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**Inflicting Violence Upon Language in Modern Romanian
Literature**

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Abstract – ENG.

In the present dissertation, we focused on certain condensed, clearly outlined and targeted occurrences within the larger area of modern literature, rather than giving into the temptation of casting a larger than life net into the open waters, in the hopes of catching... everything. Thus, we applied our efforts into researching the evolution, trajectory, forms, purposes and effects of the violence of language and of the acts of inflicting violence upon language, while limiting our approach to the Romanian literary world of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The general premise is that the act of inflicting violence upon language leads to the shifts, changes, alterations or even mutations that either create the openings from which entirely original productions emerge, or reflect certain literary goals, mentalities and abilities of theoretical manifestation. Within the existing bibliography on the matter, the literary works approached in the present thesis have not been overlooked or disregarded *per se*, but they have not been part of truly in-depth individual analyses either.

The present approach will build upon the pillars given by the (important) distinctions between violence and the act of inflicting violence, language and tongue, given that each notion bears its own characteristics, functions, purposes and manifestations. The purposes for inflicting violence upon language itself changed over time. Towards the end of the 19th century, it was strongly linked and fuelled by the societal norms of conduct, of what constituted civilised behaviour and decency, often deemed to be characteristics of the elite, as opposed to the linguistic conduct of the lower classes. Therefore, the literary manifestations of linguistic violence, in the

sense of strong deviations, were initially kept secret, tightly bound inside closed circles, and they were meant solely for the delight of those personally invited – the members of the *Junimea* literary society. The annual Banquet was a feast during which the literary compositions created by the members, often specifically for the event itself, were read aloud. The primary criterion was that they had to be *spicy*. As a matter of fact, the secret has been well-kept to the present day, given the fact that most of the respective texts continue to be inaccessible to us – they have not been reproduced, but merely mentioned and described in very few words in several memoirs that recount the banquets. However, what we do know is that the texts have been linked (by the *Junimea* members themselves) to adjectives such as *spicy*, *bawdy*, *corrosive*, even *obscene* or *pornographic*. The purpose, in this case, revolved around the idea of creating an atmosphere of joy and laughter. The societal norms are subjected to violence – secretly. Language is therefore divided into two categories: what can be written and what can only be read aloud. The act of inflicting violence upon language, at this stage and at this point in history, occurs at the level of the chosen vocabulary. Forbidden words, used freely, but orally, that become part of a large, annual, exclusivist literary mischief that causes joy.

As the century turns, the idea of inflicting violence upon language is no longer limited to the notion of vulgarity itself. It becomes part of a boiling sense of anger (thus severed from the somewhat deliciously guilty delight it had formerly caused) and can no longer be kept contained. It bursts open the doors of secrecy and it barrels towards an unsuspecting society, brimming with rage. The act of inflicting violence upon language now comes a lot closer to the violence of language itself – it becomes a weapon wielded by those revolted by the state of society, by the state of literature, by the state of the literary practices and by the abhorrent state of public taste, in general. Thus, the first through the gates thus opened are the pamphlet writers – the wielders of vulgarity are now out, all guns blazing, and the targets are clear. Language is now locked, loaded and used vulgarly, but with the artistry and mastery that truly sets pamphlets in motion.

One step further, the concept of violence is pushed to the point of open, all-out scandal-seeking. The Romanian Avant-garde comes into play, beginning with the manifests and ending with the most scandalous magazines of the 1930s, edited by writers who were, at the time, teenagers, and who used the most provoking language the young male mind could produce. The purpose was, indeed, to cause outrage, but the contents of the magazines themselves do suggest the validity of a series of possible theoretical takes on the matter: from societal norms, to vulgarity

as a construct, to language used to create sparks meant to either light up the room or to blow it to bits, to language that creates a carnival inside a whirlwind.

So far, the act of inflicting violence upon language takes place at the lexical level. Things are clear, given the fact that we can rather easily identify both the acts of violence, the purposes and the effects. The overall image of language from this viewpoint becomes somewhat murkier when language is subjected to violence on levels that surpass the mere lexical one. By this, we mean that violence infiltrates language on the levels of its syntax and semantics: through language invention.

The practice of language invention was part of the Romanian Avant-garde dream, given that it was one means of achieving the all-too-desired “liberation of human expression from all of its forms”. However, the actual manifestations of language invention within the works of the Romanian Avant-garde are rather limited, which is why we chose to approach them as occurrences within a larger discussion. Thus, depending on the purposes of their creation, fictional languages have sought to achieve certain political, aesthetic or playful purposes. The set of criteria by which we can approach such a language and determine whether or not it is also a tongue can be found in the rather large bibliography on this matter – whether or not it has a name, a morpho-syntactic structure, among other aspects. Fictional languages, however, can be divided into two sets of categories that are, we believe, somewhat clearer: translatable-untranslatable and educable-non-educable. In other words, whether their purpose is to hide or to reveal the meaning and whether or not they can be learned and used in daily life.

The untranslatable and non-educable languages are the ones created by the Avant-gardes. Even so, upon an extremely close inspection, they are by no means simply playful, merely experimental, nothing more than games, pranks, farces or musical constructions. If we dive below the surface, the structures that hold them up, or hold them in place, have rather surprising theoretical pillars – from language *ruptures* that walk the tightrope between folklore and old Romanian, to the internal principle of a form of *pig latin* drowning in vowels, to the barest skeleton of Romanian grammar, to which new phonetic utterances are stuck and made to fit, to the final form in which conventional language is strangled to point of obliteration, under the crushing weight of the unconventional, using its final moments to transmit a condensed message, while desperately gasping for air. In all cases, language is subjected to violence due to the fact that their norms are broken apart, so as to construct a new code in each such occurrence. The translation of

a conventional language into a fictional language is the first step in its subjection to violence, followed by the translation of the fictional language back into a conventional language, as a re-subjection to violence, or, as is one of the cases discussed in the present dissertation, the translation of a fictional language into another fictional language, which almost excludes the reader from the linguistic conversation entirely.

The translatable and educable fictional languages are placed somewhat in contrast. The aesthetic purposes from the first instances are almost absent, but they are brought into the discussion in order to showcase the means by which the non-existent can go from nonconventional to trans-national. Given that translation into such a fictional language is indeed possible, we shall bring forth one such case, in which the works of Urmuz have indeed been translated into Esperanto. The question that arises is whether or not, in this case, the Avant-garde dream of a-nationalism was fulfilled and, more importantly, whether or not the fictional language equivalent is can truly be considered to be a translation, or an altogether different text, that can be placed in its vicinity.

In the end, the visual occurrence under scrutiny is the magazine *75HP*, which opens two possible approaches. It contains, on the one hand, texts that are more visual, in their graphic construction, but seem to be written in a conventional language, following the conventional rules of grammar, but that are only slightly strange in their semantic sequences. On the other hand, it contains works that are almost entirely visual compositions. The act of inflicting violence takes place twice: by violating the image through the insertion of text and by violating the text by pouring it into a visual mould.

The act of inflicting violence upon language, within the sphere of the Romanian modern literature, expanded and became increasingly more artistically productive. It changed and shifted over time. It went from the secretly naughty, delightful mischief of telling (not writing) bawdy pieces of literature, to the artistry of bending language into shapes that publicly insult or appal. The steps that followed pushed it towards strong-arming aesthetics by choosing and employing outrageous vocabulary that created the division between *pure*, meaning fake, fraudulent, outright stupid, and *authentic*, but vulgar. The epitome, however, is the creation of languages and the creation of tongues, as a matter of fact, by inflicting the most productive form of violence on the existing linguistic conventions.