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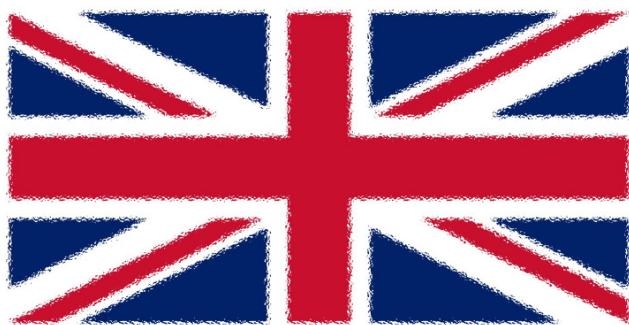
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EDITORIAL

RO-BRIT STUDENT JOURNAL is an annual English journal dedicated to publishing papers written by students in the Faculty of Letters (and not only), under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures from “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău.

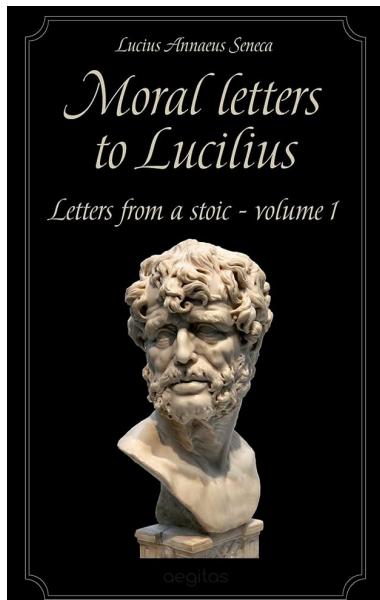
This journal intends to encourage students to take more initiative in engaging in the English studies, providing at the same time the opportunity for them to have their research and creative writing published. Thus, RO-BRIT STUDENT JOURNAL invites English-speaking students to contribute to the journal through submitting original articles. The journal welcomes submissions on English language, literature and culture, its purpose being to provide a channel for the publication of original work by Romanian students who love the English language. This is an excellent opportunity for students to allow their research to be seen by their colleagues and to participate in a promising endeavour.



RO-BRIT STUDENT JOURNAL este o revistă anuală în limba engleză dedicată publicării lucrărilor scrise de către studenții din cadrul Facultății de Litere (și nu numai), sub auspiciile Departamentului de Limbi și Literaturi Străine de la Universitatea “Vasile Alecsandri” din Bacău. RO-BRIT STUDENT JOURNAL intenționează să încurajeze studenții vorbitori de limba engleză să scrie și să publice în limba engleză articole cu privire la limbă, literatură și cultură, scopul principal al revistei fiind acela de a oferi un canal pentru publicarea de lucrări originale de către studenții români care iubesc limba engleză. Aceasta este o oportunitate excelentă pentru studenți de a permite ca cercetarea lor să fie văzută de colegii lor și de a participa la un efort promițător.

1. Introduction

In this article, we will discuss the school of thought called Stoicism. One of the most important philosophers of ancient Rome is Seneca. His writings constitute one of the most important bodies of primary material for ancient Stoicism. His book, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, contains 124 values letters.



2. Defining the term

Stoicism was a school of thought that flourished in Greek and Roman philosophy during Classical Antiquity. It was one of the loftiest and most sublime philosophies in the record of Western civilization. In urging participation in human affairs, Stoics have always believed that the goal of all inquiry is to establish a universal code of conduct characterized by tranquility of mind and certainty of moral worth.

The Stoics were mainly interested in the freedom of the individual in the measure in which personal formation bears the imprint of the environment, in regaining peace and serenity. It is a philosophy that at a person within the entire spectrum of being, from the social order to the cosmic order.

3. The philosophy of a Stoic

3.1. The taming of fear

In *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, Seneca wrote, “You will stop fearing when you will stop believing.” - the senses, controlled by reason, are our means of knowing. Fear accompanies hope but our inability to control our hope is to limit our desires that serve as a powerful antidote. Furthermore, fear does not focus on the result, but on the causes that produce it. Seneca’s third letter strongly highlights this principle. – In it, he writes: ‘No reason for fear is so strong to give and strengthen the conviction that sometimes what is hoped for deceives us. Therefore, balance hope with fear and whenever you are indecisive, lean on it in your favor: believe what you like the most. Even if there are more reasons for fear, tilt the scales in your favor and stop worrying.’ Put simply, reason is the essence of happiness. For Stoics, uncontrollable senses, feelings, and impulses are a source of errors. One’s whole existence must be put under the sign of discernment and virtue.

3.2. Moderation

According to the Stoics, temperance is another virtue that elevates the soul, purifying it. In his fourth volume/book, Seneca talks about material contempt - ‘This is no longer a cure where vices have become morals’ – vices subjugate the spirit and the human being, and if acquired to the fullest possible extent, they deprive that being of the vitality of reason. Human nature desires to possess more and more of the material world, which leads to boundless greed. In several letters, Seneca shows his disdain for certain rich people or emperors who consume excessively food, even though they cannot finish it all; he criticizes the debauchery of some, and points to these individuals as an example to argue that their souls are tormented by vices and locked in a cage of scum.

Who is not temperate cannot find his peace, runs from one side to another, and finally engages in an endless search, which becomes a genuine flight from himself. He is an eternally dissatisfied person who lives as if he could not conform to his own situation, as if he were not constantly seeking sensations. But he does not have the courage to escape from the trap he has created for himself.

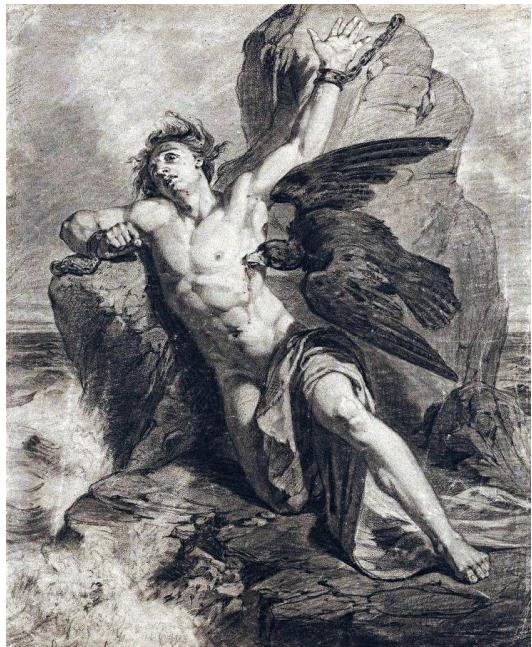
Temperance has among its fruits expected quiet and rest, necessary peace, in the end. Temperance does “stillness of order” and it is found only in a heart confident in itself, and willing to give of itself to those around.

Temperance impresses upon the individual a sober behavior. He discovers that temperance is a positive thing, it is not simply a model of behavior that one “chooses” and that cannot be imposed on anyone, but it is a necessary virtue to bring order to the chaos that has arisen. It is about educating yourself in temperance

and freedom at the same time; they are inseparable, because freedom “crosses” the whole human being and is the basis of education itself. Education aims to enable everyone to be free to make the right decisions that will shape their personal lives.

In Letter XLIX, Seneca says that “the one who misses them the least enjoys wealth more.” The one who is always dissatisfied with what he has becomes a master of himself and a servant of the vice that has seized him. One desire is born from another.

Prometheus said, “heights detonate their own ridges” (Prometheus, in Greek mythology represents one of the Titans who stole fire from the gods in heaven, thus being the promoter of civilization on earth.



Punished by Zeus, he was chained to a rock in the Caucasus, from where an eagle came daily to eat his liver, which grew again during the night.)

“He who walks on a path reaches the end; but the wandering is limitless. So, leave desertions and, whenever you want to know if what you want is natural desire or blind lust, see if it can stop somewhere.” Seneca also discusses this idea in letter XXIII, he says that a pleasure to which we do not oppose resistance, leads to an inevitable decline if it is not measured -”The pleasures that make the crowd drunk have a light, superficial layer. Any joy that comes from the outside has no basis”.

Seneca’s promises regarding the individual emancipation that comes with temperance, moderation. He wrote in another letter: “Do not let yourself be deceived by short-lived deceitful lures (letter XCV).” Ambition, debauchery and violence want the scene. You will heal them if you put them in the shade.”

3.3. *Contempt for death*

Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor and follower of Stoicism, said “In this boundless time is the short time of my life: from the gathering of the elements in birth to their dissolution in death. Thus, the sight of the spirit rises to the divine sight of things and their nature. If the air surrounds us, the spirit by thought must surround all and rise above all. The elevation of thought above fame, pleasure, and death, is a great, noble elevation” (X, 8). The greatness of this elevation is a knowledge made virtue of the man ennobled by it.

Grounding the present is another spiritual exercise encouraged by Stoic philosophers. Aurelius urges people “to graciously receive any event in the present, to find the opinion true to reality in the present, to act in the present in the interest of all” (IX, 6). When an individual approaches life in this manner, he argues, “things are received undifferentiated, man identifies himself with nature and receives every moment with kindness, with contentment, with reverence” (VII, 54). By uniting our will with universal nature and living truly in the present, Aurelius believes that we can free the imagination from regrets and hopes, and by extension from unnecessary worries and anxieties.



1. Seneca adds “Even if I am threatened with certain death and even if I know that suffering awaits me, I will not come to the aid of my torment, but I will help myself” - the essence of their thinking is to live a life with dignity, embracing nature; the course of life, the difficulties, the concept of death did not scare them, because they knew that we are all mortal, and a pure life must be lived in harmony, not in suffering.
2. “Life was given to us under the merit of death”(XXXI) - the fear of the unknown, the impulse of revelation towards which we all move sooner or later only gives dissatisfaction, negativism. Accepting death represents a new birth.
3. “Fate has no power over the moral life”(XXXVI).

4. “If it will be less bad, I count this as a good. The clock does not deceive me unless it spares me. But even then, it does not deceive me, because, as I know that everything can be the temple, I still know that not everything will actually happen. I’m waiting for it, but I’m prepared for the worst”(XIII). Also, we have to come to terms with the destiny over which we have no power, the impact of Seneca’s words in the following lines are undeniable:
5. “What to do? Death is following me and life is rushing by. Teach me not to run away from death and not to let my life pass me by. Give me courage in facing difficulties and complete peace in the face of the inevitable. Release me from the grip of time. Show me that the price of life is not in its duration, but in the way you use it, that it can happen, it even happens very often, as who lived a lot to have lived too little. Tell me how many times I go to bed: (“You may never wake up”) and when I wake up: (“You may never sleep again.”) Tell me when you leave: (“You may never come back”), and when you come (“You may never go.”) (XLIX).

3.4. *Taming the spiritual flame*

The Stoics saw knowledge and reason are closely related, and believed that separating the two would result in an illicit reign of uncontrollable emotions over an individual’s life. As such, their philosophical lessons emphasized self-mastery and discernment as indispensable tools for achieving happiness. In Stoicism, a good life consists of living according to reason and avoiding passionate manifestations, which are deviations from our rational nature. Pathos, as the opposite of reason and something that cannot be controlled, must be avoided. Similarly, pain, pleasure and fear can be and must be mastered by self-control exercised through reason and imperturbability (ataraxia). These qualities become attainable when we understand that everything that happens is part of a divine or cosmic plan. Only the ignorant ignore the universal law and allow themselves to be carried away by their passions. The daily practice of journaling is a true philosophy of life: analyzing the past day prepares you for the next day. “Demonstration without principles does not exist, they give the soul an absolute judgment”.

Seneca’s last letter, CXXIV, discusses the happiness that is born from reason - “You will be in control of your own good when you realize that the most ‘happy’ people are the most unhappy”.

4. Conclusion

According to the Stoics, the only truly good thing is a very good state of mind, identifiable with virtue and reason. Stoicism encourages people to practice- moderation, acceptance of death, etc.- essentially just summarize/list the sections you talked about. Reason must dominate the spirit and the body. This is the only thing that can guarantee happiness. External factors such as money, success, and fame cannot bring us true happiness. Stoic philosophers like Seneca and Marcus Aurelius contend that much of the unhappiness in the world is caused by the confusion people make when they fail to recognize and accept circumstances that are beyond their control. The only thing we have control over is also the only thing that guarantees us a good life, a happy life - our mental state.

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to get a better understanding of Gaston Leroux's most known work *The Phantom of the Opera* and to understand the relationship between Erik's complex psyche and his actions, as analyzed through Freudian psychoanalytic theories and Platonic ideals of identity. As Sigmund Freud's theories on repression and the theory of the uncanny suggest, Erik's idealized persona as the Angel of Music conflicts with his true, vulnerable self which reflects a deeper internal struggle. The paper further explores how Erik's disfigurement and dual personality serve as metaphors for themes such as estrangement, dissociation, death and the search for meaning which are common themes in Gothic literature.

Keywords

Gothic literature, Freudian theory, repression, Plato, identity

1. Psychoanalysis and Gothic literature

Gothic literature, as a genre, is characterized by its use of dark, atmospheric settings and its exploration of psychological extremes, often conveyed through narrative devices that invoke fear, mystery and the supernatural. Central to Gothic works are decaying or imposing structures such as ancient castles or haunted mansions—in our case, the Opera house and its undergrounds—which function as symbolic spaces that conceal dark secrets or as settings for villains. The genre's focus on psychological conflict, rebellion against societal norms, and the portrayal of both human vulnerability and strength has allowed it to resonate across various literary movements.

It is thought that psychoanalysis and Gothic literature share a fundamental connection, notably in their exploration of the human psyche, repressed desires and the return of the repressed. Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919), originally *Das Unheimliche*, offers a theoretical structure that perfectly aligns with the gothic category, where the supernatural and monstrous are often manifestations of psychological fears and unresolved conflicts. In Freud's theory, the uncanny arises from something familiar yet strangely unsettling, an emotional response to something both known and unknown. This tension is specifically common in Gothic works, where characters embody this duality through their appearance and actions, captivating yet disturbing those around them.

Gaston Leroux's 1910 novel *The Phantom of the Opera* is a classic gothic story set in the haunting depths of the Paris Opera House with the action taking place somewhere in the 1880s, as the timeline is not specifically mentioned. The tale follows Christine Daaé, a young soprano, who feels stuck in a love triangle with the enigmatic and disfigured Phantom, Erik, and her suitor Raoul. With its themes of unrequited love, isolation and the grotesque, the novel embodies all the traits characteristic to Gothic literature. In terms of psychoanalysis, Erik's obsession with Christine and her conflicting emotions highlight themes of desire, repression, trauma and identity, all of which add depth to the story's dark and complex narrative.

2. Erik's psychological struggles

In *The Uncanny* (1919) Sigmund Freud writes the following: "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration... We may try to reject the derivation of fears about the eye from the fear of castration on rationalistic grounds, and say that it is very natural that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a proportionate dread; indeed, we might go further and say that the fear of castration itself contains no other significance and no deeper secret than a justifiable dread of this kind. But this view does not... dispel the impression one gains that it is the threat of being castrated in especial which excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense coloring."¹

1 Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. p. 383.

https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_Uncanny.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024.

In this quote, Sigmund Freud notes that losing vision, or even the fear of blindness, serves as a metaphor for deeper, repressed fear of castration, symbolizing a loss of control or power. It is commonly believed that the eyes are “the windows of the soul” a phrase often used to suggest that the eyes reveal a person’s inner thoughts and emotions. The idea, though widely accepted finds its roots in ancient philosophy, specifically in Plato’s Republic.

In Book X², Plato explores the concept of mimesis, the imitation of reality, where he uses the metaphor of mirrors to discuss how appearances can distort the truth. While Plato does not directly state that the eyes are the window of the soul, he emphasizes the connection between vision and the soul’s understanding of higher truths, suggesting that how one perceives the world through his eyes shapes his deeper understanding of reality. In this context, the eyes become symbolic not only of human perception but also of the soul’s struggle to grasp the true form of things, free from the illusions of the physical world. Both Freud and Plato’s theories cross paths of how appearances, whether visual or psychological, distort deeper truths. Plato’s mimesis suggests that the world of appearances is a mere shadow of a higher, truer reality, while Freud’s uncanny theory asserts that repressed emotions and desires manifest in unsettling ways that are both familiar and strange.

In *Phantom of The Opera*, Gaston Leroux describes Erik’s physical appearance as following: “He is extraordinarily thin and his dress-coat hangs on a skeleton frame. His eyes are so deep that you can hardly see the fixed pupils. You just see two big black holes, as in a dead man’s skull. His skin, which is stretched across his bones like a drumhead, is not white, but a nasty yellow. His nose is so little worth talking about that you can’t see it side-face; and the absence of that nose is a horrible thing to look at. All the hair he has is three or four long dark locks on his forehead and behind his ears.”³ Erik’s disfigured appearance can be interpreted as a distorted imitation of the ideal human form, representing a painful deviation from what is considered a perfect reality. His skeletal form, hollow eyes, and yellowed skin embody an imitation of humanity, viewed as inferior by Plato’s philosophy. Freud’s theory of the uncanny, however, interprets Erik’s appearance as both familiar and unsettling, especially regarding his deep, hollow eyes. These eyes evoke fear because they are neither fully human nor alien. Therefore, his eyes, which metaphorically symbolize the windows of the soul cannot fully reveal his internal struggles without causing terror or repulsion. As stated previously, Freud suggests such distortions symbolize repressed emotions and desires, with Erik’s disfigurement reflecting his inner conflict between the desire for love and the alienation caused by his appearance. The two theories help to explain how his appearance causes both intellectual and emotional discomfort, it is both a mimetic distortion of the ideal and the uncanny representation of his internal fears. While Plato and Freud help explain how Erik’s external appearance distorts both reality and emotion, they also provide a structure for understanding the deeper psychological mechanisms that drive his behavior. Erik’s outward distortion, a symbol of his inner conflict, connects to Freud’s model of the psyche which consists of the id, ego and the superego. The ghostly nature of his character is not just a result of his physical deformity but also the unconscious desires and fears that conflict within him as they relate to his obsessive attachment to Christine. This obsession can be interpreted through the psychoanalytic perspective of the Oedipus complex.

3. Oedipus Complex, Repression and Death Drive

Erik’s psychological struggles are shaped by his unresolved Oedipal conflict, repression and the death drive (Thanatos). His obsessive nature and unhealthy attachment to Christine indicate early rejection by his mother and the lack of a paternal figure. This fixation symbolizes his unmet need for motherly love. His emotional outbursts, expressing both longing and violence, accentuates the depth of his repression, with his mask that serves as a barrier that conceals his true self. Erik’s violent behavior, even though not directly expressed towards Christine, leads to acts of sabotage and murder such as his role in the death of several people at the opera house. His emotional cruelty towards Christine can be seen in moments where he forces her to make difficult choices, using his power and threats to maintain control over her. All those elements

2 Plato. *Republic: Book X*. 1957. pp. 312-313.

<https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Dialogues%20of%20Plato%20Book%20X%20Jowett.pdf>, accessed November 20, 2024.

3 Leroux, Gaston. *The Phantom of the Opera*. Illustrated by André Cataigne. New York: Grosset & Dunlap: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1911. p. 11.

https://archive.org/details/the-phantom-of-the-opera_202102?mode=2up&view=theater, accessed November 20, 2024.

suggest the presence of his death drive.

To further support this interpretation of Erik's oedipal conflicts, one can examine the description of his lair given by Leroux in the following segment: "After the deceptions and illusions of the torture chamber, the precision of the details of that quiet little middle-class room seemed to have been invented for the express purpose of puzzling the mind of the mortal rash enough to stray into that abode of living nightmare. The wooden bedstead, the waxed mahogany chairs, the chest of drawers, those brasses, the little square antimacassars carefully placed on the backs of the chairs, the clock on the mantelpiece and the harmless-looking ebony caskets at either end, lastly, the whatnot filled with shells, with red pin cushions, with mother-of-pearl boats and an enormous ostrich-egg, the whole discreetly lighted by a shaded lamp standing on a small round table: this collection of ugly, peaceable, reasonable furniture, at the bottom of the Opera cellars, bewildered the imagination more than all the late fantastic happenings. And the figure of the masked man seemed all the more formidable in this old-fashioned, neat and trim little frame. It bent down over the Persian and said, in his ear: "Are you better, daroga? . . . You are looking at my furniture? . . . It is all that I have left of my poor unhappy mother."⁴

His fixation with his mother and his unresolved attachment style are vividly reflected in the neatly arranged, old-fashioned furnishings of his lair. This environment shows a certain sterility that can be tied to his repressed desires. It describes a place that is meticulously ordered, almost clinical in its precision. This sense of neatness could symbolize an extension to his emotional state. His isolation and lack of connection to others create a "world" that lacks warmth, affection or personal intimacy. Freud suggests that repressed emotions manifest in the unconscious and in the external world, often as a way of avoiding painful feelings. Another interesting part of this paragraph is Leroux's usage of "it" when referring to Erik in the final chapter.

In the first chapters of the novel, Erik's identity remains unknown, he is perceived by Christine as her Angel of Music, sent to protect her, but as the plot progresses and his real identity is revealed, he goes through a "dehumanization" process. Plato argues that mimesis can be deceiving, leading people to accept illusions as reality. Erik's mask and his role as the Angel of Music are forms of deception. Sigmund Freud's concept of "the double" can be applied to Erik's character. The Angel of Music could signify Erik's idealized self, a romanticized and almost divine entity who commands respect and adoration.

In the "New Margarita"⁵ chapter, Christine is alone in her dressing room after the success of her first performance, having a mysterious conversation with a voice that is described as having a "curiously masterful tone"⁶. In this scene she was talking to the Angel of Music and he demanded her: "Christine, you must love me!"⁷ Here Erik presents himself as a figure of idealized, unattainable perfection. This persona is both his creation and his projection of his deepest desires. He tries to impose this alter ego on Christine, reinforcing his need to keep her loyal and focused solely on him and music, which he associated with his own identity. Later in the book it is revealed to Raoul that this angel of music forbids Christine to marry anyone and if she does, she will lose him (the angel). By setting this condition that Christine must remain faithful to him and sacrifice any possibility of personal happiness like marriage, Erik is solidifying his "angelic" and controlling persona even while rejecting the reality of their situation. As mentioned above, Erik's disfigurement symbolizes repressed fears, especially castration anxiety while his dual personality takes on the role of the heimlich and unheimlich dichotomy, denoting his fragmented identity.

In *The Uncanny*, Freud notes: "In general we are reminded that the word heimlich is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. Unheimlich is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of heimlich, and not of the second. [...] On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the Unheimlich, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."⁸ The heimlich aspect of Erik is the angelic persona he presents to Christine. This guise is designed to be familiar and safe, exactly what a young woman might expect from a protector and mentor. His supposed offering of comfort and emotional guidance creates

⁴ Leroux, Gaston, *Phantom of the Opera*, op. cit., p. 326.

⁵ Leroux, Gaston, *Phantom of the Opera*, op. cit., p. 29

⁶ Leroux, Gaston, *Phantom of the Opera*, op. cit., p. 30

⁷ Leroux, Gaston, *Phantom of the Opera*, loc. cit.

⁸ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, op. cit., p. 132.

a false sense of safety which is meant to conceal his true nature. Then again, the monstrous, deformed figure capable of violence, who is obsessed with this innocent woman perfectly matches the term given by Freud, the “unheimlich”. As Freud explains, the “unheimlich” is something that should remain hidden but is brought to light, creating this unsettling effect. The revelation of his inner darkness to Christine and others exposes the unnerving nature of his repressed aspects of the psyche.

4. The Id, Ego and Superego

Freud's structural model of the psyche, introduced in *The Ego and the Id* (1923)⁹, divides the human psyche into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. According to Freud the id represents the source of all psychic energy, being the only component in one's personality that is present from birth. This aspect is entirely instinctual and primitive operating on the pleasure principle and seeking immediate gratification.

The ego which develops from the id is governed by the reality principle and plays the role of a mediator between the id's desires and the constraints of reality. Unlike the id which is entirely in the unconscious part of one's mind, the ego functions across all three levels of the mind: the unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious.

Lastly, the superego refers to one's internalized societal norms, ideals and morality, developing as a part of cultural and parental influence, acting as an internalized moral compass. The superego also consists of two parts: the conscience which reinforces moral standards by making one feel guilt or remorse for forbidden behaviors and the Ego Ideal which sets aspirations for ideal behavior, rewarding the ego with pride for meeting these standards.

To further illustrate Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche and its relevance to Erik's character, I will analyze a paragraph from *The Phantom of the Opera* that demonstrates the relation between the id, ego and superego. As Erik himself states: “Look! You want to see! See! Feast your eyes, glut your soul on my cursed ugliness! Look at Erik's face! Now you know the face of the voice! You were not content to hear me, eh? You wanted to know what I looked like! Oh, you women are so inquisitive! Well, are you satisfied? I'm a very good-looking fellow, eh? When a woman has seen me, as you have, she belongs to me. She loves me for ever. I am a kind of Don Juan, you know!”¹⁰ Here it can be observed that each element of his psyche can be seen in how he reacts to Christine's rejection, underlining the tension between his unconscious desires, his rationalization and his inner sense of guilt.

To start off, Erik's statement, “When a woman has seen me, as you have, she belongs to me,” reveals his id-driven impulses. Erik's words reflect a deep, selfish need for control and validation, particularly from women as he tries to assert dominance over Christine in response to the perceived signs of rejection. His disfigurement only worsens his feelings of inadequacy, leading to his emotional outburst that could be interpreted as a defense mechanism.

On the other hand, Erik's reference to himself as a “Don Juan” shows the function of the ego. The ego seeks to mediate between the impulsiveness of the id and the moral and social restrictions imposed by the superego. In this context, his adoption of the persona of a Don Juan, a fictional character known for his romantic conquests, serves as Erik's attempt to mask his ugliness and compensate through an image of grandeur and an inflated sense of self. By doing this he tries to protect himself from the vulnerability he feels regarding his deformity.

Finally, his sarcasm “I'm a very good-looking fellow, eh?” suggests the influence of the superego, which, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, internalizes societal norms and moral standards. In this moment, Erik's exaggerated claim of beauty is marked by self-loathing and a recognition of his failure to meet the societal standards of attractiveness. The superego is not only present in his awareness of his monstrosity but also in the guilt and self-reproach he feels, further emphasizing his volatile emotional state.

Conclusion

The broad implication of the present research is that Erik, the mysterious figure at the core of the novel,

9 Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIX (1923-1925): *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, 1-66. Edited by James Strachey. pp. 19-39.

https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_SE_Ego_Id_complete.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024

10 Leroux, Gaston, *Phantom of the Opera*, op. cit., p. 167

reflects the complexity of human nature as shown through psychoanalytic and philosophical perspectives.

His deformity and dualism play the role of metaphors for his fragmented and unstable sense of self, a motif fundamental to Gothic fiction. By drawing on Freud's theory of the uncanny and the structural model of the psyche, as well as Plato's concept of mimesis, this interpretation exposes the contrast between Erik's idealized persona and his repressed weaknesses. Erik's inner turmoil indicates a significant struggle between the id's primordial urges, the ego's rationalization, and the superego's internalized moral restraints. His mask, a symbol of allegorical castration and a metaphor of repression, not only conceals his external deformity but also reflects the boundaries he develops to shield his actual self from rejection. His obsessive preoccupation with Christine is both a mirror to his oedipal conflicts and an indication of his quest for acceptance in a world that ostracizes him.

Ultimately, this tragic narrative invites readers to contemplate on themes such as estrangement from one's own self, isolation, despair and the rooted, human need for connection beyond the surface level. His character is not merely a villain or a victim but a reminder of the psychological and societal forces that shape us all. Beyond his grotesque appearance, through the lenses of psychoanalysis Erik emerges as a deeply human figure with a desperate need to no longer feel like an outsider but instead, to feel like he belongs somewhere or to someone.

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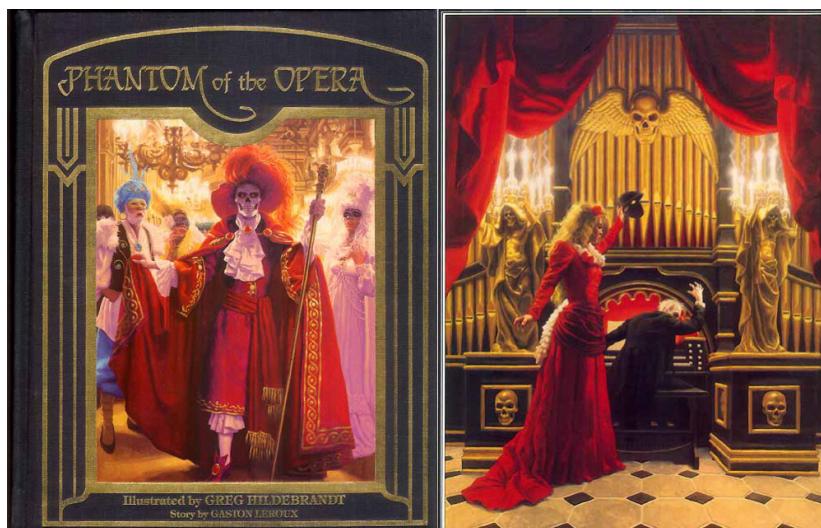
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The Importance of Folk Tales to the Formation of American Culture and Identity

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Folklore and culture have a close relationship; they depend on and influence one another. According to the Cambridge dictionary, a folktale is “a traditional story that people of a particular region or group repeat among themselves”.¹ Since they are transmitted both orally and in the written format, from one generation to another, folktales played a significant role in the formation of the American culture by helping create and disseminate important ideas and values. However, these values are not only presented within the stories but are also formed through them, originating in their turn even more stories. Simply put, folktales create values but values also create folktales. Even though they evolved over time and changed to resonate with the time period, they maintained many key ideas and themes. These beloved folk stories served thus as a way to keep the core characteristics of the American spirit alive, while continuously evolving to reflect modern values and ideas of national identity.

From this perspective, characters represent an essential element that contributes to the propagation of values. These are figures that people can relate to and use as role models. Among the most important ones are Paul Bunyan, John Henry, Johnny Appleseed, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, whose adventures became part of American folklore. Even though some are truly fictional while others are inspired from real-life figures, their stories constitute a significant part of the American identity and remain relevant even today.

The legendary lumberjack Paul Bunyan² is a North American folk hero. He is mostly known as the figure who created the Dakotas by cutting down large amounts of trees, accompanied by his famous blue ox, Babe. Together, they worked as an unstoppable team that did not run away from the most difficult labours. The stories associated with him emphasize the importance of leadership, teamwork and hard work. Bunyan was a great leader for his lumberjacks; he always found unusual but effective ways to solve problems and did not give up until the work was done, thus becoming a powerful symbol for perseverance.

John Henry, the emblematic “steel-driving man”³, is another character associated with physical strength and determination. He is a central figure in the battle against industrialisation, as the symbolic leader of the labouring class, fighting for them until death. Thus, Henry not only stands for the superiority of human labour as opposed to the degradation of the machines but also for solidarity against a common enemy. Both Paul Bunyan and John Henry have become valuable examples of work dedication for generations of Americans through different media, such as illustrated books⁴, animated movies⁵, and songs⁶.

Compared to Paul Bunyan and John Henry who are truly fictional characters, Johnny Appleseed, the great nurseryman, is based on a real man called John Chapman. Chapman dedicated his life to planting apple seeds as a contribution to frontier society and nature. He stands for values such as freedom, because he chose to live on his own terms, embracing a modest life, and altruism, as he dedicated himself to providing for others. His way of living in harmony with nature became an example for generations to follow, as evidenced by the numerous children’s books portraying his life⁷. This shows that the story of Johnny Appleseed is very influential. Other American values that can be linked to this character are the ideas of unity, dedication and equality, as he showed empathy both for humans and animals and tried his best to be in communion with nature.

As “one of the United States’ first and most prominent folk heroes”, Daniel Boone was a “symbol of courage as he braved the dangers of the frontier”⁸. He was also a real-life historical figure, remembered for

1 Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/folktale>, accessed January 15, 2025.

2 Michael Edmonds, *Out of The Northwoods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan*, Wisconsin, Wisconsin Society Press, 2009.

3 *John Henry (folklore)*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_\(folklore\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_(folklore)), accessed January 15, 2025.

4 Such as Steven Kellogg, *Paul Bunyan*, U.S.A., HarperCollins, 2004.

5 Such examples are the animated films from Walt Disney Animated Studio *Paul Bunyan* released in 1958 and *John Henry* released in 2000.

6 Such as Jesse Fuller’s song, *John Henry*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=605IF9_u14Q, accessed January 23, 2025.

7 Such as Lori Haskin Houran, *My Little Golden Book About Johnny Appleseed*, New York, A Golden Book, 2017.

8 *Who Was Daniel Boone? Learn All About the Early American Folk Hero*, <https://explorethearchive.com/who-was-daniel-boone>, accessed January 25, 2025.

his contributions as a frontiersman. He is also portrayed as a skilful warrior, excellent explorer, and fearless hero. The legendary character of Daniel Boone gained a lot of popularity during his time, especially amongst children, through the large propagation of intriguing comics⁹. He became an example of heroism for children who were recreating his adventures on the playground by pretend-playing. However, compared to the other folk heroes discussed before, his adventures also promote negative values from a contemporary point of view, such as racism. His stories show the Native Americans as an inferior group of people and characterise them using derogatory names.

Another historically based folk hero is David Crockett, who was also “an American frontiersman and politician who became a legendary figure”¹⁰. As someone who tried to create their own place in American folklore, he stands out from the other real-life individuals discussed in this article. He portrays himself in his autobiography from 1834¹¹ as a simple and trustworthy man, who is trying to defend himself from unfair criticism. He declares in his book, “most of authors seek fame, but I seek for justice”¹². He tries to portray himself as modest to show his readers that he is a man of the people and gain their trust. However, it seems that his goal is not just to clear his name but also to manufacture a specific public image of himself as someone strong, self-sufficient and competent. Later on, “Davy” Crockett becomes a hyperbolized character exploited in various humoristic and exaggerated stories about his accomplishments¹³. Consequently, he became immortalised as a folk hero, someone who embodied important American values like strength, freedom and heroism.

The main thing that these characters have in common is their eagerness to do what they consider to be right, and work for what they believe in. Their motives, however, are slightly different even though all five of them were of service to their communities. Paul Bunyan helped society by contributing to the development of cities, being linked to the idea of a certain progress, while John Henry wanted to prove that human determination was better than the power of machines. Johnny Appleseed, on the other hand, stood for living in peace and unity with nature and other human beings. Finally, both Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett helped expand America’s borders and showed that it was important to fight for your cause no matter the cost. All of these folklore characters are examples of hard work, inspiring the Americans to make something of themselves based on their own merit. Their perseverance, dedication and aspiration for growth are also values that contribute to American progress.

In conclusion, the adventures of these five folk heroes have had an essential impact on American culture, by promoting certain examples of thinking and living. Even though these characters are hyperbolized and their stories are often unrealistic, the values they stand for are real. In fact, the use of hyperboles and supernatural elements played a role in keeping the stories alive, because these aspects contribute to a clearer understanding of values and ideas, and people appreciate both straightforward messages (hyperbolised characteristics mark better certain values) and figures that stand out.

The American values, culture and identity are therefore strongly influenced by the folk stories. Through their extraordinary adventures, folk heroes became role models for the Americans and contributed to the development of their national identity. Very popular and appreciated, these stories had been passed from one generation to another, helping in keeping the American spirit and ideology alive.

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11 David Crockett, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*, Philadelphia/ Baltimore, E. L. Carey and A. Hart/ Carey, Hart & Co., 1834.

12 *Idem*, p. 3.

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As I am writing this article myself I am listening to one of my favorite songs by Tracy Chapman 'Fast Car' and I cannot help but wonder how it makes me feel. Music has always been a means of escapism for us and it is indeed shown to be true that music therapy truly works. The 'need' or 'want' to create any form of art has been associated with our emotions. Music is defined as 'vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony and expression of emotion' but how can this harmony of sounds heal us?

Well, the history of music has shown that music can reduce feelings such as anxiety, stress, depression due to the fact that when we usually listen to music our body releases dopamine—a neurotransmitter which is associated with pleasure and reward—and other hormones such as endorphins which also play a big role in how we feel pleasure and in the process of reducing pain. Thus, research has proven that music used in therapy sessions helps create a more comfortable atmosphere and has a positive influence on those dealing with trauma. Music therapy has also been used in hospitals or hospices on chronically ill patients to help improve their cognitive function and provide a coping mechanism for those in need of emotional support.

Music has the power to touch our souls, lift our spirits and heal. But can music actually act as medicine? To start with, a music therapist is not only a skilled vocalist or magnificent at playing any instrument, such therapist possesses knowledge of how music provokes such ease for the human body. They may use different styles of music or teach their patients how an instrument can play music for you or with you. Music therapy does not just soothe the soul—it can help people with a variety of health issues feel and function better. Well this thin but not out of fashion line between art and medicine has been debated since Seneca translated this Hippocratic aphorism '*O βίος βραχὺς, ή δέ τέχνη μακρύ*' to an eternal question about the nature of medicine: is medicine an art or a science? Music therapy is not just a pleasant diversion from real medical problems but a means of assisting in treating patients by providing them with emotional support.

An expanding number of scientists attest that this type of therapy is more than a nice way of soothing patients, it can improve the medical outcomes and the quality of life. Coping with cancer magazine argues for this type of healing procedure and takes into consideration a specific report of The World Health Organization that states how hospitals level noises make it difficult for patients to rest, they even raise the blood levels and interfere with pain management. Taking this into account, the magazine reinforces the idea of including music in cancer treatment: 'It takes more than medicine to treat cancer'. They claim that music can do wonders for this type of patients that are dealing with a broad category of 'pain' like: nausea, fatigue, anaemia, dietary and weight issues, possible loss of hair and nails etc. Nowadays more hospitals are using music as a complementary therapy with interactive music interventions (listening actively to music) and active music engagement (singing along to songs) which not only muffle the hospital noises, but also have been proven useful at reducing nausea and pain after chemotherapy by uplifting the patients' moods.

But you do not have to be a music lover in order to benefit from this type of therapy or for you to relax. Science demonstrates the power of music and its healing properties. The music field allows us to choose from a variety of music genres and styles to get the best quality and enjoy ourselves at the same time. In fact, science has proven that listening to classical music for 30 minutes everyday decreases the levels of stress hormones in our blood.

For example, different types of music target pathways in the brain; familiar music helps with our emotional state while unfamiliar music lifts up the mood.

Music therapy is indeed for everyone and it doesn't only help patients, the healthcare providers can benefit from this too. Doctors have recently started to use music as a way of relaxing or 'setting' the mood in the surgery room. This way they can feel less stressed or anxious when it comes to performing surgery, especially high risk surgery.

What about prescribed music?

'Prescribed music' refers to a musical composition that targets a patient's neurological mechanism and mood states. Instead of focusing on music genres, prescribed music is selected based on its compositional elements like timbre, tempo, dynamic range, instrumentation etc. This music is emotionally nonintrusive but it should be containing relaxing compositional elements because they are more effective. However, like any

type of medicine, prescribed music has side effects too; for example, it can provoke emotional distress if the chosen style of music contains activating rhythms or by overstimulating the patient with high pitched vocals or high notes or a strong bass.

In conclusion, music therapy can be a powerful tool for emotional and psychological healing. It taps into the universal language of music to help individuals express feelings, reduce stress, and even improve cognitive function. Whether used to treat anxiety, depression, or developmental challenges, music has the unique ability to resonate deeply with people, facilitating connection and self-awareness. Its non-invasive nature and ability to transcend verbal communication make it an accessible and effective therapy for many.

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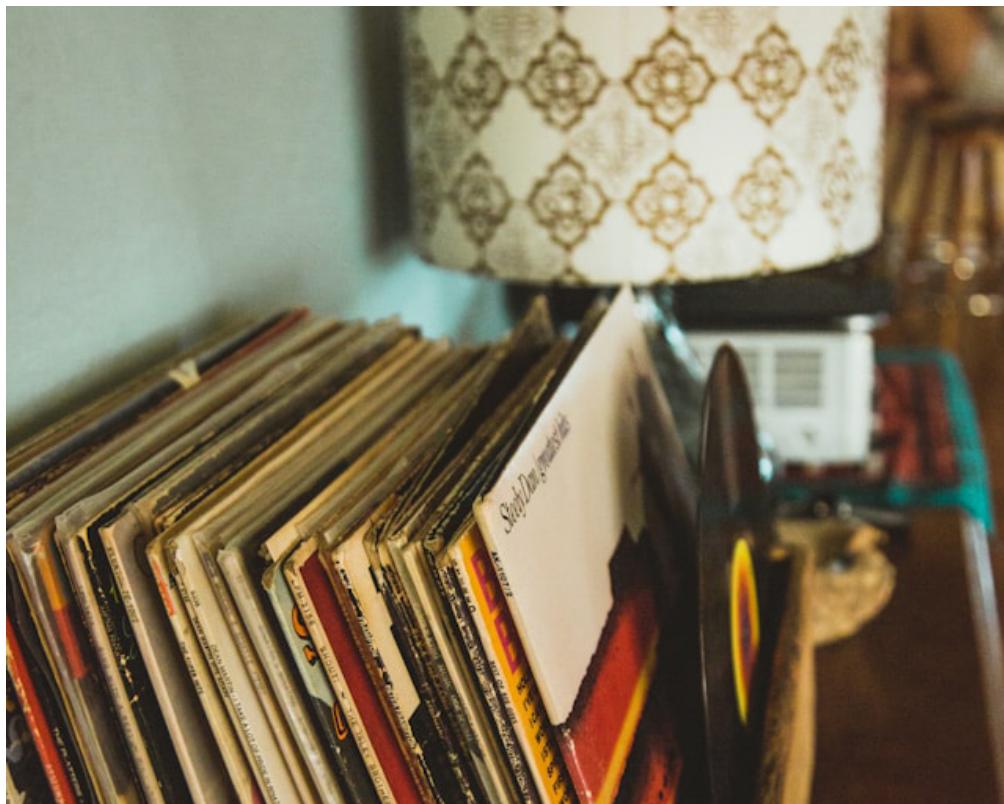
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Diary of an Erasmus student in France!

Nicole Stoica, III, E-F

Coordinator: PhD Lecturer Gabriela Andrioai-Grigoraș

My name is Nicole and right around this time, one year ago, I signed myself and my best friend for an Erasmus English exam. Both of us passed and we chose to go to France, more specifically, Bordeaux! I do not regret my decision!

Being here for more than two months has been definitely hard. I am not going to sugar-coat it for anyone, moving to another country is hard. Not knowing the language is also very difficult, since you can never state what is in your mind in a proper way, you are constantly left thinking: Did they get it?

In terms of language barrier, I was lucky, one might say. I knew a bit of French prior to coming here, but I still got people telling me my French is terrible, which makes no sense to me since, the reason behind this whole project was that I wanted to learn how to speak in this beautiful language and even fall in love with the culture. Talking to more foreigners here, I discovered this is very much of a common thing. It is not like the French purposefully try to be mean to me specifically, that is just the way it is here and accepting this made my experience here so much more bearable, because yes, I did cry when someone at a bar told me my French was awful, IN ENGLISH!

This is not me trying to say that the stereotype is true, but this is me trying to say that one should expect one or two people being like that when you try to speak to them without knowing straight A French. Maybe the best way to deal with this is to try speaking with more foreigners just like you! Focus on improving through fun. That should not stop you from taking French classes or speaking to natives. I am taking a French grammar class here and I am so happy and proud of my progress. This class has made me learn and teach myself so much which gave me the proper confidence that I can have more than a 5 min. conversation on the street. Now, moving on to how University works here, I would give this a 10/10. I love this place! There are so many things to do, from learning basically almost every language you can think of, to having a class of any sport you would like to, also having other ateliers you can attend, the list is endless. I personally have Chinese two times a week here, of course taught in French, and I also go to yoga every Thursday, which is fantastic for my mental and physical health (Merci Harmony, tu es le meilleur!) I have been taking a cours de soir to help French people learn Romanian. It has been so great for me to find out about them and how everyone has a different story that links them to my native language. Making friends with these people, going out after classes, planning voyages together is something I am grateful for!

I have also been to a therapy-through-art class, which was, simply put, eye opening. In the whole class (of six people) five were foreigners. Everyone was talking about how French culture can be both cold and intimidating, which assured me that there is nothing wrong with feeling a bit lost here. It is normal. I guess drawing and chatting is a great way of talking about trauma without affecting the vibes of the class. (if you plan on coming here, please make sure to take this class, thank me later).

I have talked so much about how hard it is to make friends here, but I actually go out with friends all the time. Yes, most of them are not French, but that is the beauty of Erasmus. I have friends here from China, Spain, Greece, Poland, Argentina, Cote d'Ivoire, Hungary, you name it! One way I love to spend time with my friends is by having pot lucks together. For those out there not knowing what pot luck is, the best way to explain it is: intercultural dinner. Basically, everyone cooks something specific to its country. We also love to go to pubs here. Louise, my French friend from the Romanian course, has been teaching me the art of French pubbing, which I will be forever grateful.

The area of Bordeaux is so beautiful! Le jardin public is literally out of my wildest dreams and the whole city from Victoire to Marche des Capucins to, again, you name it, makes my day! It is like constantly living in a dream (minus actually having to study, but that is not the point).

All in all, I love this place! Yes, certain things are hard to navigate, but the opportunities you get here makes it worth it. Bordeaux will forever be in my heart and I am just still in denial thinking that I scored this, like how crazy it is when dreams do come true. For those of you out there who are not sure if they should come, I hope my article helped you gain a better insight on what life is like for an Erasmus student abroad!

Thank you for reading this!



My Erasmus Experience

A Journey of Growth, Discovery and Connection

Florina-Ioana Bârjovanu, III, R-E

Coordinator: PhD Associate Professor Nadia-Nicoleta Morărașu

Studying abroad through the Erasmus program has been one of the most challenging experiences of my life. It was not just an academic opportunity but a journey that allowed me to grow personally, culturally and socially. From the moment that I stepped off the plane in a new country I knew that there was no turning back and that this experience would be unforgettable.

The decision to apply for the Erasmus program was both exciting and frightening. I had always dreamed of living in a different country, getting to know a new culture and meeting people from all over the world. However, the thought of leaving my comfort zone, my family and my friends behind was intimidating. Despite the fears, I knew that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone.

The first few days in my host country were full of emotions. Everything was new and unfamiliar like the language, the food, the culture and even the way people talked. I remember feeling a sense of fascination as I explored the city but also a feeling of nostalgia as I adapted to my new home for the next five months. However, the warmth and friendliness of the locals, as well as the support of other Erasmus students quickly made me feel at home.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of my Erasmus experience was the academic environment. Studying in a different educational system exposed me to new perspectives and teaching methods. I found myself challenged in ways I had not been before, and this pushed me to think critically and creatively. Beyond the classroom, I had the opportunity to attend lectures, workshops and cultural events that deepened my understanding of the host country's history, art and traditions.

One of the highlights of my Erasmus experience was the opportunity to travel. I was just a short flight or train ride away from some of the most iconic cities in the host country. I took full advantage of this, visiting neighboring cities such as Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Toulouse. Every journey left me with unforgettable memories and deeper appreciation for the diversity of our world.

I will always be grateful for the people I met along my Erasmus experience because the Erasmus program brought together students from almost all over the world such as Poland, Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Argentina, creating a vibrant and diverse community. I formed friendships that exceeded borders and cultures, and these connections have remained strong even after the Erasmus program ended. We shared countless moments of laughter, learning, discovery and shared experiences that created bonds that will last forever.

Looking back, I realized that my Erasmus experience was not just about studying abroad, it was a journey of self-discovery. Living in a foreign country alone for five months forced me to step out of my comfort zone, adapt to new situations and become more independent. I learned to face up to challenges, embrace uncertainty and appreciate the beauty of diversity.

My Erasmus experience was more than just a semester abroad, it was a life-changing adventure that formed me in meaningful ways. It allowed me to grow academically, culturally and personally, and it gave me memories and friendships that I will cherish forever. The Erasmus program is not just about studying in a different country, it is about discovering the country, connecting with others and discovering yourself. I am forever grateful for this opportunity, and I would encourage anyone to take this opportunity as I did. It will be an amazing experience that you will never forget.

The Passion of the Christ

Florentina-Cristiana Belu, III, R-E
Coordinator: PhD Lecturer Raluca Galita

“The Passion of the Christ” is a movie directed by Mel Gibson, released in 2004, with Jim Caviezel playing Jesus Christ. Other key actors include Maia Morgenstern as the Virgin Mary, Monica Bellucci as Mary Magdalene and Hristo Shopov as Pontius Pilate. The movie follows the last twelve hours in Jesus’s life, a period characterized by violence and suffering, including Jesus’s agony in Gethsemane, arrest, scourging, condemnation and crucifixion. The characters in the movie speak the languages which were spoken back then (Aramaic and Latin), a fact that adds to the movie’s impression of authenticity.

I watched the movie for the first time at the age of 17. A year before, I had read the comments of the users on Cinemagia and the synopsis. I thought that if I ever tried to watch it, I would get scared and turn it off after the first thirty minutes. Both the comments and the synopsis described the excessive violence featured in the movie, which was so extensive that Gibson was accused of sadism for including it. Nevertheless, one year later, I decided to give the movie a chance. I thought that I could resist until the end and I did. The violent imagery made me sad, not scared or eager to turn off the TV, even if I was gritting my teeth while watching the crucifixion scene. For me, the scenes evoked powerful emotions, awakening a sense of sadness and empathy for the suffering that the Son of God endured in order to save the world. The feelings I experienced during the movie were sadness and suspense, not the disgust at the blood and wounds.

Despite the violence depicted, the movie’s purpose is not just to focus on physical suffering, but to show that we have been redeemed through that very amount of sorrows. Gibson offered the Christian audience a deeper approach on the Savior’s suffering by means of Caviezel’s portrayal. The movie is not meant to be a violent one, even if it seems to be at first. It is meant to depict a terrible reality, just as it was two thousand years ago. The director didn’t invent anything. The film accurately depicts things spoken about in ancient sources; a prisoner sentenced to death by crucifixion was not offered flowers and candy, but rather mockery, severe scourging and nails in his hands and feet. This was Jesus’s experience too, both in the Bible and in “The Passion of the Christ”.

Despite its merits, the movie is still not one for sensitive individuals. You need to have a strong heart in order to watch it till the end. I can say from the bottom of my heart that this film changed my life. After seeing it, I meditated deeply on the sorrows which the Son of God endured for us and developed a personal connection with Him beyond religious formalism. I came to understand that Jesus is not only the main figure of Christianity, but also a very good friend; someone whose love was stronger than physical pain, strong enough to redeem the world. Christianity is the only religion in which the Creator sacrificed Himself for His creation. In all the other ancient religions, it’s exactly the opposite.

I watched the movie twice more, at the age of 18. I am not a film critic; I wrote this article to share my experience with Gibson’s movie and to offer another perspective on it. While the film’s violence can be overwhelming at times, watching the movie helped me realize that its purpose is not to terrify the viewers, but to raise empathy. For all of its seemingly gratuitous cruelty, “The Passion of the Christ” is fundamentally a spiritual experience.

As a conclusion, the movie is not for weak-hearted persons, as I have written above. It must be watched with the heart, not with the eyes.

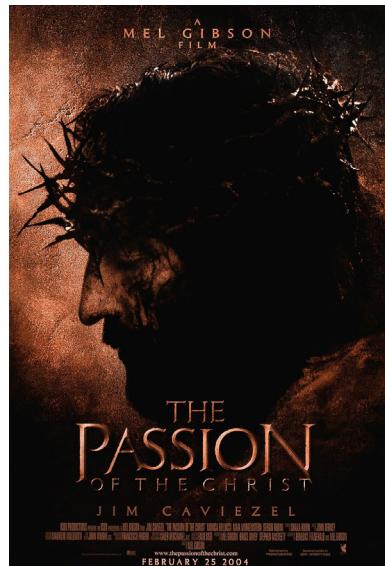


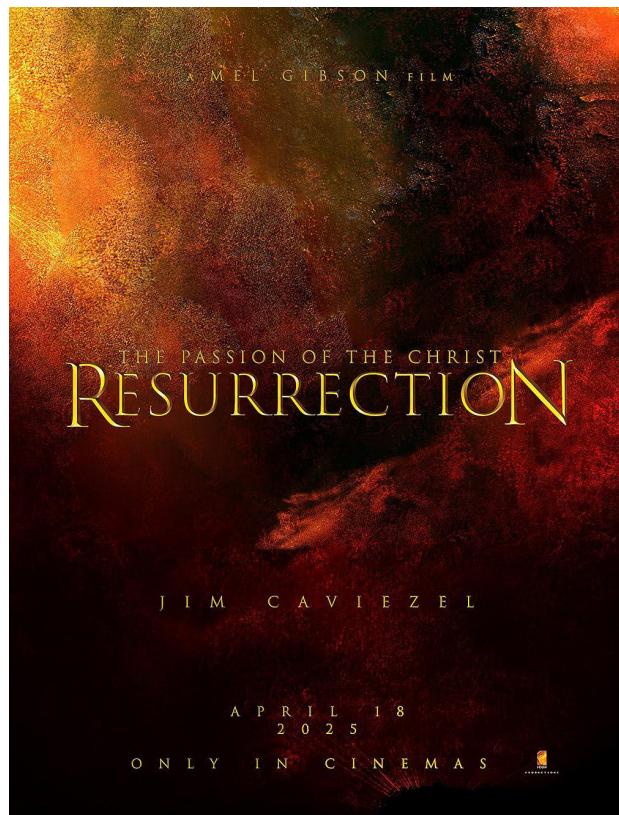
Image Used:

Gibson, Mel. The Passion of the Christ. Movie poster. 2004. IMDb.
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335345/> accessed February 4, 2025.

The Passion of the Christ: Resurrection

Florentina-Cristiana Belu, III, R-E

Coordinator: PhD Lecturer Raluca Galița



Mel Gibson's 2004 movie, "The Passion of the Christ" depicts the last twelve hours of Jesus' life in painstaking detail. The director was famously accused of sadism and antisemitism because of the film's brutality. Despite these accusations, the movie had immense box office success, earning \$612 million worldwide according to IMDb.

Now, it has been announced that the movie will have a sequel called "The Passion of the Christ: Resurrection", also directed by Mel Gibson. The director has been working on the sequel for a few years and the release date is scheduled for April 18, 2025 in the US¹. The film, as the title suggests, will focus on the three days between Jesus's burial and His rising from the dead and the events following His resurrection. In 2016, during an interview, Gibson said: "Resurrection. Big subject! Oh, my God... We're trying to craft this in a way that is cinematically compelling and enlightening so that it shines new light, if possible, without creating some weird thing."²

The main actors - Jim Caviezel as Jesus, Maia Morgenstern as Virgin Mary, Francesco de Vito as Peter - will remain the same as the first film; however, there is not yet any information about the rest of the cast. Jim

Caviezel, the lead actor, made sure that the sequel "is going to be the biggest film in history. It is that good"³. He also said, without giving any spoilers, that "There are things that I cannot say that will shock the audience. It is great. Stay tuned."⁴

Based on Caviezel's declaration, the movie should be entertaining and, as indicated in its title, more optimistic and less violent than the first one. People who enjoyed the first movie will likely enjoy "The Passion of the Christ: Resurrection" too and those who felt intimidated by the graphic nature of the first film may find themselves better able to appreciate the sequel.

Image Used:

The Passion of the Christ: Resurrection. Movie poster. 2026. Blu-ray.com.

<https://www.blu-ray.com/The-Passion-of-the-Christ-Resurrection/953776/>, accessed February 4, 2025.

1 https://m.imdb.com/title/tt5795232/?ref_=ext_shr_lnk

2 https://m.imdb.com/title/tt5795232/trivia/?item=tr5902605&ref_=ext_shr_lnk

3 https://m.imdb.com/title/tt5795232/trivia/?item=tr5902599&ref_=ext_shr_lnk

4 *Ibidem*

What happens when you stop believing in the Christmas Spirit, in Santa Claus, only to be proven wrong when you least expect it? That is the question explored by *The Christmas Chronicles*, a movie about Katy and Teddy Pierce, two siblings who do not get along at all after the unexpected passing of their father. The movie begins with Teddy, the older brother, who behaves meanly to his sister, Katy, and almost tells her that Santa is not real. Their mother, who works as a nurse, is called to the hospital on Christmas Eve, leaving the two siblings alone at home. Left without anything to do, Katy starts to watch old Christmas tapes of their family when she suddenly notices that one of the videos shows a stranger in their house putting gifts under the Christmas tree. She shows it to her brother, and they make a plan to catch Santa in the act by setting up a trap that would alert them if he arrives. To their surprise, the trap is triggered, and when they run outside, they are shocked to see Santa Claus jumping from house to house in a trail of red smoke while his sleigh (carried by his magic reindeer) floats above the street.

Katy and Teddy climb inside the sleigh to get a better look but are accidentally lifted to the sky by Santa after he is done delivering gifts in that area. Revealing themselves after Katy asks Santa for a blanket, Santa is startled and loses control of the reindeer, and Katy almost falls out of the sleigh. He catches her at the expense of his bag of presents. Then, the two siblings decide to try and help Santa find his reindeer, who were off the leash, and his presents in order to save Christmas. They manage to get in trouble with the police, while Santa constantly admits who he is, proving it to everyone despite them not wanting to believe that what he was doing was real. He keeps calling strangers by their names, telling them what they wanted for every Christmas, speaking foreign languages to those who do not speak English, and even making presents out of thin air, no matter how big they are. After spending some time in jail for stealing a car, he throws a party with the inmates and then he is released, using his powers as Santa Claus to turn into smoke and fly out of the prison with the help of his elves.

With the help of the Pierces, Santa manages to save Christmas, giving the kids an unforgettable memory and wonderful presents. This is by far my favorite Christmas movie, because it is the only one that really captures the feeling of Christmas magic that I've had since I was a child. It is a must-see, in my opinion; everybody should have this movie on their holiday watchlist!



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https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2990140/?ref_=tt_mv_close, accessed February 4, 2025.

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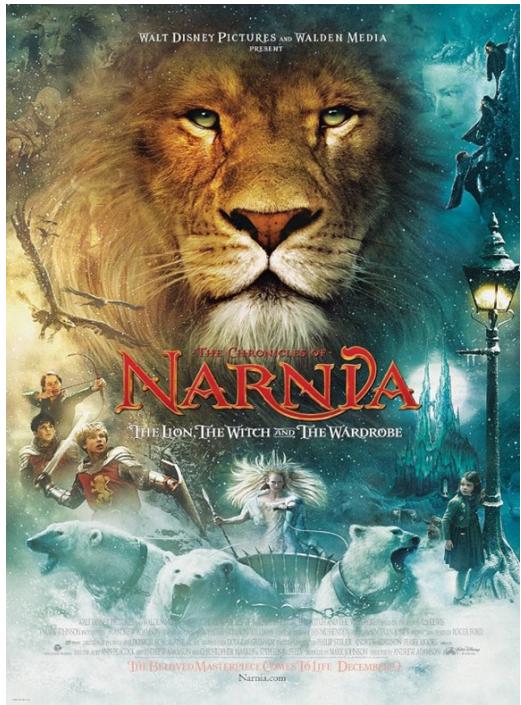
Netflix. The Daily Fandom.

<https://thedailyfandom.org/whos-the-best-santa/>, accessed February 4, 2025

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

Andrei-Ionuț Ioanici, II, E-F

Coordinator: PhD Lecturer Raluca Galița



Set during World War II, the movie follows the story of four siblings who cannot seem to get along very well. Compelled to flee their home due to German air raids, the Pevensies—Susan, Lucy, Peter and Edmund—are sent away by their mother to stay in the countryside in the house of a professor. After being told not to make too much noise and disturb the homeowner, the siblings play hide and seek, and one of them hides inside of a wardrobe, not knowing that it was secretly a gateway to another realm—Narnia. After a while, all the siblings end up in there and they are forced to work together in order to save both their little brother and the realm of Narnia as the prophecy, according to which four rulers, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, as humans are called in that realm, shall come to save and rule Narnia, foretold long before they were even born. There is a witch who manages to lure Edmund, the little brother, into thinking that she is good, when in reality she plans to kill the heirs to Narnia's thrones and only uses him as a “rat”, to help her find his other siblings. Luckily, they are not alone in their quest of finding and rescuing their little brother. The wise lion, Aslan, who is unofficially the actual ruler of the realm of Narnia (the creator of Narnia and, thus, an allegory for God),

offers to help and makes a deal with the witch wherein he gives up his own life in exchange for Edmund's. The witch kills him and attacks the kids and their army, but Aslan's sacrifice, similar to that of Jesus Christ's, proves to conquer her wickedness. He rises from the dead and aids the others in battle against the evil witch and ultimately kills her. The story ends with all of the siblings taking their rightful places as kings and queens of Narnia and being bestowed great titles, titles they would have never thought they would be given in their lives. The years go by, and after some time, they manage to return back to the real world, where nothing really changed at all, despite them growing into adulthood in Narnia.

The story shows how certain stressful situations can actually help bring those who dislike each other together and help them discover how good they can be if they work as one. Before having to fight for their brother and for Narnia, the Pevensies hardly got along, but afterwards, having gone through the horrors of crucial battles, losing people, and experiencing true evil (not just the silly conflicts with one another that they thought were evil), they united and cared for each other, loved each other, fought alongside each other as brothers and sisters and as kings and queens.

This is one of the many movies I love, not just because it is a fantasy movie (the genre that I personally find most alluring), but because of the plot as well. The story is filled with important lessons that come from both the actions of the characters and their lines, especially those coming from the wisest character of all—Aslan. Although young, the children prove to be excellent actors, managing to bring a sense of reality to the movie, making it feel like you are actually the spectator of someone's real life instead of just a story. All in all, it is a movie worth watching more than once.

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Adamson, Andrew. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Movie poster. 2005. IMDb.

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Before we begin, tell us a bit about yourself. What is your name and where are you from?

My name is Kailani and I am from Oregon, USA.

Do you have any particular hobbies?

I like making music, writing and getting outdoors however I can.

Could you tell us more about your homeland? What is Oregon like and what are some interesting things we should know about it?

Oregon is beautiful. It has a lot of nature, and its geography and climate are very similar to that of Romania. It is riddled with forests and pine trees, of which countless hiking trails snake their way through, and it borders the Pacific Ocean on the West side. We also have the deepest lake in the US (Crater Lake) and, unfortunately, a lot of wildfires in the summer. The population is smaller than many other states and it is mostly rural. It is home to the legend of Bigfoot and a good deal of other folklore and myths. It is the ancestral land of many native tribes such as Klamath, Umpqua, Molalla, and Chinook. Many place names in Oregon are named after these indigenous tribes.

I know you've been living in Romania for a while now. How would you describe your experience here? What do you think of our people and culture so far?

I would describe my experience in Romania so far as overall being quite wonderful. It has definitely not all been easy- coming to adjust to a new country, language and culture- but I knew that from the first moment I arrived here it felt like another home. People have been very welcoming, generous, and eager to share their culture, which has made me more and more curious to learn- there has been an undeniable warmth. I really enjoy learning about the myths and legends here especially, and exploring as much nature as I can. Everything seems to have such a historical depth that I have never experienced before- the West Coast of the US is all extremely new, and no building is more than a couple of hundred years old. I also love all of the Romanian food that I have tried and found it hard to go without it when I went back to the U.S. to visit.

Prior to moving out from your homeland, what have you studied?

Before moving away from Oregon, I studied Cultural Anthropology for two years at University. I think I have always felt a strong curiosity and inclination for studying other cultures, which is ultimately what led me here.

What made you choose to study in Romania over other countries? Was there anything in particular that you found appealing about this land?

When I initially came to Romania I was drawn by the agricultural aspect (and the natural world here in general), among other things. I had learned a bit about Eastern Europe through my faculty and a couple of connections I had here, and I decided to volunteer doing farm work the first time I came to visit. When I started to learn a bit of Romanian I found that I really love the language as well and wanted to continue studying it.

Was it hard for you to adapt to this new environment?

Overall, I think adapting to life here has felt quite natural. Certain things have been a bit hard to adapt to, but nothing too stifling. I remember when I first came here I was so confused when I went grocery shopping because how we handle produce is usually different in the U.S., plus just not having digested the value of lei yet. I think overall going from the Imperial system to the Metric system has been a bit of an adjustment, but now I feel pretty comfortable with these logistical aspects. I think another hurdle I have had to get over is my shyness around learning a new language, and stepping out of my comfort zone with speaking even if I am not sure if what I say is correct or not.

What was the biggest cultural difference you have noticed when you moved to Romania?

I want to say the biggest cultural difference I have felt here is that people seem to be more invested in the concept of community overall and place more value on it. This is not to say that people are not community-oriented in the U.S., but we often have a very individualistic mindset and it is often expected to greatly individuate yourself from your parents and family after you turn 18. This can also apply to the city or town you live in- things are farther apart as well and most towns are not walkable, creating an environment that feels more separate.

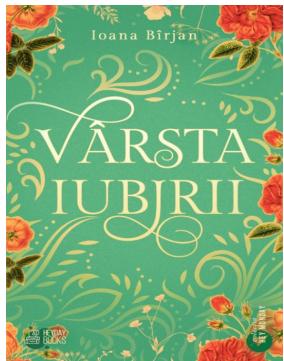


GET TO KNOW OUR
STUDENTS

Andreea-Mihaela Duțu, I, LEPC

Coordinators: PhD Associate Professor Mihaela Culea

Fulbright Teaching Assistant Abigail Thomson



1. About the book

I enthusiastically recommend *Vârsta iubirii*¹ (The Age of Love) by Ioana Birjan, a writer from Constanța who wrote this novel during her university years, a time when we were classmates. The novel was published by Heyday Books² in Bacău, and its launch took place in 2023 at the National Opera and Ballet Theatre “Oleg Danovski”³ in Constanța. During the launch, the author presented her book surrounded by representatives from the publishing house and her fellow students from the Faculty of Letters at “Ovidius” University, providing moral support, one of whom took the opportunity to speak about the book and Birjan.⁴ (In the foyer, alongside the author, were present Iulia Gângă—one of the founders of HeyDay Books)⁵. The book was later presented at the student conference.

Vârsta iubirii is a book that impresses with the depth with which it tackles universal themes such as love, friendship, and self-discovery. This work manages to captivate readers through a complex narrative that follows the interconnected lives of multiple generations of characters, each with their own conflicts, aspirations, and challenges.

This book is a notable contribution to contemporary literature, especially with regards to character-driven novels that explore deeply personal themes like identity, familial ties, and the multifaceted nature of love. This book shines as a narrative study of the connections and choices that shape individual lives across generations. It taps into universal themes through specific, intimate portrayals, and this grounding in the human experience makes it a valuable piece in the genre of introspective literary fiction.

2. Structure and summary

Birjan’s novel is structured into several thematic chapters (“Micuța pianistă”, “Ore de literatură și cărți furate”, “Dafinul tatălui”, “Două prietene”, “O piesă de teatru numită viață”, “Proaspătul profesor și prietena redactor”, “Cursuri de teatru și agronomie”, “Mica vrabie”, “Necredinciosul”, “Cafeaua vârsată”, “Tradiții și superstiții”, “Parfum de lăcrămioare și aromă de miere”, etc.), each focusing on a specific period and on a different character or group of characters. The story traces the genealogical lines and personal development of its main characters, with the narrative advancing through interwoven accounts, historical descriptions, and psychological introspections. The action unfolds across multiple generations and distinct locations, including post-war artistic New York:

“Orașul care nu dormea niciodată își afișa impunătoarele clădiri într-un mod aproape ostentativ. Dar puțini erau cei care nu se lăsau cuceriti de farmecul emanat de New York. Anii '50 păreau a fi un adevărat paradis, după o perioadă în care poporul american își jelise copii căzuți pe frontul celui de-al doilea Război Mondial.”⁶ (“The city that never slept displayed its imposing buildings in an almost ostentatious manner. Yet few could resist the charm exuded by New York. The 1950s seemed like a true paradise, following a period when the American people had mourned their children who had fallen on the frontlines of World War II”);⁷

Thus, we are presented with a family setting infused with Turkish cultural influences. The title is particularly fitting and well-chosen, carrying a poetic resonance that encapsulates the story’s core themes: love in its various forms, experienced over a lifetime and across generations. Birjan writes:

1 Ioana, Birjan, *Vârsta iubirii*, Heyday Books Publishing House, Bacău, 2023. ISBN: 978-606-9649-06-0.

2 <https://www.heydaybooks.ro/produs/varsta-iubirii-ioana-birjan/>, accessed November 29, 2024.

3 Ziua de Constanța. (2023). Ioana Birjan launched her debut novel at the “Oleg Danovski” National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Constanța <https://www.ziuacconstanta.ro/stiri/actualitate/ioana-birjan-si-a-lansat-romanul-de-debut-la-teatrul-national-de-opera-si-balet-oleg-danovski-constanta-foto-video-813721.html>, accessed November 29, 2024.

4 *Ibidem*.

5 Translated by Andreea-Mihaela Duțu

6 Ioana, Birjan, *Vârsta iubirii*, HeyDey Books, Bacău, 2023, p. 11.

7 Translated by Andreea-Mihaela Duțu

“Iubirea în toate formele ei, asta urma să înfățișeze Erin. Sentimentul reciproc al unui cuplu, iubirea dintre prieteni, precum și cea față de credință și ființa supremă.”⁸ (“Love in all its forms—that was what Erin was about to portray. The mutual feeling of a couple, the love between friends, as well as love for faith and the supreme being.”)⁹

The word “age” suggests that love is not confined to a single period of life; rather, it appears and reappears, evolving and reshaping itself alongside the characters’ experiences. The title also alludes to themes of emotional maturity and self-discovery. Through the lives and relationships of characters like Erin, Agnetha, and Amelia, the novel explores how love—in its diverse forms, whether romantic, familial, or friendly—contributes to identity formation and personal fulfillment.

The story opens with Erin, a renowned writer experiencing a creative block, striving to balance her personal truth with cherished memories from the past:

“Mâna îi rămăsese lângă tasta care ar fi șters toate rândurile. Nu era mulțumită de cum sună introducerea, aşa că încercă din nou și din nou...trecuseră deja câteva luni...”¹⁰ (“Her hand remained next to the key that would have erased all the lines. She was not satisfied with how the introduction sounded, so she tried again and again...a few months had already passed...”)¹¹

Erin becomes a central figure, bridging generations and exploring themes of memory and loyalty to the past. In the chapter “Micuța pianistă” (The Little Pianist), the author recounts the story of Agnetha, a young woman in 1950s New York dedicated to ballet, who faces significant emotional and physical challenges. The narrative progresses through the experiences of Agnetha’s daughter, Amelia, and her friend Sezin, both of whom grapple with understanding their own cultural and personal identities. Their friendship, described as that of “two sisters”, symbolizes deep connections that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries. Additionally, the author incorporates secondary characters like Octavian, Max, Victoria, and Christian, each of whom significantly influences Erin and Amelia’s decisions and growth. The novel’s final chapter, Epilogue, suggests an open and reflective ending, leaving readers space to contemplate the lives and choices of the characters as they reunite to share memories, offering glimpses into their inner worlds: “Aflându-se din nou laolaltă, cu toții începură să povestească amintiri.”¹² (“Being together once again, they all began sharing memories.”)¹³

Similarly, there is an unmistakable resemblance between Bîrjan’s *Vârsta iubirii* and Virginia Woolf’s works, particularly “Mrs. Dalloway”¹⁴ and “To the Lighthouse”¹⁵; this connection is further underscored by Bîrjan’s own acknowledgment during the book launch that Woolf is one of her favorite authors. Their similarities lie in the emphasis on introspection, the use of stream of consciousness, and intertextual elements, such as references to other literary works through character names, allusions to various texts, and stylistic choices. Both authors bring self-discovery to the forefront of their narratives with a focus on emotional depth and the intricacies of the characters’ inner lives. Just as Woolf examines gender roles and societal pressures on women in her era, Bîrjan presents similar conflicts in the context of her female characters’ artistic and social ambitions. Likewise, the careful depiction of settings and cultural atmosphere in “*Vârsta iubirii*” is reminiscent of Woolf’s vivid style, creating a backdrop that enhances the characters’ experiences. This attentive construction of environment functions as more than just a setting; it becomes integral to exploring identity, memory, and belonging.

3. Chapter highlights: a deep dive into the book’s key moments

The novel begins with Erin, a renowned but conflicted writer, wrestling with self-doubt as she tries to capture the essence of her and her loved ones’ stories. Her struggles with inspiration and authenticity set the tone for a narrative that explores the delicate balance between memory and truth. Erin’s relationships—with her fiancé, her friends, and her past—become the foundation for her creative journey.

Micuța pianistă (The Little Pianist): set in the vibrant yet turbulent 1950s New York, this chapter introduces Agnetha, a young ballet dancer chasing her dreams against the backdrop of post-war America.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 486.

⁹ Translated by Andreea-Mihaela Duțu

¹⁰ Ioana, Bîrjan. *Vârsta iubirii*, HeyDey Books, Bacău, 2023, p. 7.

¹¹ Translated by Andreea-Mihaela Duțu

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 485.

¹³ Translated by Andreea-Mihaela Duțu

¹⁴ Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Alma Books, UK, 2012, <https://almabooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Mrs-Dalloway.pdf>, accessed November 29, 2024.

¹⁵ Woolf, Virginia, *To the lighthouse*, Global Grey Ebooks, 2021.

From her triumphant debut in Swan Lake to the heartbreak of an injury that ends her career, Agnetha's story is one of resilience. The chapter weaves together themes of ambition, love, and loss as she navigates motherhood, the tragedy of losing her husband, and her eventual partnership with Christian. Through her daughter Amelia, Agnetha's artistic legacy finds a new life.

Ore de literatură și cărți furate (Literature Lessons and Stolen Books): a tender exploration of friendship, this section follows Erin and her childhood neighbor Octavian. Their shared love of literature and storytelling fosters a bond that propels them toward their respective careers. Erin's role as Octavian's muse and motivator underscores the power of supportive relationships in shaping creative lives.

Dafinul tatălui (Father's Laurel): this chapter shifts to a close-knit Turkish family, focusing on Sezin, the youngest sibling affectionately nicknamed "Laurel." Her playful childhood, marked by familial love and traditions, contrasts with her eventual move to America. Sezin's story sets the stage for her friendship with Amelia and explores themes of identity and belonging.

"Două prietene, două surori" (Two Friends, Two Sisters): when Amelia and Sezin meet as college roommates, their bond transcends cultural boundaries to become a sisterhood. Through shared experiences—from late-night adventures to cultural exchanges—their friendship becomes a testament to the enduring connection between kindred spirits.

After this chapter, the story takes an unexpected turn, full of emotion, sacrifices, and difficult choices. Amelia and Sezin's lives are tested by secrets, impossible loves, and challenges that will redefine their destinies. What do the shadows of the past hide? How will they face the trials that await them? Only time will tell.

4. The book's strengths and weaknesses

The book excels in the psychological complexity of its characters and its attention to historical and cultural detail. Bîrjan skillfully creates the post-war New York setting and captures the cultural dynamics within Sezin's Turkish family, incorporating vivid descriptions and natural dialogue. The author's narrative depth and introspective style lend the novel an intense, reflective atmosphere, while the themes—ranging from sacrifice to self-acceptance—are explored with sensitivity and maturity.

The novel's dense structure may present a challenge for readers, particularly due to the large cast of characters and the intricate, interwoven themes. The extensive historical details and lengthy passages of introspection can also slow the reading pace, giving the impression that some chapters are more descriptive than action-driven. This may deter readers who prefer a faster-paced narrative.

5. Conclusions

Overall, Bîrjan's novel is a profound exploration of the inner lives of its characters and their relationships across generations. Though its complex structure and abundant detail may feel overwhelming, the author successfully maintains the story's coherence, offering an introspective and emotionally resonant reading experience. This novel is a good choice for those who appreciate richly detailed life stories and existential themes, inviting readers to reflect on destiny and human connections.

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