



Journal
of Danubian
Studies
and Research

The Danube, the Architecture of a Beyond Compare Area

Raluca-Eugenia Voinea¹

Abstract: The Danube, one of the most cosmopolitan rivers in Europe, can be qualified as a geographical, historical, economic and cultural place of transition. Pointing out such a coordinate, the Danube emphasizes overcoming identities, boundaries and demystification. The Danube, this one-of-a-kind cultural area, represents a border identity through its status conferred by its historical and geographical position, but also by the culture in relation to the significant names of the artists and writers. This is the place which gets altogether the national and cultural diversity “a space in which cultures met and broke apart, like any other border that might seem like a place of transition, but also a barrier” (Magris, 1994, p. 424).

Keywords: Danube; antiquity; chromatic pallet

The European culture established throughout history by the contribution of all nations from the continent. This culture came full circle by means of some particular elements getting altogether the presence of diversity, but also by not giving up the national stream.

It is to be taken into consideration that the Danube represents the motif which will form the descriptive outline of various other fields such as literature, painting, music, folklore etc. Therefore, we are able to receive this information under the form of a cultural pattern, a mental and an emotional matrix, uncovering a diversity of creative styles. Apparently, the same, but different, the Danube represents the European heritage through multiple interpretations (geographical, symbolical and historical).

¹ Professor, National College “I.L. Caragiale”, Bucharest, Romania, Address: Calea Dorobantilor No. 163, Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, Corresponding author: raluca_voinea2000@yahoo.com.

Known as “the Danubius” in its superior side and “the Ister” in its inferior one, the Danube crosses Ovidiu’s poetry, the “Panegiricul lui Traian” by Pliniu cel Tânăr and the shallowness of the Viennese waltzes, letting Freud coming up with his psychoanalytical approach. Also, the Danube reflects into some various hypostases from Fănuș Neagu’s short prose, into “the way to Greece” as the quintessential river poet Hoderlin observes. Another added to the list is Eminescu’s lyricism in the poem “Revedere”, the prose of Mihail Sebastian, Sadoveanu, Panait Istrati, and also the famous painter Vasile Parizescu and the relation between myth and reality.

Starting from the antiquity of this dual and lively territory, we can discover legends keeping some kind of a truth. For example, the *Snake’s Island* legend (its name dates back to the 19th century) was devoted to Apollo, before the Trojan War. The second legend was distributed to the bravest form them all, Achilles – the famous hero of the *Iliad* by Homer. The first author talking about the island was Arktinos from Milet (777 B.C.) in his work called “Aetiopiada”. Arktinos was followed by Pindar, Euripide, Hecateu, Strabo and a lot of other writers from the Middle Ages. Regarding the Greek mythology, the Goddess Thetis begged Poseidon to bring out from the depths of the sea an island for her son, Achilles, the hero of Troy. Achilles’s remains were placed on this island and put into a sanctuary. Thus, Achilles would have been brought back to life on this island and, in his honour, the Greeks built a great temple. The ruins of this temple were discovered in 1823 by Captain Kritzky, on the order of Admiral Grieg, the supreme commander of the Russian Black Sea fleet, thoroughly researching the Snake’s Island, came across the famous temple of Achille. In 1837, the Russians built a lighthouse on the island and used its stone to destroy everything left from this edifice.

From another point of view, we find out the theme of the path that came out a hundred years before through the freezing of the waters in “Panegiricul lui Traian” by lui Pliniu cel Tânăr. He pointed out that the Romanian settlements were installed on the Danube at a very favourable time to the barbarians, but unfavourable to the Romanians. The freezing waters created a real battlefield; the sky and the climate became the weapons for those fighting. Undoubtedly, the Danube becomes a natural bridge in terms of confrontations.

Interestingly enough, the image of eternity of this river, in its continuous change, finds an important role in the Eminescu’s lyricism. The symbolism of water has an outstanding complexity and it conquers the topography with sacred, protective powers, it also conquers the forest which relativizes its duration until it is ended. The Danube, this enormous river, crosses the whole continent, summing up how the time

passes just like the Nile – the witness to the ancient civilization passing (“Și de-i vremea bună, rea/ Mie-mi curge Dunărea”). The image of this aquatic place has the value of a simple exhibition, emphasized by a hierarchy of high physical merits. The immobility of the waters that mirror the firmament is explained by the fact that they are part of a transcendent geography that has abolished the movement, them being an equivalent of the sky. The water, namely the Danube, in its universal perspective, outlines the typical image of *Nothing-ness*. Eminescu expressed his concept of death through the primary element of water and the sea portrays the residence of Gods, but also it portrays an Eden, the place where the soul descends to. The poem “Căci eterne sunt ale lumii toate” written by Mihai Eminescu, through means of extended interpretation, brings the mythological symbol of the sea – the realm of Poseidon to the foreground. The sea is an enormous and well-shaped mirror providing an ideal background for lyrical meditation. We are only the formula of an eternal passing of our spirit in the world, just like Heraclit, we cannot sink twice in the same river (noi nu ne scăldăm în aceeași apă) – the expression - “vezi în ce ape te scalzi”. However, the Danube is both volatile and the symbol of eternity.

The need of reaching the eternity and the sense of belonging to a place is taken into consideration by Mihail Sebastian. A day did not go by without the writer not thinking of Brăila. He confessed that if he had been banned one day to think of this city, he would have undoubtedly got confused, denying his own existence. Just a simple question from the novel “De două mii de ani” draws attention to the impact onto the Danube scenery in the writer’s abstract consciousness: “Did anyone need more than a homeland, a land, a horizon, plants and animals? Everything that is abstract in me has been corrected and for the most part, cured by a simple glance of the Danube. Everything that is fever has been calmed down and taken into one place. I have no idea of how I would have been if I were born elsewhere. I am convinced that I would have been different. The river brought against the example of its royal indifference to my Judaic sense for intimate catastrophes. The simplicity of the landscape stood up against my inner loose ends. And to my uncertainty and unease, the river has shown the evanescent, yet everlasting game of the waves”. Sebastian was in need of getting closer to the Danube for keeping his feet on the ground and for making us understand how silly we would be if we protested against the rain every time it rains over us.

The simplicity of the image of the Danube contrasts with the abstract soul, in the fever of a constant anxiety and consistency that offers the balance needed. The blue nuance of the river acquires dual interpretations: the color of Heaven, of hope, purity,

truth, ideal, steadfastness such as it is presented into the work of Shakespeare, Coleridge, but also the colour of mourning – Homer (“Thetis puts on a veil when she understands that Achille’s end is near”).

The chromatic pallet of the Danube, as a state of the soul, guides the way of Vasile Parizescu’s painting. Surprisingly, we can depict such distinct human destinies, but so unitary by means of the Danube symbol. Vasile Parizescu captures in an affectionate manner the lane of childhood - Brăila, a lovely place which assimilates the temporal and spatial horizon, just like the meaning given by Lucian Blaga in “Hronicul și cântecul vârstelor”. The sensitivity for the blue expansions is to be noticed in the landscape of the waters, early developed for someone born on the banks of the Danube – the “Port of Brăila” – the oil, now situated in Greece is one of the evidences of this kind of approach. The river and the lakes are painted by Vasile Parizescu, the water with its reflections occupies the most part of the painting, as in the “Barge convoy at Macin”, where the blue sky interwoven with the blue reflections of the Danube, shining towards the horizon and offering depth to the landscape. The entire blue landscape occupies three quarters of the painting surface and is animated by several brightly coloured boats, standing on the bright and full of coloured shadows of the shore. The boat - “El cutremură o barcă”- “Lacul” written by Mihai Eminescu, - the long canoe of Caron - “Să sărim în luntrea mică”, the carts from the fantastic novel of Mircea Eliade - “La țigănci” – represents a symbol and a link between transcendent and contingent, illusion and disillusionment, dream and reality. Pascal said it would be a pleasure to be on a vessel shaken by the storm when you were sure it would not sink. In the architectural picture of the Danube, our existence becomes permanent and this place will convey to every single generation the power of eternity, born into the matrix of spirituality. The marine aspect evolves into a special chapter of his art, precisely because the painter manages to capture a fight between dynamic and static, the chromatic getting through a variety of nuances to be associated with the tough, noble-coloured gems, unaltered by man’s interference. Parizescu imposed his own vision in a precisely defined space, and the shoreline often customizes the chromaticity of the local architecture. Surprisingly, the painter gives a voice to the battle between water and shore through the white streak of waves. Through perseverance and concentration, the painting brings altogether the whole chromatic beauty of an architecture which gives meaning and reason to the Danube space. Thus, if we paraphrase the title of Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophical work, very familiar to the painter – “The world as the will and representation” – we will understand that the world is both the will under the rational control and the colour of representation.

The image of the Danube – a symbol of life and death – creates a different world, and its voice has a permanent conversation with the lands described in Fănuș Neagu's work. The writer from Brăila notices the importance of this area in an interview given to Victor Crăciun – “Where you see a world and two shovels that's where all these start: the dream, the madness, everything that belongs to Scherezada, to the Orient” (Neagu, 2002, p. 15). The Danube space, as a mystical space, becomes an essential coordinate in Fănuș Neagu's work, the Danube being not only life-giving, but also the one which takes lives away, destroys love, or the witness of unfulfilled love. More than a boundary, the river becomes a source of knowledge, the serpent through metaphors of the silk insomnia of Fănuș Neagu's work – the Danube becoming a complex character. “It seems to me that the Danube is the strip of Europe and the foundation on which we rely our history, hope and adventure. The Danube sums up so many stories, as its own banks overwhelmed with both plain, swish and Dobrogean orchards that many generations will come to sing for love, for the beauties and riotousness of this water touched by gods” (Neagu, 2002, p. 33). The precision of the writer gave us the possibility to know that “on the great rivers, voices isolatedly echo, each of them chasing through their own tunnel. The air near the sumptuous shores helps them, solemnly, to remain distinct” (Eminescu, 1989, pp. 208-209).

Symbol, myth and reality, the Danube river with an unmistakable architecture creates the image of an area in which space and time give us an open way to knowledge, remembrance and introspection.

References

- *** (1989). *Stories from the road of Brăila*. Bucharest: Eminescu, pp. 208-209.
- Neagu Fănuș (2002). *Interview with Victor Crăciun*. Bucharest: Semne, p. 33.