

Turkish Characters in Romanian Literature

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Abstract

The present paper studies the image of the Turk in the Romanian dramaturgy of the twentieth century, through the play *Take, Ianke and Cadîr* by Victor Ioan Popa. The masterpiece of Victor Ioan Popa, *Take, Ianke and Cadîr* is, without any doubt, the pearl of the Romanian dramaturgy. A Jew, a Romanian and a Turk - central figures of the play are merchandisers who share their clients. The Romanian's girl and the Jew's boy end up loving each other, though their love story, in their fathers' conception is impossible. The old Cadîr, always in love and cherishing life, makes their love come true and sets up the scene for a happy ending. The two shops merge breaking down the wall between the shops. The play offers us a totally different image of the Turk, that is no longer related to the expansionist Turk stereotype from Romanian historical writings – friendly, caring and tender Cadîr, who turns out to be smarter and wiser than his neighbors. The success of this play on stage proves us that one could dissociate the Turk from early religious and historical stereotypes, traced back to the Crusades, through the medieval Romanian literature.

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1. INTRODUCTION. THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

This paper addresses the imagology research field from a literary text perspective and based on foreign characters, considers their help in drawing self-images and images of the others.

The imagology studies the image of the *Other*, as it is anchored and perceived in an individual or collective mentality, because it absorbs information about the surrounding reality and, consequently, on the others.

The literary image perception translates the universe into fiction. The sources of inspiration are diverse and involve any act of communication and any means of conveying a message.

The two imagological perceptions – the image of the *Other* and *self-images* – are vividly chained, for testimonies of others and how others are translated into images are always doubled by self-judgments and self-images.

As young the academic field might be, as old is the preoccupation. Therefore, we may say that Imagology has venerable roots because while writing about the Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, and how they perceived each other, Homer or Hesiod were actually producing imagological studies.

From the point of view of the imagological studies, the image is the mental reputation or discursive representation of a person, group, ethnic group or nation. Humans bear different images, which, whether they are aware or not, are reflected in their conduct, constructing the mental image.

The fundamental elements of an image are:

- The *collective* character of an image formation,
- The principle of *orality* underlying the dissemination of images and
- The *reception*, a major force of images' transmission from generation to generation – a function that leads to the creation of the stereotypes' pyramid, which, like stones, hides and reveals, when cut, the cultural and historical stages of a society.

The images may vary depending on the perspective. A fundamental distinction is made between self-images (or self-identity awareness in a group) and images of the others. Both images interact in a process of interdependence, supporting each other. Based on our research, we may classify foreigners in Romanian literature as follows: the sturdy and drunkard Russian, the gentle Frenchman, a cowardly muffled Czech, a faithful Serb, the warrior and wise Turk, the stubborn and diligent Bulgarian, the corrupt Greek and the ambitious Greek woman, an art and cafes amateur Italian, a rigid and polite Englishman, and the American billionaire.

Generally speaking, in the Romanian literature, the foreigner is characterized by the fact that she or he does not speak the Romanian language. As a rule, the foreigner characters are identified with the culture of the people that they represent. The ethno-image leads to the formation of the word-image. These words translate the culture, the literature and the mentality of a nation. Language, along with culture, history, myths and collective memory is the main component of the identity of the foreigner, of the *Other*.

In characterizing foreign personages, (those who are outsiders to a reference space), there are both positive and negative marks; the stereotyped communication being constructed by means of an adjectival plan, using qualifiers. The *Foreigner* is introduced in writings for different reasons:

- The action takes place in another country,
- To add a splash of color to the writing style,
- In a *Persian Letters*' style, to criticize without being judged for doing that.

2. THE TURKSIH CHARACTERS IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

As an outcome of a long historical and cultural relation of Romania and Turkey, the Turkish language had left some traces in our language, given the many morphological classes of words of Turkish origin in Romanian, as well as their semantic distribution.

Present in our literature, from medieval to modern days, the Turk's image in the Romanian literature is dichotomous:

- On the one hand, there is a conqueror and warrior, in chronicles and historic novels, and
- On the other hand, especially after 1918, Turks play the role of the wise man, representing the oriental wisdom.

Within the pages of Romanian literature, a very well-illustrated image of the Turkish people has been outlined. The attention toward this powerful neighbor has evolved gradually from the first contact until the later era. Romanian chronicles of the 15th century focused on the rise of the Ottoman Empire crowned with the conquest of Constantinople, but once they approached the Danube, the Turks begin to appear more in our writings. Related to the historical evolution between the nations, the literature, based mainly on the oral tradition, proverbs and sayings, illustrated a large variety of characters: warriors, enemies, advisers, and wise neighbors. The religious alterity was also the question.

Religious differences are overcome by true love as expressed with the quote "the Christian forgot her laws, laws were forgotten by the Muslim," in "Love with the one of the other law," (Urechia, V. A. „Amor cu cel de altă lege,” p. 283.) or like in the short story "Fatmè" where Fatme is a Turk and her lover is a Romanian and they are so deeply in love that the quote follows "If you were a Turk man, you would eat pork! If you were a Turk woman, you would love Năftică!" (Bacalbaşa, Anton. „Fatmè,” p. 126)

Panait Istrati in *Codin* depicts the Turk with a rifle on his back instead of a sword, and with a smart look: "The Turk, giant, with the rifle over one shoulder, the bag with bread on the other, with a copper and hairy face, with dark and intelligent eyes." (Panait Istrati, *Codin*, p. 153)

Gala Galaction imagined in the *Mahmud's shoes* an enchanted, harmonious coexistence, between three different ethnic groups: Savu, a Christian, Mark Goldstein, a Jew and the Turk Ibraim. The subject of the novel has a real nucleus, and the artistic transfiguration of the event gets the intensity of a process of consciousness. Savu the shoemaker, during a drunken madness moment, kills a Turkish prisoner named Mahmud. The disgraceful remorse

gets him ill of a typhoid fever for more than a month, and Mahmud's image is constantly pursuing him. In confession, Savu receives from the hermit Silvestru the canon to prepare with his hands a thousand pairs of footwear of all kinds and to cross the world to give them to the poor. Roaming the country's roads, Savu distributes the shoes that he has made by his own hands to the poor, regardless of age, religion or ethnicity. Under the sign of the same humanitarian beliefs, he establishes a beautiful friendship with the Turk Ibrahim and the Jewish Goldstein. Sheltered in the Ibrahim's house, Savu does not hesitate to defend the wealth and the life of his Turkish friend, even at the price of his life, when a gang of gypsies attack him. Their cohabitation is based on the principle of doing good, helping the humiliated and afflicted, respecting each other's religion. Beyond these aspects, in the novel, we find a detailed description of the Turkish settlement where flower gardens are compared to paradise gardens. Asked what kind of people are the Turks, Nicolache says to Savu: "honestly speaking, they are people of faith and word. If a Turk gave his word, that is it. Turks are good people! And they are good friends. If you could win the heart of a Turk and make him a friend, he shall risk his life for you." (Gala Galaction, *Mahmud's shoes*, p. 45)

In *The Cuciuc Brothers*, Gala Galaction draws a Turkish character in terms of a rich fellow capitalist, because he had a lot of money and was a very important trader, "His bag was always open to help the needy, to do any good." (George SION, *The Cuciuc Brothers*, p. 130) Ali Efendi was well-respected and appreciated in the community and also considered a wise man, "He had the gift of wisdom: everyone would seek advice from him; like a fair judge he would settle and reconcile all conflicts; everyone listened to him and obeyed his advice, which they considered spoken out of a saint's mouth." (Gala Galaction, *Mahmud's shoes*, p. 130)

Ismail, the famous chef of Radu Tudoran's book *In full sail*, known for his charming Romanian-Turkish language and admired for his harem of four Turkish women, a true Levant character soups served to his crew traditional Turkish food: "It's ready! Come on, eat! This is a meatballs soup, with lots and lots of lovage! And the meat was chopped with a meat cleaver, like in Istanbul!" (Radu Tudoran, *In full sail!* p. 128) The author finds a very common place for the two cultures to meet; in the kitchen and at the dinner table. Anton Lipan, the commander, asks for "mamaliga" (the Romanian

polenta) with the soup, for he does not like it with bread, but Ismail does not approve it, being very surprised by the commander's choice. The chef serves his soup with a metal spoon and refuses to offer a wooden one asked by the commander who says that the metal one changes the taste of the soup. At last, Ismail is happy to see that the commander likes the taste of the soup, but he is also very disappointed that Anton Lipan did not appreciate the meatballs because the meat was cut in too little pieces.

3. THE TURK IMAGE IN “TAKE, IANCHE AND CADÎR”

The play *Take, Ianke and Cadîr* by Victor Ioan Popa is a multicultural story about a friendly coexistence in the Balkans. The play, in three Acts pictures, the life of the three main characters – a Romanian, a Jew and a Turk – that flows slowly, peacefully, and united by a deep friendship. It was first staged on March 25th, 1932, under the author's directing.

Victor Ioan Popa was born on July 29th, 1895, in Călmățui, Tutova County, located in the eastern Romania. He lived only 51 years but had a great career as publicist, novelist, dramatist, director and scenographer. He attended the Iași Conservatory and for a short period the Law School. To provide a living for himself, he worked as a teacher at the Costache Negruzzi College in Iași. He was the director of the Popular Theatre in Bucharest, the National Theatre in Cernăuți and professor of voice and diction at the Bucharest Conservatory.

Published only in 1938, the play *Take, Ianke and Cadîr* is based on the idea of tolerance, mutual respect of feelings, and spiritual purity. The play, built upon the idea of a balance between the pursuit of happiness and the social constraints, leads to a happy end when the union of two young people of different religions is granted.

Anna – Ianke's daughter, who is a Jew, wants to marry Ionel – Take's son, who is a Romanian.

This only becomes possible, due to Cadîr, the Turk that has skillfully reconciled both parties in conflict. His wisdom was based on a personal experience with an unhappy outcome that serves as example.

The news that young people have decided to marry threatens to spoil the tranquility of the village. Although both parents love their children and are linked by a three decades of friendship, they refuse to become in-laws, for fear of bankruptcy of their businesses.

Desperate, Ana addresses Cadîr:

What shall we do now? Tell us! You have been always around and advised us well. Tell us. Is our love a sin?

Ana-Aniki, replies Cadîr, wherever there is love, there is no sin! The sin is living alone.

Cadîr brings calm and urges everyone to think it over, in order not make decisions in a hurry. He shares his own story of having loved a Christian and refused to marry her because of her religion. Being alone all of his life brought him to the thought that “A man without love is like a dried tree.”

Cadîr, with his kindness and his good sense, saved the situation. Wisely, Cadîr tried to show Ianke, that resistance is basically a social prejudice:

Jew, Christian, Mohammedan – we are all the same. One’s a good Jew, another is a good Christian. I am a good Mohammedan. It’s all the same, Ianke! You a Jew – him a Christian. We are brothers... You are both alike... have the same houses... the same wall... the same size... the same shops, only the painting is different!

While Take and Ianke keep fighting, the wise Turk comes up with different solutions. First, he advises Ana to run away with her lover and be happy. He promises money to help. Then he tries to convince each of his friends to accept the love of their children:

“Listen man, Ianke, you very upset if girl from that Leibovici a Christian boy loves?”

“But to hell with them! It is their business! They may love each other, as they wish,” Ianke says.

At last, he confuses the two, lying to the grumpy Take about being Ana's father and telling the labile Ianke that he is Ionel's father. Duping them both, he borrows money from each of them and helps the young couple to run away.

When things would settle down, and the remaining issue is how to name the new shop, as "Take and Ianke" or "Ianke and Take"; he finds the right name for it: "In Jerusalem," because there, in the holy city, fellows of different nationalities coexist.

In the social context of the time, the author points out from the beginning of the play that the flower of the friendship of the three merchants have arisen from the urge to stifle silly prejudices. They wanted to be united by the warmest brotherhood because Ianke and Take had found themselves in the same building, not because of the actual requirements of the local trade but because of the absurd racial discrimination. The racial prejudice stopped the neighbors to buy all goods from the same merchant independent of him being Jewish or Romanian, and set a strict correspondence: Romanians should buy from Tache and Jews from Ianke, therefore demanding the presence of two tradesmen of corresponding nations for a reduced clientele. Cadır being Turk, could satisfy both, and thus both communities could buy from him .

4. CONCLUSION

The foreigner's image is shaped in literature based on clichés and stereotypes inherited from author to author, confronted with the popular literature, proverbs and sayings that are adjusted by historical and cultural relations and embraced through the analysis of the self-images. All these images are the result of stratification, interdisciplinary interaction and networking: from identity to alterity, from the stereotype to literary image, several clichés are built up in a multifaceted body.

Therefore, the literary image is taken from the collective consciousness of a group or a community and constitutes a cliché or a prejudice, which may originally contain a part of the truth or partial information, but may also be a pure fiction and a literary bias.

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