

## DUTY OR/AND FREEDOM IN RODICA IULIAN'S *LE REPENTIR* AND *LES HOMMES DE PAVLOV*

Le patriotisme est une belle vertu sans doute; pratiquez-la comme citoyen [...]. Mais en votre qualité d'homme de lettres vous n'avez point de patrie, vous êtes citoyen du monde: aimez le vrai, goûtez le beau, soyez juste envers toutes les nations [...]. Pour moi [...] je voudrais [...] rassembler autour de moi les richesses littéraires et classiques des siècles & des nations, me faire tour à tour Grec, Latin, Italien, Espagnol, François, Anglois, Allemand & savourer avec le même délice les fruits les plus exquis de tous les climats.<sup>1</sup>

LIKE SEVERAL OTHER European countries, including Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, Romania was for many centuries deprived of independence, having fallen victim to the inter-continental colonialism of the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. After a brief spell of freedom, fully regained only in 1918, at the end of the Second World War Romania found itself once again under foreign domination, this time by being included in the Soviet zone of influence. Due to the link between the concepts of national and linguistic identity, championed by German philosophers such as Leibniz, Lessing, Herder or Fichte and later propagated by Romantics throughout Europe, writers in countries deprived of political autonomy were traditionally perceived as responsible for kindling their compatriots' love of the native soil, tradition and language and were expected to play the foremost role in their nations' struggle for political, cultural and linguistic self-determination. The nineteenth-century legacy of utilitarian literature, in tandem with the politicised role of art under Communism, gave rise to the notion that artists, and writers in particular, ought to turn their work into a platform for combating repressive regimes. By the same token, authors who opted for exile and who, rather than enlisting their work in the service of the national cause, were concerned with their integration into their new cultural and linguistic milieu, risked being considered unpatriotic by both other expatriates and their audience at home.

It is in the context of this long-standing tradition of artists' responsibility towards their nation that I shall examine the exile prose of Rodica Iulian. Like other writers in communist Romania, Iulian for many years battled with censorship, treading the fine line between compromise and writing for the desk drawer. The third path, which was virtually inaccessible but which Iulian finally opted for, was exile. Unable to reconcile her artistic ambitions with the prescriptiveness and rigidity of Socialist Realism, in 1980 Iulian moved to France – a natural choice of adopted country for a Romanian émigré. Since her arrival in exile she has been working as a

journalist, contributing to Radio Free Europe and Radio France. In 1991 appeared *Le Repentir*, Iulian's first novel written directly in French, which was followed by another work of fiction, *Les Hommes de Pavlov*, published in 1995. Iulian is also the author of several short stories and an extended unpublished essay, *Dracula ou de l'imposture*.

Adopting an autobiographical reading of Rodica Iulian's two exile fictions, in this article I shall discuss the novelist's representation of themes such as duty, betrayal, guilt and reclamation, suggesting that the writer's preoccupation with these moral questions is a consequence of her personal experience. Her decision to go into exile and to switch to writing in a language with a higher status and greater scope than her native one appears to have given rise to the author's sense of unfulfilled responsibility towards her mother tongue and her national literary tradition. Thus, I shall argue that the dilemma between the quest for personal/creative fulfilment and the sense of duty towards the homeland and national culture is indeed inherent in the writer's exilic predicament. When expressing her belief in the cyclical nature of history and the universality of human experience, which, when distilled by the creative process, becomes art, Iulian strives to extricate herself from the narrow context of national literature and to redefine her responsibility as a writer, thereby hoping to shed the burden of guilt and betrayal. Yet, despite the author's apparent wish to challenge the concept of national belonging and to produce work which transcends cultural borders, a careful reading of Iulian's prose reveals that, apart from showing a strong presence of Romanian topics and characters, it remains faithful to her national literary tradition, including the Socialist Realist novelistic canon. Furthermore, it could be argued that the author's overtly anti-communist outlook clashes somewhat with Iulian's portrayal of the problematics of guilt and reclamation which bears an uncanny resemblance to Marx's critique of bourgeois society and in particular to his views on man's culpability and estrangement.

While it is clear that *Les Hommes de Pavlov* (henceforward referred to as *Les Hommes*), which narrates a story of a female country doctor, is largely autobiographical,<sup>2</sup> the links between Matei, the protagonist of *Le Repentir*, and Iulian's personal experience are less explicit. However, the first-person narrative, together with a number of parallels that can be traced between the novel's central character and the author's internal and later external exile, encourage at least a partially autobiographical reading. Through the figure of Matei, a Romanian art restorer exiled in France, Iulian reworks the facts of her life in Romania – her estrangement from her opportunist colleagues and her struggle against censorship – whilst Matei's inability to find work corresponding to his experience and qualifications and his much loathed job in a Parisian advertising agency mirror Iulian's difficulties in re-establishing herself as an author in France. Also, the writer often metaphorises Matei's painting technique as medicine<sup>3</sup> or writing and, rather than

having her protagonist visit Parisian art galleries, she focuses on his yearning for books “auxquels il avait rêvé pendant des années, comme à une nourriture inaccessible”.<sup>4</sup> When contrasting Matei’s financial hardship with his colleague’s instant commercial success, Iulian once again represents painting as literature: “Il [Laurent] emploie un *langage* curieux, il *parle* stratégie, tactique, moyen. Dans sa *bouche*, la peinture se métamorphose en art militaire” (*LR*, 11; my italics). Finally, Matei’s predicament is articulated as his failure to communicate his tragic experience to an imaginary listener – an unsympathetic *étranger* – which is due to both the shortcomings of translation and the protagonist’s problematic relationship with his native tongue. Hence, the character’s painstaking efforts to translate Romanian names into French and to render in his second language cultural phenomena specific to his homeland can be identified with the author’s scruples about writing in French and addressing Western readers, who may be not only unaware of but also indifferent to the Romanian people’s plight. The conflict between images and words, each problematised for a different reason – the former being equated with Matei’s guilt-provoking deed and the latter involving difficulties of language acquisition and connoted with communist demagoguery – invokes Iulian’s transition to writing in an acquired language, the author’s bilingualism and the polarisation of her artistic imagination caused by her geographical and cultural displacement.

In *Les Hommes* Iulian recasts herself as a young country doctor called Marina, who spends three years on an obligatory work placement in a remote Romanian village. Whilst the events recounted in the novel, set against the backdrop of the collectivisation of agriculture and gradual demoralisation of the village community, are closely based on Iulian’s life, the heroine’s estrangement from both the peasants and her opportunist fiancé as well as her precarious position as a woman can be read as fictionalised portrayals of the writer’s banishment from her homeland and her subsequent marginalisation on the French literary scene. Like Marina, who chooses solitude over marriage to a man she despises, Matei is alienated from both his colleagues and his friends, his political non-conformism distancing him from the former and his fear of implicating others and jeopardising his own status and security estranging him from the latter. By the same token, Matei’s relationships with women tend to be restricted to one-night stands and encounters with prostitutes. His short-lasting and loveless affair with his colleague Malvina resembles Marina’s brief reunion with her ex-fiancé, Giorgio, where in both cases the lovers are drawn to one another not by passion or affection, but by yearning for togetherness which promises an illusion of safety. Once he is in exile, Matei’s aloofness towards Westerners, whom he judges incapable of empathising with his traumatic experience of loss, together with his otherness and foreignness, become the source of “une sorte d’étrangeté qui flottait [...] entre ses collègues, ses nouvelles relations, ses amours de fortune et lui” (*LR*, 9). At

the same time his ambivalent attitude towards Romanian expatriates, who, as exemplified by Laurent, can be quick to idealise their past and to adapt to the commercialised artistic scene in the West, estranges him from his fellow countrymen in exile.

If considered in Hegelian or Marxian terms, the estrangement of Iulian's protagonists can be seen as closely related to their guilt. Marx, who secularised and developed Hegel's concept of man's alienation from God, other men and Nature, stated that both estrangement and culpability stem from the detrimental living and working conditions created by capitalist society.<sup>5</sup> Whilst on the one hand the bourgeois state alienates the individual from himself, other persons, the material and cultural objects that he creates and the process of his work, on the other hand it gives rise to moral conflicts and dilemmas, such as duty-versus-interest (e.g. the choice between going on strike and earning money in order to provide for the family), thus creating greed, individualism, competition and egoism.

Paradoxically, as Iulian's exile narratives clearly indicate, Marx's critique of bourgeois society can be easily extended to a communist state, whose citizens, as illustrated by the protagonists of the two texts in question, often find themselves both alienated from the society they live in and imbued with a sense of guilt. Whilst Marina's and Matei's culpability arises from their violation of the idiosyncratic laws issued by the regime and the ethical code of their profession, their estrangement stems from the disintegration of communities – a consequence of the authorities' deliberate destruction of culture and tradition and the creation of what Michel Foucault has termed the "panoptic society".<sup>6</sup> In both novels, Iulian describes the breakdown of social structures as an outcome of policies of urbanisation and industrialisation and of purges that eliminated the educated and cultured layers of society, encouraging opportunists to thrive:

Avec une rapidité surprenante, les structures du pays s'étaient écroulées. Par des fissures, les trous béants de la ruine, une armée hétéroclite, composée de va-nu-pied, de mécontents de tout bord, d'opportunistes, des délinquants, des rêveurs impitoyables et des parasites, avait déferlé offrant ses services à la nouvelle équipe au pouvoir. (*LR*, 50–51)

C'est dans les rangs de cette race asservie, terrorisée, malades d'envies médiocres, dévorée par le désir de coloniser la ville [...] que le pouvoir recruta son armée de bureaucrates, de geôliers et de flics. Des accouplements consommés sur les routes de l'exode paysan intérieur naquirent des enfants qui, depuis leur âge le plus tendre, connurent la faim, les mêmes désirs, et perçurent la peur des parents malgré leur silence. (*LR*, 126–7)

Despite the protagonists' efforts to preserve their neutrality and to stay away from politics, their refusal to collaborate quickly turns them in the eyes of the regime into enemies of the people. This means that they will be constantly watched and, by being entangled in plots fabricated by the

Party, will sooner or later be forced to conform. For instance, by being deprived of firewood for her surgery and feeding stuff for her horse – her only means of transport – Marina is obliged to “steal” hay from the government stables and dry twigs from the forest, now considered “State property”. Likewise, Matei’s refusal to destroy Anatol Constant’s masterpiece puts the art restorer’s career in jeopardy. Thus, the protagonists’ work becomes politicised and driven by external goals, which, in Marxian terms, represent the alien powers that both render man’s work meaningless and prevent him from realising his potentialities.

Coupled by Hegel with the absence of the sense of wholeness and integrity, culpability is a direct consequence of man’s learning to distinguish between Good and Evil and between Spirit and Nature. At that moment, man assumed responsibility for his deeds and therefore began to feel guilty. “The union of the two determinations [subjectivity and objectivity] is,” Hegel says in *Philosophy of Nature*, “what is called the *primal state of innocence*, where Spirit is identical with Nature; whereas the standpoint of the divided consciousness is the fall of man from the eternal, divine unity.”<sup>7</sup> Hegel goes on to argue that only animals and children can still dwell in this “paradise state” of natural unity of thought and intuition, whilst man, having “eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”, has to go through “the labour and activity of thought” in order to overcome the separation between himself and Nature. “The healing of this breach,” Hegel contends, “must be in the form of the knowing Idea, and the moment of the solution must be sought in the consciousness itself.”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, in Iulian’s exile narratives, which reverberate with biblical echoes, the protagonists re-enact the transcendence of the law of righteousness: by plucking the evil fruit of knowledge they awaken to their moral obligation. In both texts, trees are a powerful symbol, forming the backdrop to Matei’s and Marina’s discovery of the regime’s crimes towards the Romanian people and the national heritage. In *Le Repentir*, the beech trees which Matei erases from Anatol Constant’s canvas can also be found in the park of the estate where the painting was created, the concentration camp of Barca, where the single tree embodies Pr Valère’s solitude and confinement, and in the village R., where Matei works whilst in exile. It is during the restorer’s visits to La Hêtraie and Barca that he learns about the deportations, imprisonment and killings of countless artists and intellectuals. For instance, he is told by Valère that Constant, whose talent Iulian judges equal to that of Brancusi (*LR*, 112), was murdered only because “il défiait l’histoire, survolait la géographie et laissait au paysage la liberté d’être uniquement le lieu de rencontre des couleurs. Sa peinture ne racontait rien et ne se racontait pas, niant ainsi tout déterminisme, lui opposant la joie et la fièvre de peindre” (*LR*, 113). Likewise, the deportation of historians and the deliberate and systematic annihilation of the national cultural heritage, of which Matei learns during his visits to cellars brimming

with half-decomposed paintings, exemplify the authorities' policy of rewriting Romanian history. The manor house in La Hêtraie, once inhabited by the family of Ioan Donna (who, ironically, had been assassinated in the inter-war period for sympathising with the Left), was repeatedly plundered and devastated and later, having briefly served as a battery, a barn and a school, was turned into a weekend retreat for Party apparatchiks. When travelling through the Danubian plane Matei discovers that, as a consequence of the collectivisation of agriculture, "cette terre à laquelle, depuis son enfance, il associait la verdure, la douceur, l'air au goût du miel" has become a dusty desert abandoned by the dispossessed peasants. Where the map was once tinted green and covered with "hiéroglyphes de l'abondance" – "le dessin d'une gerbe de blé, celui d'une vache tachetée de brun vue de profil, un épi de maïs, et d'autres gerbes aux épis plus touffus" (*LR*, 22) – the landscape is now dotted with detention camps which, on the contrary, cannot be located on any official map.

The symbolism of the plum tree as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is even more explicit in *Les Hommes*, where the narrator wonders:

Pourquoi le pommier plutôt que le prunier a-t-il été choisi comme Arbre de Connaissance du Bien et du Mal? Ne serait-ce pas un vilain tour qu'un diable littéraire et botaniste nous aurait joué, en remplaçant dans le texte d'origine par le pommier le nom du premier arbre, le prunier, à la puissance funeste, si évidente. . .<sup>9</sup>

The "lethal powers" of the tree manifest themselves through its association with the cataclysms that torment the village: the weather anomalies, the eclipse of the sun, hunger, murders and deportations. The plums, which constitute the core of the local diet made up of *slivovitz* and a plum-and-meat stew, which, according to Marina, lacks in both flavour and nutrition, are frequently used by the author as a metaphor of evil. The purple bruise on the forehead of a murdered infant and the nipple of a prematurely aged patient who, like other women in the village, is a second-class citizen, abused by her husband and denied a place at the table, are both compared to the violet fruit. It is no coincidence that Marina chooses a purple pen to enter into the patients' register the name of the village policeman, Victor Alambic, the guardian of the new order known for his fondness of the plum-based alcohol.

The symbolic act of Marina's biting into a sour-tasting plum and Matei's erasing the beech grove represented in Constant's masterpiece stand in the novels for the protagonists' expulsion from the Garden of Eden of Innocence, that is, their disillusion with Communism which has failed to deliver the promised democracy, equality and welfare. Their knowledge about the atrocities committed by the Party compels them to revise their role as intellectuals in the safeguarding of their country's culture and tradition. However, as Matei and Marina begin to realise their power-

lessness in the face of the fast-spreading terror, the destruction of their country's national heritage and the irreversible changes in Romanian society, they start to feel guilty. Their attempts at atonement by keeping a record of events that they witness fail since writing proves to be as dangerous as oral tradition is unreliable. In *Le Repentir* Iulian expresses her fear that even if the stories about detention camps and prisons are passed on to the next generations they are bound to sound as esoteric and exotic as "des histoires de trappeurs aux confins du pôle Nord, des aventures dans le Gobi" (LR, 35). Also, whilst Matei's command of French is insufficient to render his experiences in Romania, his mother tongue, once the means of torture and propaganda, seems hardly suitable for artistic expression. Thus, having renounced the idea of writing, Matei resorts to photography and painting. However, his attempt at Pr Valère's portrait causes him to doubt whether art, with its tendency to use metaphors and symbols, can and should assume a historiographic dimension. His choice to paint his sitter's body in purple in order to accentuate the prisoner's ordeal makes Matei think that "Il est possible que [...] j'ai ajouté certains bouts de phrase [...] c'était du jeu, là, de la littérature" (LR, 36–7). Thus, his efforts to immortalise Barca, La Hêtraie, Anatol Constant, Elisa Donna (the painter's lover and patroness) and the manor house where the couple had met, hardly prove to be redeeming.

Neither time nor physical distance can free Matei from the memory of his "péché d'orgueil" (LR, 9), which is how he himself describes his decision to trade an invaluable work of art for his personal and artistic freedom. Importantly, it is only when the protagonist can once again work as an art restorer that his sin is finally absolved. His work on the fresco representing the martyrdom of St Savinien finally puts an end to the "longue convalescence après une maladie aiguë" (LR, 8), facilitating Matei's integration into Western society and providing him with a sense of belonging and fulfilment. Just like Iulian's critique of communist society, her representation of her protagonist's reclamation invokes Marx's conviction that the problems of guilt and alienation can only be resolved through freely chosen, non-coerced and *social* work where individuals have control over the activity and the products of their labour. According to Marx, non-alienated work is partially constitutive of human community, freedom and self-realisation. For Matei it is not only the opportunity to exercise his profession, but also, and maybe more importantly, the appreciation shown by the community in which he is working, which alloys his culpability. The villagers' keen interest in Matei's restoration of the fresco and the protagonist's good rapport with his collaborator Arthème seem more rewarding than the salary he receives, making his work truly meaningful. It is only then that Matei can begin to appreciate his creative and personal freedom, epitomised in the novel by the copy of the Statue of Liberty, looming large in the background as the artist is talking to a passer-by on the Pont de Grenelle:

Peut-être est-ce ça, l'insaisissable de la liberté: s'arrêter sur un pont et parler avec un inconnu, en regardant d'autres inconnus qui pêchent, sans que personne vienne vous dire qu'il est interdit de stationner, de crier, de pêcher, de regarder. [...] Matei se sent heureux. (*LR*, 110–11)

The sense of solidarity and comradeship that permeates the last pages of *Le Repentir*, where Matei and Arthème exchange stories about their misfortunes, evokes a paradigm often found in Socialist Realist novels, where the positive hero, having discovered the laws governing his social existence and overcome his weakness, would derive his joy and fulfilment from working with others towards the common cause. It could be argued that Marina, who comes to the village to put her knowledge in the service of the people, is also largely styled on the ascetic heroes of the Socialist Realist novels. Like most of them, she goes through a process of discovery, experiencing struggle and ordeals, and places her responsibility as a doctor above her personal happiness (she chooses to stay in the country despite the possibility of a transfer to the capital to be with Giorgio). However, although Marina's fortitude earns her both the villagers' and her fiancé's respect, in the end she fails to conquer her weakness and emerges out of her experience downtrodden and plagued by guilt and fear, Iulian thereby subverting and mocking the Socialist Realist "method".

By showing Matei gaining financial independence and finding happiness on his *terre d'accueil*, Iulian demonstrates that exile, despite the emotional and economic hardship that it often entails, can also be a positive experience. Having felt trapped within his nationality, native language and ethnic identity, none of which he had freely chosen (*LR*, 52), by severing the emotional ties with his country, Matei has a chance to redefine his identity. It is clear that for Iulian the transition to writing in a language free from negative connotations and political overtones, and her ability to communicate with her audience without thinking of her work passing through the mincer of censorship, has been a highly liberating and challenging experience, albeit to some extent overshadowed by her compatriots' unvoiced reproach that she has abandoned her homeland and betrayed her native language. In both narratives the author's need to explain her decision to leave her country, to write in a language other than her native one and to remain abroad even though democracy has been restored in Romania, is implicit in the protagonists' ambivalence about their compatriots, displaced on to their native language.

Significantly, in *Le Repentir* Iulian places great emphasis on the artist's resentful attitude towards his mother tongue and the pleasure he takes in renaming things in the new language. When considered in isolation words, Matei observes, are "aussi propres qu'au sortir d'un dictionnaire"; however, when "crachés par leurs bouches, écrasés entre leurs lèvres, moulus entre leurs dents, trempés de leur salive, remués avec le bout de leur langue, ils

s'aglutinent en une manière visqueuse, empoisonnée" (*LR*, 178–9). Since there are so few words at our disposal "ils finissent par pourrir dans nos bouches comme des chicots" (*LR*, 30) and unavoidably change meaning depending on the speaker and the circumstances in which they are uttered. The sentence "Ils sont tous pareils" which, when pronounced by Matei's French acquaintance, is no more than a casual remark, when uttered by a guard in Barca, becomes an insult, its resonance changing with the noun substituted by the personal pronoun *ils*, the tone of voice of the speaker and the context in which it is pronounced. To test his theory, Matei associates the word *liberté* with Pr Valère. The sentence he produces – "il était libre de contempler les magnifiques couchers de soleil" – successfully marries the two seemingly incongruous terms, thus confirming the artist's worst fears about language.

The fact that Matei is restoring French rather than Romanian works of art seems of little importance in the context of the protagonist's ruminations on the universality of beauty and cyclical nature of history. The numerous parallels between his own life and the story of St Savinien – a Greek who, having rebelled against the prevalent order in his country, went into exile where he died the death of a martyr – convince Matei that his experience is far from being unique. Likewise, the homology between his own determination to safeguard art, Arthème's affection for the ancient custom of the mason's signing the last stone of a restored building, and Fischer's passion for collecting bric-a-brac, means that both the instinct to annihilate and the urge to protect history and art from destruction belong to all-human behaviour. In the end Matei feels that

il se sent attaché à cette terre où il n'est pas né, comme s'il l'avait toujours connue et qu'il eût une dette envers elle. [...] La terre qu'il foule ne lui semble pas différente de celle qu'il a quittée. Elle s'est tant de fois refermée, elle aussi, sur des morts, lors des massacres et des guerres. (*LR*, 160)

If it can be argued that Iulian inscribes herself into the protagonists of her two exile fictions, *Le Repentir* could be read as an account of the author's struggle against her sense of guilt and her attempt to absolve herself of her apparent sins of desertion of her homeland and betrayal of Romanian literary tradition. In the remaining part of this article I intend to demonstrate that through her work Iulian successfully reconciles her sense of responsibility towards her cultural roots with her ambition to pursue her literary career in free-thinking Western society, thus proving that duty and freedom do not have to be exclusive notions.

Through the two narratives discussed here as well as Iulian's other French-language writings, which are all centred on the author's homeland<sup>10</sup> and disclose details about the communist rule in Romania, Iulian construes an image of her native land in the minds of her new readership. A study of the novelist's prose in the context of Romanian literature also reveals

that her work, although written in flawless and often inspired French, remains largely indebted to the author's national literary canon. Iulian's writing is clearly rooted in the *Volk* tradition, where the *Volksgeist*, or in other words the sense of nationhood, is based on the collective personality of the people, which in turn springs from shared cultural roots and landscape.<sup>11</sup> Having originated in eighteenth-century Germany, which at that time was a collection of states striving towards unification through insistence on their peoples' common cultural heritage, such definition of national identity can be traced in countries which have suffered loss of independence and have therefore been susceptible to the ideas of German writers and philosophers. The predominance of nature and in particular of sylvan imagery in Iulian's texts makes her novels artistically akin to the writings of great Romanian authors such as Ion Pillat, Mihai Sadoveanu or Mihai Eminescu. As in the poetry and prose of her literary forefathers, in Iulian's writing the forest has a multiple and powerful presence, incarnating universality, harmony, beauty and eternity. Importantly, the meal Marina shares with her friends in a forest clearing dubbed "l'Eglise" is the only moment of serenity and beauty during her three-year assignment and is reminiscent of both pre-Christian pagan rites and Holy Communion.<sup>12</sup> As Friedrich Sieburg has pointed out, nature does not occupy a prominent place in French literature since "la nature en France est dépourvue d'extrêmes, dépourvue de ces déchainements passionnés qu'elle se permet [...] dans les Carpates [...]. Ni la plaine ni la montagne ne semblent ici monstrueuses."<sup>13</sup> Conversely, as elucidated by the Romanian literary historian Constantin Ciopraga, "no portrait of the Romanian people is possible without deciphering the complex relation man–nature."<sup>14</sup> The reason for the predominance of stylisation based on forest lies, Ciopraga argues, in his country's turbulent history which has meant that stone never gained precedence over wood in architecture.

However, although Iulian's fiction is largely retrospective and firmly rooted in her national cultural tradition, it does not belong to what Czesław Miłosz has defined as the "literature of nostalgia",<sup>15</sup> whilst Iulian herself hardly fits Joseph Brodsky's ironic portrayal of an exile writer – a retroactive being, with "tears or saliva running down between his shoulder blades".<sup>16</sup> Rather, as demonstrated through the author's highly unsympathetic description of the Romanian people, exemplified by Marina's contempt for the peasants' meekness in the face of the regime or Matei's adamant refusal to "revenir dans le pays défiguré qu'il ne reconnaissait plus comme sien" (*LR*, 168), Iulian's prose is largely free from nostalgic overtones and could be classified more appropriately as what Claudio Guillen calls "literature of counter-exile". Indeed, the novelist's work is "characterised by the tendency towards integration, increasingly broad vistas and Universalism"<sup>17</sup> while Rodica Iuliana Coporan's choice to use her middle name as her pen name implies her wish – conscious or subconscious – to identify with Joseph

Conrad (originally Józef Konrad Korzeniowski), a positive role-model for generations of exile writers. The author's decision to write in French and focus on supranational and timeless notions such as alienation, responsibility, guilt or betrayal, expresses her desire to reposition her work within a wider context of European literature and to challenge the reductive understanding of writing as the tool of an ideology. By providing a testimony to life under a totalitarian regime and in exile, which would hardly have been possible had Iulian remained in Romania or had written strictly for her native audience whilst abroad, the author issues a warning for the future rulers of states, which, as Brodsky says, is the only way an émigré writer can fulfil his/her responsibility. Considering this as well as the rather moderate commercial success that Iulian has so far enjoyed on the French literary scene, it seems surprising that the thematics of guilt occupy such an important place in her work, and it therefore must be argued that the novelist's sense of culpability originates in the traditional perception of the meaning and mission of literature which still persists in Romania and other European countries that have shared the fate of Iulian's homeland.

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#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> J. Jürgen, *Langue française, langue universelle? Die Diskussion über die Universalität des Französischen an der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften zum Geltungsanspruch des Deutschen und Französischen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 1994), p. 177. The statement was made by Johann Bernhard Merian who was a Professor of philosophy at the Collège français in Berlin at the time.

<sup>2</sup> My interview with the writer.

<sup>3</sup> Iulian used to work as a medical doctor in Romania and, like Marina, the protagonist of *Les Hommes de Pavlov*, she spent three years on an obligatory work placement. Since her arrival in exile, she has not practised medicine as her qualifications are not recognised in France.

<sup>4</sup> R. Iulian, *Le Repentir* (Paris, 1991), p. 149. References to *Le Repentir* will henceforth be given in the text, thus: LR, 149.

<sup>5</sup> K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", *Early Writings*, ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York, 1964).

<sup>6</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, 1979), pp. 195–228.

<sup>7</sup> F. Weiss, *Hegel: The Essential Writings* (London, 1974), p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> R. Iulian, *Les Hommes de Pavlov* (Paris, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Iulian's short story "Les Chaises" is set in Bucharest and is Iulian's own version of Ionesco's play with the same title. The essay "Dracula ou de l'imposture", as the title itself suggests, discusses the figure of a vampire in Western literary tradition.

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see S. Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 24–30.

<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that in order to represent Marina's and Matei's reintegration into society, Iulian uses a meal as a metaphor. The symbolism of Matei's and Marina's sharing food with their friends and colleagues rings with echoes of Freud's reflections on guilt in *Totem and Taboo* (London, 1950). To support his theory that all societies repose on a shared sense of culpability, Freud interprets the totem meal, which consists of a communal sharing of the totem animal's flesh, as a re-enactment of the tribesmen's, or their ancestors', original sin – the killing of the violent and possessive father who had chased away his brothers and sons and kept all women to himself. By eating the flesh of the surrogate father, the tribesmen rekindle their sense of guilt and thus renew the bonds that unite their clan.

<sup>13</sup> F. Sieburg, *Dieu, est-il français?* (Paris, 1930), p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> C. Ciopraga, *Personality of Romanian Literature* (Iași, 1981), p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Cz. Miłosz, "Notes on Exile", *Books Abroad* 50 (Spring 1976), pp. 281–4 (p. 283).

<sup>16</sup> J. Brodsky, "The Condition We Call Exile", *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 34 (1991), pp. 1–8 (p. 4).

<sup>17</sup> C. Guillen, "On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile", *Books Abroad* 50 (Spring 1976), pp. 271–81 (p. 272).