisme*, *décadence*, and elite cosmopolitanism). Fundoianu's early activity as a poet, translator, playwright, journalist, and essayist burgeons against this divided backdrop.

On the one hand, he considers himself an heir of the Symbolist movement, illustrated, around 1900, by poets like Al. Macedonski, D. Anghel, Ștefan Petică, or Ion Minulescu. This (af)iliation is mirrored in one of the first notable reviews that he receives from an older writer attending the salon of Al. Bogdan-Pitești, an extravagant patron of the arts involved with the decadent circles. The article is called *Un veniamin cutezător* [A Daring Benjamin]⁴, with the noun in the title (*veniamin*) alluding to Fundoianu's first name (Benjamin), but also connoting the favourite offspring of a family lineage⁵. A father-to-son relationship between the group's elders and Fundoianu himself is implied. Another goer to Bogdan-Pitești's *soirées* becomes the main father figure and mentor of the teenager: the poet Ion Minulescu. Years later, Fundoianu will pay his respects by invoking him as the "first bell-ringer of the Romanian lyrical revolt"⁶, in his debut volume of poetry entitled *Privești* [Landscapes, 1930]. However, the "bell-ringer" Minulescu plagiarized significant parts of his best-known manifesto from Remy de Gourmont⁷, which suggests a questionable parentage of the

Symbolist movement in Romania in terms of (il)legitimacy. The author of *Priveliști* fashions himself the heir of a fractured and reconstructed genealogy, given that the “founding fathers” of his group are obviously not part of the local literary *milieu*. As an intensive reader of French literature in general (and of Jules de Gaultier in particular), Fundoianu is highly aware of this conundrum.

On the other hand, descending from a family of prominent Jewish intellectuals⁸, his quest for identity is deeply interspersed with his interest in Jewish heritage. Before turning 13, he starts translating Yiddish literature in collaboration with the poet Iacob Groper (eight years his senior), who guides him to (re)discover a spiritual “heredity” and refresh his sense of cultural belongingness in a moment of personal crisis⁹. Fundoianu starts working for the newspaper *Egalitatea*, led by his uncle Moses Schwarzfild, producing texts about the Jewish community in Iași [Iassy]. These early concerns will be confirmed in his later activity, in times when the project of Jewish emancipation confronts the challenges of anti-Semitic legislation and prejudice in the whole of Central-East Europe, including Romania¹⁰. The exclusion from the rights of citizenship, the social ghettoization, the anti-Jewish incidents, stirred by the upsurge of nationalist sentiments around the First World War, give rise to various models of self-identification within the Jewish community, which influence Fundoianu in finding his own.

This is the ideological landscape in which B. Fundoianu articulates his discourse on Romanian culture. The writer starts contributing essays to several journals in his teens, he publishes the volume *Imagini și cărți din Franța* by the age of 23, and further nuances his position in dozens of articles, until leaving for Paris, when turning 25. It is an unusually early age to develop a cultural narrative, which partially explains why his texts are replete with ambiguities and contradictions. Nevertheless, the taste for a poetics of contradiction is also confirmed in his major works conceived later in France, from *Rimbaud, le Voyage* (1933) to *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* (1947). Therefore, it is more credible to recognize his “paradoxical thinking”¹¹ as a long-term discursive strategy rather than only the awkward shortcoming of an unripe mind. In other words, with a phrase taken from the first significant introduction to Fundoianu’s work in Romanian, this paper tends “to take him seriously”¹². The rich texture of his essays, the majority

of which were written in his early twenties, is already situated in the space of European modernity, rising above parochial hindsight and grasping the inner conflicts of the paradigm on a larger scale, due to the author's extensive (though disorganised) readings from world literature, theatre, arts, and philosophy. An integrated approach to his articles and correspondence conceived in the Romanian language, less known to a global audience, may provide an insight to his perspective on the relationship between tradition and modernity, or rather traditions and modernities in lateral spaces of intercultural encounters like his own country of birth. As a Jewish writer keen on Yiddish literature and on the "Hebrew revival" crossing political frontiers, he is in a symbolic position to challenge the territorialized versions of national literature and to negotiate a more inclusive notion of cultural heritage and genealogy.

Premises: A Contentious Preface and More Cultural Essays

Fundoianu's book *Imagini și cărți din Franța* generates a polemic mainly because of its preface, in which at least two contentions raise adversity: (i) Romanians might not "have a soul – a distinct and personal soul", and consequently (ii) their literature has no distinct "individuality" but represents a "colony" or "province" of the French culture¹³. Such indictments win Fundoianu the renown of an *enfant terrible*, if not *agent provocateur*, even among the modernists – his allies, in principle. E. Lovinescu – the leading promoter of the national modernist movement and director of the review *Sburătorul*, to which Fundoianu contributes articles on a regular basis – strives to prove with counterexamples the recklessness of the proposition (ii)¹⁴. Actually, prior to Fundoianu, it was N. Iorga, the main promoter of *sămănătorism* and main ideological opponent of Lovinescu, who made a similar remark (calling the Romanian culture of the 1840-1860s "a French cultural colony"¹⁵). The Jewish writer F. Aderca, himself a notorious member of the *Sburătorul* circle and friend of Lovinescu, debunks the essentialist reduction underpinning the insinuation (i) and ridicules its author as a disciple of H.S. Chamberlain's racial conjectures and as a Jewish follower of the anti-Semite politician A.C. Cuza¹⁶. Taken at face value, both critiques are righteous, but there is more to Fundoianu's vision than reckless ethnic essentialism.

If we take the time to scrutinize the preface *and* the whole mass of articles published in the press, Fundoianu's outlook on Romanian literature as a marginal phenomenon in Europe is a more complex matter, still inviting to reflection, despite inconsistencies. Established in Paris, Fondane abandoned his rumination on the condition of "minor" cultures and researched "major" authors like Rimbaud or Baudelaire. This shift of interest witnesses a strategy to gain visibility on the French market as well as, maybe, a drive to leave behind his "Romanian" past, associated with a complex of periphery. However, if in 1921 the author planned a sequel to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* called, symmetrically, *Imagini și cărți românești* [Romanian Images and Books], in 1937 he looked for a Romanian editor to accept a book entitled *Ferestre spre Europa* [Windows to Europe]¹⁷. None of these projects had time to come to fruition, but it appears that a comeback to his "Romanian" preoccupations was on the way, and we can only guess that one or more new explanatory prefaces would have shed more light on his vision.

From the whole body of texts, we can infer a vision that is simultaneously outdated and ahead of its time, reactionary and revolutionary. On the one hand, the biologic and genealogical vocabularies send us back to the organicist imagery of the 1850-1900s. On the other, the focus on intercultural encounters in lateral spaces like Romania suggests re-readings from the vantage point of recent theories of world literature. Therefore, in the following two sections we will look at his texts from what Didi-Huberman called a "polychronistic" perspective, i.e., in their own and our historical contexts.

Tracking the Organic: A Euchronistic Perspective

Before deploying the puzzle pieces of Fundoianu's biologic imagery, we should take note of his caveat against the use of tropes imported from the sciences into the literary studies. As a disciple of the Impressionist school, he reviles the introduction of the theories of evolution and heredity into the self-called "scientific" histories of literature:

For this is what the procedure of the science-based [literary] criticism comes down to: importing, in aesthetics, loads of analogies – nothing else but metaphors, even double metaphors – once in the field of their science and twice in the field of aesthetics¹⁸.

Despite his methodical doubt about the lure of cognitive metaphors, Fundoianu elaborates texts brimming with images from the animal and plant world¹⁹, the idea of “grafting” or “transplanting” cultures functioning as a master analogy. Actually, Fundoianu’s readings in life sciences exceed by far the classical *querelle* between Lamarckism and Darwinism, comprising references like Carl Linné, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Lubbock, Ernst Haeckel, August Weismann, E.D. Cope, Hugo De Vries, Yves Delage, Auguste Forel, René Quinton, Félix Le Dantec, Georg Friedrich Nicolai, or Richard Goldschmidt. The Romanian essayist invokes, comments on, and even dedicates articles to their theories. One of his book fetishes is J.H. Fabre’s *Souvenirs entomologiques*, which he rates among the most insightful texts, opening new prospects into the “problems of philosophy and psychology”, “often scrap[ing] to the nothingness, to the very issue of life, to the unknowable”²⁰. The young Fundoianu finds (or invents) existential stakes between the lines written by naturalists, harbingering his later development as a philosopher.

We should historicize his use of biologic metaphors by looking at the permeation of biologic imagination in the ideological discourses from the social sciences, ethno-psychologies, cultural theories, or literary studies in Europe between the 1870s and 1930s (from G.K. Chesterton to the German vitalists, from Leo Frobenius to Oswald Spengler, from Ferdinand Brunetière to Remy de Gourmont). An essentialist biological view of identity was also popular in Romania, from the literary critic E. Lovinescu to the essayist E.M. Cioran, from the liberal to the fascist spectrum²¹. Fundoianu’s intensely aestheticized approach is in line with Gourmont’s pathway from *La Physique de l’amour*, but, as I will try to show further, goes far beyond his French master’s reach.

Looking for the Transnational: An Anachronistic Perspective

A 21st century researcher might find an interest in re-evaluating the *Preface* with tools taken from the theory of world literature, considering the author’s insistence on the defining relationship centre – periphery within a transnational system superseding the nationally limited literary history. Recurring keywords like “province” or “provincial”, “col-

ony" or "colonialism", "imperialism", "model", "influence", "import", "export", "circulation", "commerce", "producing" or "consuming" nations are scattered in many of Fundoianu's texts. A "world" view was uncommon in a chronotope (i.e., interwar Romania) in which the project of building national modernity seemed the most logical conclusion of the recent statal redefinition. But now, contentious as they are, some of Fundoianu's tenets sound "fresher" than his opponents' "down-to-earth" reprimands, such as his provocative claim that the local literary patrimony of the 19th century had little effect on the 20th century and could be exhausted within the years of high-school learning. Therefore, the insurgent essayist proposes complementing or supplanting it with the "artificial" French tradition, of a more liable impact:

When we entered literary life, its landscape was already ordered. You can exhaust our cultural tradition until the fourth grade of high-school. Then, because you need a tradition, you look for an artificial, but at least logical, one. You sew the new tradition next to the old one, as you could sew two disparate carpets, and, by way of partial amnesia, you try to perceive continuity in what is different. So you read the French authors as if they were some greater national writers, a rightful piece of our tradition²².

Some of Fundoianu's contentions are highly ambiguous in general, and even more so in his early essays, given his youthful age. What strikes here is the image of a quilted French-Romanian duplex *qua* literary heritage, with the double effect of (i) opening the frontiers towards a transnational concept of culture and (ii) placing the local repertoire in a subaltern position (since the French authors are pictured as "greater" or "elder"²³). Fundoianu will develop his ideas at greater length in later articles. The preface and these articles were all articulated in a less than propitious historical context, i.e., in the aftermath of the First World War and of the 1918 Great Union (between Transylvania, Bessarabia, Bukovina, and the Kingdom of Romania), at a moment when national sentiment reached a peak and strong counter-reactions were predictable.

The radical qualifications of the Romanian literature as "provincial" and "colonial" made some recent researchers use the "self-colonizing" label to characterize Fundoianu's vision. We contend that, while using Alexander Kiossev's metaphor²⁴ is not properly in the wrong, it gives

only a partial, truncated perspective on Fundoianu's project, which should be contemplated after a thorough rereading of *all* his cultural essays. Then we will see that one of the main points of his argument regards the re-empowerment of the indigenous tradition, which is hardly compatible with Kiossev's narrative of self-deprecation and self-effacement. We should rather reconsider Fundoianu's cultural narrative as a step towards (what we define today as) the creolization of local modernity, its positioning against a "quilted" geo-historical background.

Two Bio-cultural Metaphors: *Le Bovarysme* & the Mendelian Genetic Transmission

The polychronistic reading proposed in the previous subchapters – Fundoianu's interweaving of the biologist and the transnational vocabularies in a personal patchwork – may help us better re-interpret the complex(iti)es embedded in his discourse. Before doing so, we should keep in mind another interweaving characteristic of his essays: their vibrant intertextuality with various fetish books, mostly French, making the author's personal input difficult to single out, and inviting the reader to (re)visit the other texts intricate in Fundoianu's. The enmeshments, sometimes extended to full-article lengths, generate a "quilted" writing style, ironically mirroring the image of the "two disparate carpets" sewn together, French and Romanian, sketched in the *impromptu* lines of the *Preface*.

The first conflation of the biological with the cultural takes place in the semantic area of the keyword *bovarysme*, borrowed from Jules de Gaultier. Inspired by Flaubert's famous novel, Gaultier defined *le bovarysme* as "the faculty of man to conceive of himself as other than he is", or as "the error of the self on the self"²⁵, applying it to individuals as well as to collectives (populations, nations, communities). The versatility of the concept was tested (and contested) through time and across fields of knowledge, from psychiatric-psychoanalytical to social-anthropological studies²⁶, so that the theory conceived in the 1890s had a rich history of colonial representation in Fundoianu's epoch and has an even richer one now.

The notion travelled to interwar Romania, to feature in *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [History of Contemporary Romanian Literature, 1926-1929] by E. Lovinescu, as a less reliable substitute for “imitation”, the core concept taken from sociologist Gabriel Tarde to support the narrative of local modernization²⁷. But Fundoianu’s interest in the concept precedes and exceeds Lovinescu’s: for the young journalist, formed at the school of French aestheticism, *le bovarysme* is not a spare piece, but the engine of argumentation. It is significant that he borrowed a keyword with origins in fiction, while the literary critic and historian recruited his chosen core concept (imitation) from the social sciences.

The highly aestheticized notion of *bovarysme* is also biologized, starting with Gaultier, who applies it to animal evolution (to characterize the faculty of species to conceive of themselves as “other than they are”, to change into new forms fitter for survival). Fundoianu preserves the biological undertone in defining *le bovarysme* as a “fecund error” [eroare fecundă]²⁸, i.e., an error able to “give birth” or to “stem” a new self. On the cultural scale, nations are appreciated for getting rid of their respective disappointing “realities” to identify with some “illusions”, perceived as if in a “lying mirror”, and happily ending by rising up to the envisioned “illusions”, soon to be turned into new “realities”²⁹. This simple storyline is a variation on the authenticity narrative, in which identification with the “ideal self” is the engine for transcending the “real self”. Such are the cases of the Hindus, the Jews, the Romans, or the Russians, Fundoianu contends. In order to reach self-transcendence, each of these peoples embraced, at different points in their histories, a bovaric principle: the idea of being “the chosen people” (the Hindus and the Jews), the idea of being the “heirs” of the Greek culture (the Romans), or the idea of being “European” (the Russians).

In Fundoianu’s narrative, Romanians are engaged in a similar ongoing process, whose ending remains unknown. Once a people of shepherds and farmers “of obscure Thracian-Roman-Slavic-Barbarian origin”, with no cultural pedigree whatsoever, Romanians were driven into modernization by the “illusion” of their “Latin origin”, an idea formulated first by the 17th century Moldavian chroniclers and popularized by the “generation of the 1848-ers”³⁰. The appropriation of the Latin identity resulted so far in the invention of the local culture as a French “colony” In Fundoianu’s narrative, it isn’t yet decided if the in-

dependence from the French hegemony will ever be attained. Romanians still linger in the stage of mimicry, though there's room for hope³¹. In biological terms, the "consumption" or "assimilation" should be followed by the "dis-assimilation" and, eventually, the "growth" in a form of their own³². Only this way will the "error" have proven to be "fecund" in the long run, otherwise the whole "digestion" will degenerate into "intoxication"³³.

Another expanded bio-cultural metaphor starts from André Gide's essay *Nationalisme et littérature*, itself based on the agronomical studies of the economists David Ricardo and Henry Charles Carey³⁴, to which Fundoianu blends in a book by the British naturalist John Lubbock as well as Mendel's theory of genetic transmission. The final stake, after detouring among these intertextual benchmarks, is deviating the botany into a genealogy-based narrative of culture.

The article *Masca lui André Gide* [André Gide's Mask] cites from Lubbock's *Ants, Bees, and Wasps* (1882) the image of cross-fertilization, achieved with the agency of "winged insects" flying from one plant to another, unlike the "creeping insects", which are able only to pass "from one flower to another on the same plant"³⁵, allowing for little or no variation. Transposed on the cultural level, Lubbock's story reads: while the adepts of pure tradition (the ants, or "the creeping insects") stay engulfed in the old routines, the "winged" agents of change (the bees) can bring in typological change, resulting in the "beauty, scent, and honey"³⁶ of new artistic paradigms. To illustrate this scenario, Fundoianu finds in Gide's essay an example from the history of French literature: the neo-Classicist "ants" of the 17th century perpetuated *la haute littérature* in self-repeating forms, thinking that the literary resources had dried out, so once La Bruyère lamented that all that was to say had been said (*tout est dit*)³⁷; but, eventually, the Romanticist and Symbolist "bees" opened doors to refreshment and variation, announcing that the whole, larger, "family" was "close" and waiting to be called³⁸.

Leaving Lubbock behind, Fundoianu passes to an ethno-cultural *roman de famille*, regarding the parentage of French literature. While the neo-classicists acknowledged only their "Latin mother", the Romanticists and Symbolists reclaimed their "Frank father"³⁹, long disowned by the school of La Bruyère. The moral of this family story is that recog-

nizing an ancestry considered inferior (i.e., in the French case, the “barbarian” Germanic branch stemming from the Gauls) can break new ground in a nation’s cultural evolution. The idea takes after Gide: both authors write apologies of a more inclusive concept of the national tradition, challenging the narrow sense consolidated by academic canons and making room for the interbreeding of cohabitating heritages (here, the old Frank and Latin)⁴⁰. Eventually, their fables are about re-empowering the cultural stratum once labelled “minor” or “lower”, about unearthing a long-lost past and turning it into an operational resource for innovation. For, in Fundoianu’s understanding, a living tradition is one capable to “stem” or “breed” the new out of the old.

Fundoianu’s most evident personal touch is the co-optation of Mendel’s genetic theory in his narrative to explain the sudden surfacing of the “recessive gene” in a history long controlled by the “dominant”. Returning to the French example, recovering the “Barbarian recessive”, overshadowed by the “Latin dominant”⁴¹, reactivates a forgotten component of the French identity, which amounts to processing the fresh literatures of Romanticism and Symbolism out of the dried-out Classicism of La Bruyère, who once exclaimed: “all has been said”.

But obviously, Fundoianu’s rewriting of Gide’s argument, augmented with Mendel’s help, aims further than the history of French literature. Unlike the author of *Nationalisme et littérature*, he resorts to a set of colonial metaphors to describe the bounty of the new literatures, in terms of some newly conquered lands, after invoking La Bruyère again:

There was still so much to say, old La Bruyère! All the beauty of the new grains from the new lands, all the flavour of the coffee tree, which you didn’t know, all the poison lavished from the shredded tobacco leaves, the tastiness of cornmeal, ground from the blonde corn, brought from the new Indies⁴².

Contextualized with the *Preface*, the colonial imagery proves to be more than an exoticizing trope: it prepares the relocation of the cultural demonstration to Romania. Mendel helps Fundoianu “prove” the necessity of a dialogic engagement between “the colonizer” and “the colonized”⁴³, between the “dominant” and the “recessive” traits within a culture, to progress on the evolution scale. The story seems to end

with the happy return of the repressed and with its integration into a project of national revitalization.

However, it is sensible to remind here, one more time, Fundoianu's awareness of the risks incurred using biological metaphors in literary studies, which he expresses in the same article where he collates his "theory", with bits from Lubbock, Ricardo, Carey, Gide, and Mendel. Having just applied genetics to culture, he seems concerned about the validity of the "ingenious" analogy that has taken hold of his mind, "tyrannically and ruthlessly":

This is how Mendel's laws apply to plants. Do they also apply to humans? We propose this narrative to the scientifically sceptical reader because of their ingenious kinship and because – why not confess? – the association of ideas that it engaged has taken a grip on us, tyrannically and ruthlessly⁴⁴.

Genealogical Anxieties: Biological and "Adopted" Parents

In another essay⁴⁵, the *roman de famille* set in France supplies more biographical details about the "Barbarian father" of Romanticism: he might be a "drunkard" or a "madman", counterbalancing the serene legacy of the Classicist branch. Fundoianu identifies himself with a family descendant, i.e., with a French writer, so that he tells the family story in the first person. Whatever the father's "infirmity", we never know "how much our genius owes to his drunkenness and dementia". Moreover, denying one of our ascendants, however inconvenient, is absurd, from the genealogical point of view: "should we sort our heredity, should we cut short our complexity and what consecrates us [as ourselves]?"⁴⁶ Fundoianu takes the opportunity to criticize Charles Maurras for making *tabula rasa* out of the Reform, Revolution, and Romanticism, and for mindlessly advocating for the rebirth of old-school Classicism. On the contrary, Fundoianu contends that we cannot disown our past as an ineffaceable part of our being. We may notice the slide from a contractualist to an organicist vision underpinning his narrative: cultural heritage is not about (willingly) accepting or rejecting a succession, but about (willingly or unwillingly) inheriting a genetic endowment that we can't repudiate. The family metaphor is used re-

garding Honoré de Balzac, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Francis Jammes, or Remy de Gourmont, for whom Fundoianu strives to find forefathers and other relatives, convenient or inconvenient. When pinning down Gourmont's "genealogy of writing", he concludes: "The job of finding grandparents and great-grandparents is more difficult than it seems"⁴⁷. But the "duty" of the critic is more than establishing a lineage: it is seizing the "difference" between the "newborns" and their parents, because "legitimate" heredity means appropriation of an "influence", but not "repetition"⁴⁸. Fundoianu reiterates here his belief in the necessary kinship between tradition and innovation: a viable tradition is one incubating innovation.

The "job" of imagining genealogies is more preoccupying when it comes to Romanian literature. Fundoianu deploys his theory in the second part of the diptych *Spiritul critic în cultura română* [The Critical Spirit in Romanian Culture]⁴⁹, an extended comment on G. Ibrăileanu's 1908 sociological essay of the same title. Here, he appeals to the old narrative about the Wallachians as gatekeepers of Europe against the Ottoman invaders in the Middle Ages (a popular narrative in the whole of Central-East Europe) to justify the belated birth date of the Romanian culture. What finally determined Romanians to leave behind their "obscure Thracian-Roman-Slavic-barbarian origin" and step in the European culture was the "fecund error", or the *bovarysme* of "our Latin origin"⁵⁰. Fundoianu implies that the falseness of this idea consists in denying the other identity components mentioned before (i.e., Thracian, Slavic, and barbarian), discarded as "obscure". Leaving behind the infamous past and mimicking the (neo-)Latin family resulted in the creation of Romanian culture as a French "colony", heading towards modernization. One can immediately notice the positive connotation ascribed here to the colonial metaphor, in contrast with the *Preface*: "(self-)colonization" created the Romanian culture, after all. The Latin heritage played the formative role of an elective parent, whose high standards the aspiring descendant strives to meet. Fundoianu summarizes this family scenario by using the vocabulary of adoption: "The history of Romanian culture has been only the sum total of the means to adopt European culture"⁵¹. There is a subtle reversion of roles: it is not the (European) family who "adopts" the (Romanian) son, but the son who adopts the family. The difference is more apparent in the

Romanian text, Fundoianu opting for the old word *înfieri* to express “adoption” (the word meaning, literally, making somebody one’s own son). Claiming the European family is the sons’ act of will resulting in their self-creation. Here, Fundoianu’s discourse resounds with Nietzschean undertones (*via* Gaultier), in that it empowers the descendants with the agency of selecting their lineage. *Le bovarysme* is the compensatory double of genealogy, its correction, having become operational only insofar as the artificial is biologized: in Fundoianu’s words, when the (self-)error/ lie/ delusion becomes “fecund”.

Fundoianu makes it clear that recuperating just one branch of the family tree can ensure only a subaltern position in the neo-Latin family. In order to gain relative autonomy, it is necessary for the Romanian culture to reconsider its “obscure” branch, neglected by the Westernizing generation of the 1848ers. At this point, Fundoianu has fully relocated *le roman de famille* that he adapted from Gide to his native country.

Concluding Remarks

Revisiting the dual bio-cultural imagery ingrained in Fundoianu’s texts, engendering a self-styled genealogical narrative of Romanian identity, may help us re-evaluate B. Fundoianu’s vision, too hastily explained by the “self-colonizing” metaphor. For the young writer, the reinforcement of the old, medieval indigenous stratum, made forgotten by the generation of the 1848ers, equivalent with a return of the repressed or with the reclaiming of the unapparent recessive gene in the genetic transmission process, is a key phase in the building of a national modernity. Fundoianu’s readings of biological as well as cultural theories are naive, fuzzy, and highly subjective, therefore calling for a double rereading, euchronistic and anachronistic, respectively (using Didi-Huberman’s binomial from *Devant de temps*). This way, his essays look both out-fashioned (as rendering an essentialist view over ethnic identity, despite the turn towards a cultural understanding of the concept) and ahead of their time (anticipating the opening of the national towards the transnational approach, at least in the case of / semi-/peripheries like Romania). Based on a personal interpretation of Gaultier’s theory of *bovarysme*, Fundoianu implies that the problematic

cultural genealogy of a /semi-/periphery, tarred by complexes, incurs the risk of self-extinction, but also grants the chance to incubate new forms of modernity, unfathomable in other times and places. His labyrinthine, sometimes self-contradictory, narrative of cultural adoption as an encounter between the East and the West, gains an existential meaning when confronted with the author's own biography. After emigrating to France, Fundoianu himself became an "adopted child" of France, running the risks and taking the opportunities of acculturation. Unfortunate historical circumstances left, among other things, his bio-cultural narrative begun in the "Romanian years" open-ended.

- ¹ B. Fundoianu, *Preface to Imagini și cărți din Franța*, in *Imagini și cărți*, edited by Vasile Teodorescu, Minerva, București 1980, p. 25.
- ² See, for instance, Scarlat Struțeanu, „*Imagini și cărți din Franța*” de B. Fundoianu, in *Viitorul*, IVCLXVIII, pp. 1-2; S. Rivain, *La Vie littéraire. „Images et livres de France” par B. Fundoianu*, in *L'Orient*, CMXXXVII, 1922, pp. 1-2; Felix Aderca, *Erori fecunde*, in *Sburătorul*, XXIII, 1922, pp. 551-553.
- ³ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*, Minuit, Paris 2000, pp. 20-22.
- ⁴ Gala Galaction, *Un veniamin cutezător*, in *Adevărul literar și artistic*, XXXI, 1921, p. 1. Fundoianu's private, but also public, correspondence with Galaction dates back to 1915 (see Galaction's response to Fundoianu's letter in *Cronica*, XXXV, 1915; see also Andreea Teliban, *La curțile documentului. Maestrul renegat. O scrisoare inedită a lui B. Fundoianu către Al. Macedonski*, in *Observator cultural*, MCXLIV, 2023 (e.g. <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/maestrul-renegat/>, [April 14th 2023]).
- ⁵ According to the word's entry in Șăineanu's interwar edition of the dictionary, “Veniamin = 1. the twelfth and last son of Jacob; 2. the name of a tribe of Israel; 3. fig. favourite son, usually the youngest” (Lazăr Șăineanu, *Dicționar universal al limbei române*, 8th Edition, Scrisul românesc, Craiova 1938, p. 732).
- ⁶ B. Fundoianu, *Opere*, I, edited by Paul Daniel, George Zarafu, and Mircea Martin, Art, București 2011, p. 103.
- ⁷ Ion Minulescu, *Aprindeți torțele*, in *Revista celorlalți*, I, 1908, p. 3. Parts of the manifesto are mere translations or slight adaptations from Remy de Gourmont's *Le Livre des masques* (Mercure de France, Paris 1896, pp. 8, 13, 251).
- ⁸ Benjamin's maternal grandfather was part of the Haskala Illuminist movement, founded the first modern Jewish schools in Moldavia and wrote poetry. All his three maternal uncles had significant scholarly careers: Elias Schwarzfeld wrote a *History of the Jews in Romania*; Wilhelm Schwarzfeld was a philologist and a historian; Moses Schwarzfeld was a journalist, folklore specialist, editor, translator, director of the newspaper *Egalitatea*, and authored a series of books regarding rural traditions (for more details, see B. Fundoianu, *Opere*, I, pp. 14-15).
- ⁹ B. Fundoianu, *Cuvinte despre un prieten*, in *Lumea evree*, XIX, 1919, p. 1.
- ¹⁰ For the historical contextualization of the Jewish Question in Romania and Central-East Europe, see Constantin Iordachi, *Liberalism, Constitutional Nationalism, and Minorities: the Making of Romanian Citizenship, c. 1750–1918*, Brill, Leiden Boston 2019, pp. 265-581.
- ¹¹ See Roxana Sorescu, *Portret în oglindă livrescă. Fundoianu și Baudelaire*, in *Observator cultural*, DCLXXVI, 2013 (e.g. <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/portret-in-oglinda-livresca-fundoianu-si-baudelaire-2/> [April 14th

- 2023)). Before Sorescu, Monique Jutrin and Mircea Martin made similar remarks concerning the paradoxical thinking of Fundoianu/ Fondane.
- ¹² Mircea Martin, *Introducere în opera lui B. Fundoianu*, Minerva, București 1984, p. 144.
- ¹³ All quotes in this sentence, from B. Fundoianu's *Preface to Imagini și cărți din Franța*, in *Imagini...*, pp. 25-26. Fundoianu formulates proposition (i) under the guise of a rhetorical question, probably to attenuate its strength.
- ¹⁴ Eugen Lovinescu, *Există o literatură română?*, I, in *Sburătorul*, XLI, 1922, pp. 281-284.
- ¹⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Traduceri*, in *O luptă literară. Articole din „Sămănătorul”*, Neamul Românesc, Vălenii de Munte 1914, p. 15. Iorga's article is dated May 25th 1903.
- ¹⁶ Felix Aderca, *Erori fecunde*, in *Sburătorul*, XXIII, 1922, p. 552.
- ¹⁷ The title *Imagini și cărți românești* is indicated on the second page of the 1922 edition of *Imagini și cărți din Franța*. Fondane mentions the volume title *Ferestre spre Europa* in a private letter to F. Aderca (B.A.R. Archive, S28(9)/DCCCXV, dated 25.I.1937). Both titles appear among the book projects counted in the interview *Un avangardist român la Paris. De vorbă cu B. Fundoianu*, taken by Sarina Cassvan in *Rampa*, MMMDCXXIII, 1930, p. 3.
- ¹⁸ B. Fundoianu, *Critica – probleme vechi*, in *Imagini...*, p. 178.
- ¹⁹ A collection of biological metaphors can be gathered, for instance, in *ivi*, pp. 24, 27, 63, 199, 232.
- ²⁰ B. Fundoianu, *Mișcarea culturală*, in *Mântuirea*, LXXXI, 1919, p. 2.
- ²¹ See Ștefan Fircă, *Transfiguring Depression: Personal and Collective Identity in Cioran's Interwar Writings*. In *East Central Europe*, IL, 2-3, 2022, pp. 322-323, <https://doi.org/10.30965/18763308-49020015>.
- ²² B. Fundoianu, *Prefață*, in *Imagini...*, p. 26.
- ²³ The Romanian phrase “scriitori naționali mai mari” may be translated either as “greater” or “elder national writers”.
- ²⁴ Alexander Kiossev, *The Self-Colonization Metaphor: Atlas of Transformation*, 2008 (e.g. [http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html#:~:text=The%20concept%20of%20self%2Dcolonizing,into%20colonies%20in%20actual%20fact](http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html#:~:text=The%20concept%20of%20self%2Dcolonizing,into%20colonies%20in%20actual%20fact.). [February 17th 2023]). For the application of Kiossev's theory to Fundoianu's case, see Olga Bartosiewicz, *B. Fundoianu și spiritul imitativ în cultura română: între autocolonizarea și autonomizarea literaturii*, in *Philologica Jassyensia*, XIV, 1, Iassy 2018, pp. 15-28.
- ²⁵ Gaultier's essays on the topic were collected in the brochure *Le Bovarysme. La psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert* (Librairie L. Cerf, Paris 1892) and in the volume *Le Bovarysme. Essai sur le pouvoir d'imaginer* (Mercure de France, Paris 1902). We provide the quotes from Gaultier's synthetic edition *Le Bovarysme* (Mercure de France, Paris 1921). In the French original, the first definition that we looked at is “la faculté qu'a l'homme

de se concevoir autre qu'il n'est" (*Le Bovarysme*, p. 52). The second resonant definition ("l'erreur du soi sur le soi") is repeated in two chapter titles of the book.

- ²⁶ The medicalization of the concept starts off from Gaultier's definition of *bovarysme* as "principe hystérique" and reaches the works of Joseph Grasset, Jacques Lacan, Maryse Choisy, or Jean Bergeret, among others (see Michel Laxenaire, *Le bovarysme*, in *Annales médico-psychologiques, revue psychiatrique*, CLXXIX, 9, 2021, pp. 785-791, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amp.2021.05.001>. Among anthropological studies using Gaultier's concept, see Arnold van Gennep, *De quelques cas de bovarysme collectif*, in *Mercure de France*, LXXIII, 1908, pp. 228-242; Jean Price-Mars, *La Vocation de l'élite*, Edmond Chenet, Port-au-Prince 1919. Recently, "exotic bovarism" reappeared in postcolonial studies (Jennifer Yee, *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism in the French Realist Novel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, p. 115 et passim).
- ²⁷ See Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (in *Opere* [Works], II, edited by Nicolae Mecu, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, București 2015, p. 369).
- ²⁸ B. Fundoianu, *Istoria ideii: o disociație fecundă*, in *Imagini...*, p. 440. The phrase also appears in his book review *Spiritul critic în cultura românească*, II, *ivi*, p. 201. The epithet "fecund" has a high frequency in various similar phrases in Fundoianu's texts.
- ²⁹ B. Fundoianu, *De la etică la spectacol*, I, in *Judaism și elenism*, edited by Leon Volovici and Remus Zăstroiu, Hasefer, București 1999, pp. 145-146.
- ³⁰ B. Fundoianu, *Spiritul critic în cultura română*, II, in *Imagini...*, p. 201.
- ³¹ *Ivi*, p. 202.
- ³² *Ivi*, p. 196.
- ³³ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁴ See Gide's three-installment article *Nationalisme et littérature*, in *Nouvelle Revue française*, V, 1909, pp. 429-434; IX, 1909, pp. 190-194; X, 1909, pp. 237-244. The article was republished in *Nouveaux prétextes* (1911). For an in-depth analysis of Gide's outlook and relationship with Ricardo and Carey, from the perspective of World Literature and ecocriticism, see Richard Hibbitt, *Against haute littérature? André Gide's Contribution to the World Literature Debate*, in *Comparative Critical Studies*, XVII (III), 2020, pp. 391-411.
- ³⁵ John Lubbock, *Ants, Bees, and Wasps. A Record of Observations on the Habits of the Social Hymenoptera*, Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co, London 1882, p. 50. B. Fundoianu delicately translates (from a French edition) and reflects on Lubbock's narrative in the article *Masca lui André Gide*, in *Imagini...*, pp. 75-76.
- ³⁶ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁷ André Gide, *Nouveaux...*, p. 87. Gide also references La Bruyère's witticism in the letter VI. *Stevenson et du nationalisme en littérature*, from *Prétextes*,

- Mercure de France, Paris 1919, p. 120. Fundoianu quotes La Bruyère via Gide in *Masca lui André Gide*, in *Imagini...*, p. 77.
³⁸ "the whole species, the family, is close. The wings made it close" (Ivi, p. 76).
³⁹ Ibidem.
⁴⁰ See André Gide, *Nouveaux...*, pp. 77-78.
⁴¹ Ibidem.
⁴² B. Fundoianu, *Imagini...*, p. 77.
⁴³ We allude to Susan Stanford Friedman's understanding of the "dialogic engagement of the colonized with the colonizer" (from *Planetary Modernisms. Provocations on Modernity across Time*, Columbia University Press, New York 2015, p. 71).
⁴⁴ B. Fundoianu, *Masca lui André Gide*, in *Imagini...*, p. 77.
⁴⁵ B. Fundoianu, *O teorie a clasicismului: Charles Maurras*, in *Imagini...*, pp. 38-46.
⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 43.
⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 52.
⁴⁸ B. Fundoianu, *Idealismul lui Remy de Gourmont*, in *Imagini...*, pp. 63-64.
⁴⁹ B. Fundoianu, *Spiritul critic...*, in *Imagini...*, pp. 194-202.
⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 201.
⁵¹ Ivi, p. 198.

