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An Australian Story with a Romanian Accent: Irina Pană's (Re)Writings in *Melbourne Sundays*

> I know I cannot survive in Australia if I do not read this country. Reading Australia has now become my full time occupation, whether I am with books or not, when I am walking or watching television, or at table, or even teaching… These lines are mine, too, impressions plagiarized by my own life (*Melbourne Sundays* 31).

> [My sister], you are all so foreign, and glaring from afar, your letters are now rubbed on this streaky paint, stiff Bucharest faces I carry around in heavy sacks. Your words all bundled up in a heavy coat, lie for hours and for days on the hard rails… When I get closer to our old school I can see your slim bones through the blizzard, and the dark purple pool of fragrant hay. But in my dream I have shut the door against your footsteps (*Melbourne Sundays* 36-37).

(Self)Translations

For writers who lived under the communist regime, language was already a form of exile. Before 1989, in Romania, writers had only two possibilities: they could choose to remain in the country and hide their subversive ideas under a camouflage of words using hidden allusions, ambiguity devices and double coding, or they could escape abroad and use a foreign language to express themselves in another sort of camouflage. Both forms of exile – "internal" and "external", inside and outside the communist walls – were experienced by the Romanian-Australian writer Irina Grigorescu Pană.

Melbourne Sundays (1998) narrates the story of a woman who left her communist country and emigrated to Australia with her family, after spending six months in a refugee camp in Austria. Her convoluted existential trajectory is also reflected by her academic positions, first at University of Bucharest, then at Monash University, Melbourne (1986-1996), and then back at University of Bucharest, where she is now full professor of English. Her double belonging to the Romanian and Australian cultural spaces is reflected by her books of fiction, poetry and literary criticism, published in Romanian and English – from her prose books in Romanian *Robinson and the Innocents* (1971) and *The Farewell Lesson* (1984) and her first volume of poetry in Romanian *The Garden's Frontier* (1980), to her memoir in English *Melbourne Sundays* (1998) and her critical studies in English *Baroque and* Alchemy (1996) and *The Tomis Complex: Exile and Eros in Australian Literature* (1996).

Melbourne Sundays is a profound meditation on exile – on her ten-year stay in Australia, on what must have felt like a hundred years of solitude, at a time when she did not know the outcome of communism and the fate of the beloved ones left behind. Fluid and refusing taxonomy, the book can be read as an autobiographical piece, a travel diary, an epistolary collage, an essayistic novel and a fragmentary poem in prose. Written in English and published in Romania, *Melbourne Sundays* contains the double message of those texts which are meant to be read both by a national and an international audience – presenting to the Western reader the harsh reality of the communist regime, while, at the

same time, aiming to familiarize the post-1989 Romanian reader with the Australian model of a free world.

The title and subtitle of the book, *Melbourne Sundays: Translations into English as a Second Life* echo Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation. A Life in a New Language*. Like Hoffman, Pană lays stress on the role of the writer-translator, a Hermes figure, a mediator able to reconcile or contrast two experiences. Living simultaneously in two worlds, the writer-translator can negotiate between two cultures, "making possible an easy commerce between the familiar and the alien" (Pană 7). In Pană's case, writing as translation implies a two-way operation: Bucharest is translated into the language of Melbourne and, in its turn, the Australian reality is read against both the contemporary Romanian one and the nineteenth century Australian one.

As Maria-Sabina Draga-Alexandru cogently observes, Pană's "exile in Australia is just a prolongation, another dimension of what used to be exile at home in a language in which truth was forbidden, in a country that was politically and geographically on the margin of Europe, just as Australia is on the margin of the world map" (360).[1] The significance of this territorial and linguistic exile is broadly explored by the writer who finds herself in a perpetual state of displacement, who understands in a Kristevian way the loss of the mother-country as a loss of the mother-tongue – who lives as "a stranger to herself", unable to trace the origin of the exilic gesture (Kristeva 1):

> I have been afraid of exile all my life, as others have been of prison or of camps, or death, or of an earthquake, but now there are days when I cannot remember how it was, or why I left my country. I cannot discover the beginning, the origin of that decision or thought. I can no longer remember the day and the hour when this other country began to be shaped: first as a journey to Australia, then as the home of a fugitive, then as the front page of a new book (17).

Pană repeatedly points out that any translation presupposes exile, displacement, expatriation, "a loss of home", that is, of language "as a home of meanings" (7). Prompted by nostalgia, by the pain of return to the (m)other land and attempting to reinscribe the past experience into the present foreign landscape, Pană's text reveals an uprooted, nomadic identity, forever in movement, forever searching for the true (linguistic and geographic) home. The writer lives in a state of in-betweenness, on a physical and mental "borderland", "constantly crossing over" and trying to appropriate the foreign Australian space while simultaneously inhabiting the Romanian one (Anzaldua 99).

Geographical movement from one country to another is paralleled by an emotional and spiritual Odyssey, in which the writer travels by reading other books to the imaginary space of a "second life". In a subtle mise en abîme, *Melbourne Sundays* incorporates parts of other female-authored texts about Australia, which raise the same issues of knowledge, power, exile and identity. *Melbourne Sundays* thus (de/re)constructs both the Romanian and Australian realities by using other texts whose discourses overlap

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[1] In an article on *Melbourne* Sundays, Maria-Sabina Draga-Alexandru convincingly correlates Pană's *Melbourne Sundays* with her critical book *The Tomis Complex*, discussing their similar textual positionings by making use of Kristeva's love/hate discourse on exile. The present article switches the discussion towards (self)translation as intertextuality examining the way in which Pană's text re-inscribes the classic Australian narrative in a new transnational framework through a continual re-writing of both the Australian and Romanian cultural and literary contexts.

in the process of writing as translation – since translation, as Pană confesses, "is the bond through which one can live simultaneously in two worlds" (7).

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Pană's life story has points in common with other autobiographical pieces in English by Eastern European female immigrants, whose "atypical Eastern/Western textual scenarios" propose "new ontological definitions that question the fundamentals of a fixed national and cultural identity" (Crişu 2009, 25). The same leitmotifs of traumatic displacement circulate in all of them, as they describe the excruciating separation from the mother country (especially Hoffman), the harshness of the communist regime (Kassabova), or the scarred aftermath of a terminal illness (Goldsworthy). All of them tell in more or less chronological order different tales of survival, anchoring them in real facts, finding ways of articulating "disruptive experiences" of personal traumas (La Capra 41).

However, *Melbourne Sundays* distinguishes itself from the others as the most livresque piece, the one which continually makes references to other female texts – being most conscious of its fictional and metafictional form. While the autobiographical element is still there, it is filtered through hundreds of intertextual lenses in an almost poetic way that retains the essence of an unusual story.[2]

Significantly, *Melbourne Sundays* can be read as a long letter containing fragments from real letters (of the first female settlers) and from imaginary letters (of the narrator and her sister). For Pană, writing becomes an act of rewriting marked by a double orientation toward the past and present reality. Her postmodern "double coded" writing has little to do with copying, remaking and duplicating, and more with redefining, rethinking and reshaping a female literary tradition (Hutcheon 107).

Reading these uncanonized texts, their unofficial versions of the grand narratives of territorial conquest, Pană does not simply repeat them, but fills in their "vacant spaces" and "gaps" (Iser 210, 280). She listens to their most telling silences and almost inaudible whispers, "writing in(to) the texts", "'formulating' the 'unformulated' stories" and throwing new light on the arch-theme of dislocation circulating in them (Moraru 15). Being similar to other contemporary women's (re)writings, Pană's text "can be said to have a higher, even ontological, stake in revising the texts of the past" (Plate 8, in Moraru 143).[3]

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[2] As Maria-Sabina Draga-Alexandru remarks, "Pană's work, combining fiction and poetry in a way that ultimately erases the boundaries between the two forms of expression, is a very significant example of a phenomenon that, paradoxical as it may seem, is very frequent in contemporary Romanian literature and is connected to the experience of politically determined inner and outer exile. In spite of the obvious cultural need for narrative forms endowed with the capacity to rewrite history, few Romanian authors (mostly women) write fiction nowadays, or, if they do, they do it in an extremely lyrical way. Pană's evolution as a writer leads not towards a choice of the lyrical mode to the detriment of the narrative one (the two options alternate in her creation from the very beginning), but towards a merging of the two" (357).

Moreover, this continual fluctuation between lyrical and narrative modes offers the writer the possibility of expressing the complexity of her paradoxical emotions through ambiguous, elliptical constructions which open up the text towards multiple interpretations and readings.

[3] As in other works about emigration, in Pană's book, "crossing borders may lead to a reconsideration of existential limits, pushing them to the extreme" (Crişu 2010, 375).

Pană's continuation of these exilic stories, her multiple readings, take the shape of a palimpsestic text characterized by "multiplicity and heterogeneity", a "récriture féminine" in which the others' stories are permanently re-inscribed (Showalter 249, Moraru 143). "My Melbourne impressions are from a book I compose as I read" becomes her leitmotif (71). Quoting other texts, invoking them, paraphrasing them, Pană does not simply reiterate their (post)colonial scripts; she revises the Australian national narrative by reclaiming the others' (un)official (his)stories, by making them "truly hers" and inflecting them with her own Eastern European accents. She enriches them with the cultural and linguistic flavors of her country exquisitely preserved by her transoceanic memories. Her forays into the others' literary territories and her taking into possession the new land are counterbalanced by her own literary offerings – her unique contribution to Australian literature.[4]

Destabilizing cultural binaries, Pană revises the Australian narrative by relating it in an unprecedented way to her own Romanian story. Through the exchange of letters between the narrator and her sister, the author brings Romania to the foreground, re-mapping it as a cultural center and subverting its representations as an antipode to the Western world. She inserts her own story into the others' stories and draws attention to the similarities between herself as an Eastern European woman and the other Australian women. Like the others, she is an exile, an expat, a "Metiza", another "woman without an official history… who constructs her own historical legacy" (Anzaldua 7). Rewriting the others' books, journeying through them, Pană assumes the identity of a writer-nomad, always in movement, "aware of the nonfixity of boundaries", always carrying her symbolic home (Braidotti 36).

Through metaphors of exile and self-exile, Pană re-inscribes the classic Australian narrative in a new transnational framework which goes beyond the center/margin, Britain/Australia model by combining both the (post)colonial and (post)communist scenarios. She no longer understands Australia solely in relation to Britain, but reconfigures it in a triangulated way, also in relation to Romania as another marginal, exilic space. Using Eva Hoffman's idea of personal triangulation as a way of going beyond bipolar perceptions of time and space (by connecting three or more contexts), Pană's text can be analyzed as having a tripartite structure, in which the Old World/New World dichotomies are obscured.[5] If Hoffman relates her native Poland to America and Canada, in a "double-emigration structure", Pană correlates her Romanian origin with Australia and indirectly with Britain. Her arrival in Australia is a "second arrival", so that the new land is a space already permeated with British meanings (Casteel 300).

Re-Lettering Australia

In the same way in which Eva Hoffman reads other books about America, such as Mary Antin's or Vladimir Nabokov's, Irina Pană indulges in interpreting the texts of the first Australian women settlers. Re-reading these fragmented texts, opening their self-contained worlds, Pană lets them speak to each other, in a dialogue, in which she also

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[4] See Pană's bio/bibliography as part of the Australian Literature Resource, at http://www.austlit.edu.au.

[5] In *Lost in Translation* Eva Hoffman observes that "we need to *triangulate* to something – the past, the future, our own untamed perceptions, another place, if we're not to be subsumed by the temporal and temporary ideas of our time, if we're not to become creatures of ephemeral fashion (my italics, Hoffman 276).

takes part. She begins "to understand" and appropriate a past that is not hers, to decipher this land where "the most unspeakable misery" exists alongside "the most glittering wealth" (42). Pană's own memory of the exilic trauma is echoed by her "postmemory" of the others' painful experiences, by her attempt to grasp the enormous impact of the traumatic events on her literary ancestors (Hirsch 7).

Narrating exilic experiences, these texts supply the fictional ingredients that are molded into the crucible of Pană's book. For the Romanian immigrant who perceives this new place as "unheimlich", these documents disclose a graspable, palpable reality. With their hands-on, practical comments, the nineteenth century diaries and early twentieth-century letters provide a solid frame for Pană's elusive perception. Pană "recapitulates" the main attributes given to the foreign land.[6] The antithetic images of England and Australia, their geographic and climatic differences, their social and cultural discrepancies are all present here, in descriptions that highlight the risks and hardships, the despair and boredom of exilic life:

> Let me recapitulate the attributes of otherly, exilic space: defilement, sin, guilt, despair, joy and frenzy, anger and scorn, anguish and dread, hope, fear and also shame, a welter of emotions that perform the transformation of the home into a state of confusion. A home that is always and already the scene of catastrophe, and shipwreck. A home that maintains itself, for a long time, in the category of non-home (22-23).

Feeling close to these women who knew the price of displacement, the writer distances herself from her Australian contemporaries – from those who seem to pass their time "in a queue, waiting to receive happy hours, in pursuit of happiness" (28). She ironically describes their "everyday lives" as "exemplary biographies", envying their existential easiness, their unsuspecting candor and amiable superficiality – in Kunderian words – their *unbearable lightness of being*. She envies mostly "the ease with which they speak the tongue, without an accent, as if they danced innocently, free from effort" (82). Their de-personalized Australia is not much different from communist Romania, another place where any personal trait of identity is erased.

In a desperate quest to find a trace of her past in the new country, Pană adopts the other women's stories as a series of masks, of surrogate identities, so that she becomes part of an "endlessly nuanced female continuum that saves the text from any kind of essentialism" (Draga 360). Their memories leave traces in their narratives, landmarks and signs, survival tips to be followed:

> How I love to read these letters from exile, and make them truly mine, my own impressions and memories. My life would not be complete and it would lose its frame without its real, or imaginary journal… My writing itself is less an answer to a real question – for I cannot even find the shape of questions in the absence of these translations – than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is unfolding, and which comprehends my protagonists' pasts (29).

These micronarratives "mother" her journey; these women become her literary ancestors, her unnamed helper-translators, assisting her to overcome the limitations of her own

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[6] The work of the Australian poet, A. D. Hope is invoked by Pană, as another way of describing Australia as an empty land, free of a cultural references: "They call her a young country, but they lie:/She is the last of lands, the emptiest,/A woman beyond her change of life, a breast/Still tender, but within the womb is dry" (in Pană 92, see also http://ninglundecember.wordpress.com/2008/06/19/australian-poem-2008).

exilic condition. The writer experiences a feeling of identification with them, projecting herself in the same maternal role – being fascinated by these women's (mis)adventures in the new homeland, by their apparently non-eventful existence lost in a myriad of household chores: "What I share with this stranger is a reality filled with children's games, interminable housework, cooking and gardening, meals and sleep, solitude on the wide verandah and summers away from home" (22).

In "Between Language and Reality: Modern Poetry and Transitivity", Gheorghe Crăciun observes that it is a common feature of Romanian women's writing to carefully describe the concrete existence and "the minimal values of life" (23). This is true not only for Pană, but also for the Australian women writers who pay attention to all (in)significant details of life. The "God of small things" governs their writings. "A thinghood" seems to absorb their attention, disclosing an infinite preoccupation to decipher and order an otherwise incomprehensible reality.

Reading these letters, Pană discovers the new land as an ambivalent space, both as "*Australia Felix*", an Eldorado of lost and regained fortunes, of convicts turned into heroes, which "could tell you the story of *Monte Cristo*" (93, 95), and as "a painted sham", a shallow reality of pseudo-values, ignored and scorned by the civilized world – "an unharvested field, unread, unremembered" (49). She rehearses the old Australian arch-theme, the perpetual feeling of exile, the perception of the colonial "edge" as the antipode of Britain, a strange, fascinating land, where the newcomer must find a way to survive, to decipher this elsewhere through associations and "modes of imaginative relatedness" (Pană, *Complex* 10).[7]

How to survive becomes the key issue, how "to transform the figure of rupture back into a figure of connection" (Seidel x). How to transform a tale of exile into a tale of love, how to reshape both origin and edge through endless rewritings and erotic appropriations. First understood as a wasteland, Australia is turned into "a home of meanings" (7).[8] Pană makes use of Kristeva's idea of love as a "builder of broken spaces", as a remedial factor in bridging the familiar and the alien, intervening in traumas of rupture by mediating between two unrelated spaces – two rival "elsewheres" re-inscribed as "homes" (Kristeva, *Tales* 381, in Pană, *Complex* 110).[9] Quoting from the Australian poet Judith Wright, Pană tells us that "Love is like a foreign land", she assumes the double position of an exile-lover, a nomad-writer whose perpetual peregrination is marked by erotic encounters (Wright 108, in Pană, *Complex* 9):

> The explorer, the lunatic, and the lover converge in me, my life is wearing these masks, full of the sense of adventuring: it is through them that I become one with the texts that I read and live that juxtaposes exilic and erotic adventures (77).

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[7] Pană's understanding of Australia as a rudimentary territory with houses "meanly finished" is not much different from Hoffman's perception of America as a monotonous country with stereotypical buildings. For Pană, as for Hoffman, the new land is an opus left unaccomplished.

[8] The country is compared to an alchemical opus, "an operation unfolding in predictable stages", from *nigredo* (which corresponds to the dark communist regime), to *albedo* (which points to the perception of the native country from abroad as a country of winters), to *rubedo* (which epitomizes the transformation of the exilic space into a country of everlasting summers) (30).

[9] In *The Tomis Complex*, Pană draws a parallel between the "old country" and the "new country" of exile which is by extrapolation a reconfiguration of the "old one" that is "neither derivative nor definitive, but an ongoing, spectacular translation: a tale of love and exile"(*Complex* 13).

In spite of her avowed identification with these texts, Pană rewrites them and destabilizes their negative image of Australia as an antipode of Britain, a cultural vacuum, an abject Down-Under, the "last of lands", "a much disliked (perhaps much envied?) otherness" (92, 49). She counters such representations by re-reading Australia in relationship with Romania – another "last of lands", another *terra nullius* – seen as a (m)otherland, an (un)loved country whose memory is both preserved and erased. She links the other women's memory of Australia to her own memory of Romania, as she wants to give weight and meaning to a country "unstamped by memory, unbreathed by dreams" (93). She wants to re-center Australia, to re-place it into "a position of authority, from which she can 'undo' the illusory nature of this elsewhereness" (92).

By juxtaposing the images of Australia and Romania, exilic space becomes a "home of meanings" – so that edge and origin "are not actually in opposition, but in resonance"; they no longer occupy antagonistic positions, but situate themselves in "fated affinity", enriching each other with new nuances in a continuous process of cultural translation (Malouf 288, in Pană, *Complex* 15).[10]

Neither a fully written text waiting to be deciphered, nor a blank page ready to be inscribed, Australia appears as a catalogue of cultural references, a space incessantly (de)composed by the writer in accordance with her own horizon of expectations. The Melbourne cityscape is thus reread as a mindscape, a space of emotional projections, of *otium* and reflection, a "mise-en-space where writing can imagine and even institute the city according to the exigencies of interiority" (70). This space that seemed initially empty is re-read as a topos already infused with other meanings – an unfinished opus that needs to be rewritten. Ultimately, Melbourne can be seen as an after-text, in relation to Bucharest, the place of origin, the pre-text, the pre-figuration of exile, which "presays [the] Melbourne days" (93).

Romania as a (M)Otherland

In *Melbourne Sundays*, textual movement is possible both on a horizontal/spatial/ synchronic axis and also on a vertical/temporal/diachronic one. If Australia's image is discovered in the process of reading other women's letters – in an archeological task of un/re-covering their historical layers – then Romania's complex representation appears in the exchange of letters between the narrator and her imaginary sister.

The sister stands for the writer's alter ego, her reversed mirrored image – what she could have become if she had chosen to stay in the country. As twin destinies, both experience a form of exile, either inside or outside the communist walls. In their epistolary exchange, Australia as a former colony of the British Empire – a cultural Down-Under – finds its equivalent in Romania as a country "colonized" by Soviet ideology – a marginal Eastern European Other. Traditionally presented as two antipodes, two marginal places in relation to centers of power, Australia and Romania are redefined in Pană's free-of-clichés narrative as equally central spaces. As "here" and "here" exchange places, *home* becomes an elsewhere, an alibi,[11] a place that cannot be pinned down to a real location. Romania, the birthplace, is both home and "another country",

[10] Gazing at the map in the past, during their childhood in Romania, the writer configures Australia as a home: "Do you remember how we used to draw maps at school, and we felt homesick for those distant places whose shapes we knew before we went to sleep" (89).

[11] From Latin *alibi*, "elsewhere, at another place".

while, at the other end of the world, Australia is both paradise and cursed land, enchanted garden and penal colony (15).

This disfigured Romania – this cultural desert – has similar points in common with the blank Australian territory, a half-inhabited continent, where the newcomer walks about like an "automaton", "unrelated" to outside space (40, 46). Changing places, the narrator and her sister constantly cross borders, move between the communist and capitalist worlds, reenacting scenes of traumatic departure.

Separation is seen as a rite of passage, of crossing the threshold of an after-life, a moment of crisis configured *via negativa* through poetic images of absence and lack of remembrance:

> I do not remember when we said good bye before the long journey,
> how we sat together, at the wooden table with all the lights on,
> before the long Melbourne journey.
> How we walked to the station in dark wintercoats,
> how we rode in the sleigh past the baying wolves,
> how winding sheets flew from our bodies
> when mother raised her hand to her face.
> I remember all this from the shady groves on a radiant summer evening (104).

Language takes a poetic form to express "the unsayable", the mourning atmosphere, the infinitely nuanced gestures of parting, of covering the face in unspoken despair (Budick and Iser xi). The barrenness of the interior space is mirrored by the desolation of the landscape, the wilderness of an atemporal country, frozen in permanent winter. Constructed through oxymoronic images of affirmation and negation, the whole poem is re-framed by the last line which projects the dark tension of a past moment upon the light background of the present – creating a sharp contrast between two worlds.

Both mythical and real, sacred and profane, Romania is an out-of-the-ordinary space with strange rituals, cut off from modern time, where "hoofs clatter on the hard dusty roads," where "women in rags, barefoot and homeless, always cold, cook meals over a fire" (84). Through a series of powerful, visual images, the writer depicts the famine and poverty, the harsh conditions of everyday life in a communist country which seems to be encircled by a "barbed wire fence" – and where receiving a letter is like "listening to the gaps in the barbed wire" (93, 95).

Borrowing her sister's voice, the author initiates the reader into a dystopian underworld, where the "bulldozed streets" are lined with "piles of rubble" (86, 105), where rooms are lit by "forty light bulbs", where "clandestine words" could be heard (93) and children learn from schoolbooks "with Stalin on the cover" (82). It is a "carceral system" whose tentacles reach far into the each person's conscience, dictating even the most intimate thoughts (Foucault 300). It is a system of total power which can function "only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity" (Arendt 560-62).[12]

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[12] In an article that discusses the way in which Romanian writers expose the devastating, dehumanizing effects of communism, Corina Mărculescu remarks: "In Romania, as in other Eastern European countries, ideological masquerade and police terror were the main instruments used to control the population, to crush opposition, to destroy civil society, to completely reconstruct the displaced society in the Party mold… The consequence of the Communist rule was the 'freezing' in time of a country deviated from its normal course by a totalitarian regime" (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7063/is_4_41/ai_n28482342/).

In this web of panoptic power, Romanian writers could only live in a state of intellectual exile – transforming a *modus vivendi* into a *modus scribendi* – a way of living into a way of writing. As Pană underlines, "before 1989… writers were already in exile, translating their work into allegories, into highly enciphered narratives and experimental, subtle, sophisticated writing" (10). "The Siberia of letters" was the name given to the country by the Romanian poet Mircea Dinescu.[13] In an *ersatz society*, under a dictatorship of simulacra, the function of language was to conceal its true message. In 1989, the revolution represented a return from exile, an act of translation into the fresh language of truth. And how could it be different when it was an *opus puerorum*, "a children's crusade", as another Romanian poet, Ana Blandiana, called it.[14]

In Australia, the image of Romania is unveiled as a (m)otherland, a strange and familiar country continually constructed through anamnesis, through partial memory regained after loss:

> Dear sister, your Bucharest letters have now become a strange fiction to me, short chapters from a far away life dreamt, not really lived, in an elsewhere I no longer remember, composed in off-tune music I can no longer comprehend (80).

A Derridean supplement whose real meaning is continually postponed, the "imaginary homeland" turns into a fictional other-land, a real space (re)written as a scriptural, second degree one. It is an absence made concrete through the palpable presence of letters, of photographs and objects carried abroad – through "chronotopes" that metonymically reconstruct the past (Bakhtin 250). A tiny icon, a piece of torn cloth and a faded photograph connect distinct spatio-temporal levels and re-create *in nuce* "a sacred space" and "a sacred time" (Pană 97).

Exile as a "Home of Meanings"

At the end of *Melbourne Sundays*, the idea of translation is equated with that of transplantation. Australia turns into a garden, seen in symbolic correspondence with the Garden of Eden, in an attempt to restore (divine) order in the foreign land. As in Hoffman's autobiography, the garden becomes a metaphoric topos of translation, a space where a perfect correspondence between name and referent is possible, so that the uncanny other land is tamed and understood as a "home of meanings".[15] Besides its negative, exilic image, Australia acquires positive connotations, symbolically conveyed by the title of the book: it associates Melbourne with a Biblical temporal reference, the Sunday, the moment of rest and acknowledgement of creation.

Translation, transplantation turn into empowering acts of (self)creation. The initial moment of crisis, of self-dissolution – when the country left behind risked disappearing into oblivion and the new country seemed to remain an abstract projection –

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[13] See the poem "Letter to Mihail Bulgakov", http://www.scribd.com/doc/3621391/Mircea-Dinescu-Moartea-citeste-ziarul (visited on 01.05.2012).

[14] See http://www.scritube.com/istorie/Revolutia-de-la9121181316.php (visited on 01.05.2012).

[15] Pană makes reference to *An Imaginary Life*, a novel written by the Australian author David Malouf. He narrates the imaginary life of the Latin poet Ovid, who was exiled at Tomis (now the harbor of Constanta); Ovid is seen as a *poeta agricolae*, a diligent worker who tries to cultivate the "barbaric" world, but who is taught in his turn by a child the true language of nature.

is overcome in the process of translation, of transferring meaning from one world to another.

The Australian language which initially seemed to be made of words without memory, deprived of all their literary richness – like "a Romanian transported without its poetry", "without (its national poet) Eminescu" – becomes a language enriched by multiple associations, abounding in cultural and literary references (95). The new language is continuously reshaped by the Australian emigrants, containing all their cultural baggage, incorporating all their "marks on paper, their own otherly countries" (18). The new language is inflected with different accents, with a multitude of words and concepts, carried from other languages, from other realities.

For Pană, writing a book in another language is no longer a self-splitting act, but an all-encompassing textual experience, in which what is accidental becomes meaningful:

> The writings I read are the writings I am. It is due to these pages that my life here, composed of successful and failed departures, is no longer an accidental and minimal crossing over, a journey from another continent, but from another book of journeys. I am caught between these two books, and they are both valuable survivals of my two homes (18).

Expatriation proves to be as way of eliminating accidents of birth, an act of self-creation, in a new land endowed with personal significance. The destiny of Constantin Brîncuși – the Romanian-born sculptor who made his career in France – becomes emblematic here, as his "expatriation is akin to levitation, freedom from the accidents of birth and determined identity" (87). Referring to Brîncuși, Pană redefines exile as an operation of "alchemical transubstantiation", "a definite purgation from rhetoric of any kind" (88).

It is through this emotional and cultural translation that the alien, accidental, foreign language is turned into a "home of meanings" (7). (Self)translation becomes a way of overcoming distance, of changing exile into a home, "lost, but slowly found again", so that the moment of separation is synonymous with the moment of reunion, acquiring depth and meaning through absence – through spatial distancing as a form of relatedness:

> The translation of my reading into English as a second life does not mean forgetting of Bucharest, or even a separation from home or from you, my sister. I translated you, our past together, the present of our life into the Australian shapes of the present. It is through these pages that you are before me again, not as a person, but as a space, lost, but slowly found again (17).

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