



## **‘The Arbitrary Distribution of Emphasis’ (Conclusions)**

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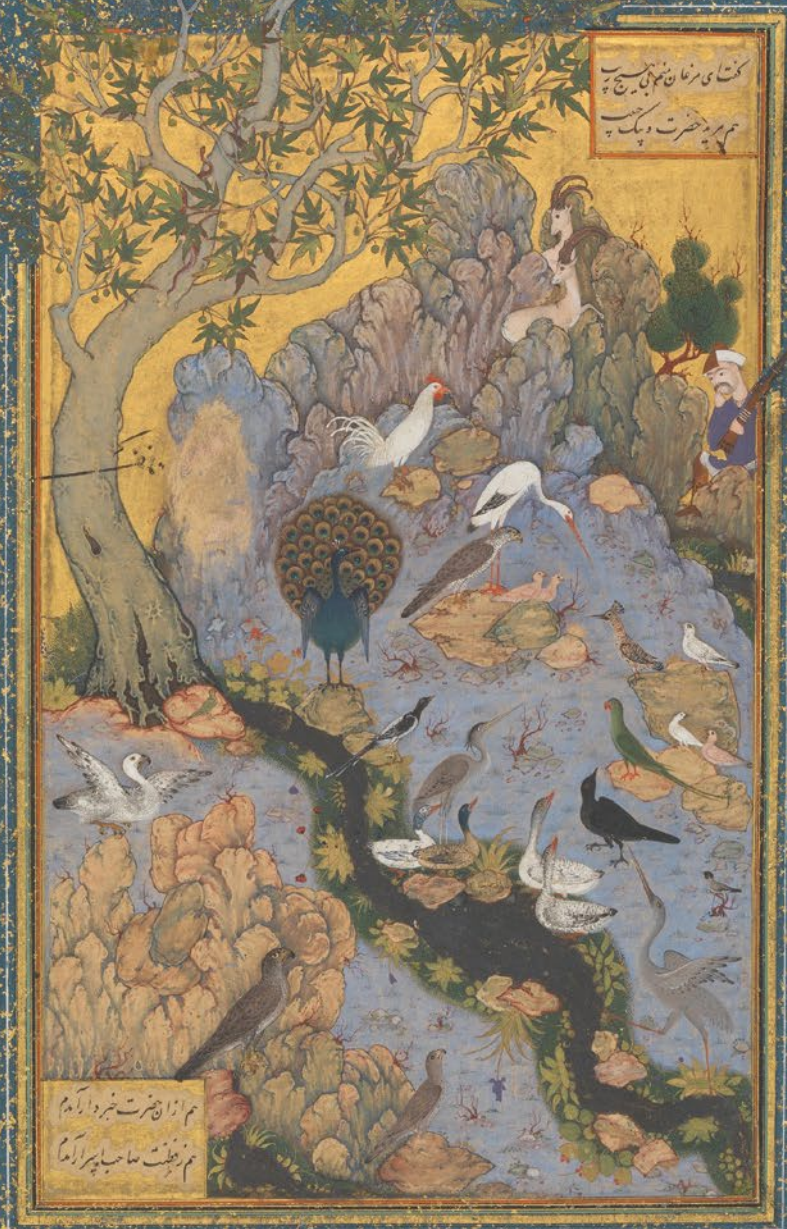
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# ‘The Arbitrary Distribution of Emphasis’ (Conclusions)

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The benevolence of the Simurgh—the mythical bird of Persian literature—and its acolytes was the *sine qua non* condition of the current experiment. It concerns shape-shifting texts, their musical interpretations, and the religious symbolism behind them. In the experiment, a scholar studying the grey area at the crossroads of literature and art in medieval culture (Vladimir Agrigoroaei) proposed an interpretation of a modern work from another grey area, situated at the crossroads of music and poetry (as well as art and cinema)—a double LP of a Romanian Pop Rock band, pressed in 1976, and whose lyrics were rewritten and published as a volume of poetry later that year. Peers with different and opinions were invited to evaluate the hypothesis: a specialist in medieval literature (Brîndușa Grigoriu); one studying the links between literature and art in the early modern period (Cristina Bogdan); historians of cultural history interested in the evolution of religious art (Ana Dumitran) or book production (Ovidiu Olar); a historian and archaeologist who has already published studies concerning the same topic (Florin Curta); a historian of cinema (Corneliu Dragomirescu); and an opera critic (Alexandru Pătrașcu). The resulting polyphonic evaluation replicated a situation often encountered in academic research, whereby negative reviews tend to present an alternative working hypothesis, while positive ones build upon the structure of the evaluated research, responding to its stimuli in the manner of plant tropism. Those who accepted the original hypothesis embellished and inflated it to the point when it began living a life of its own, independent from the original object of research. However, when the hypothesis and its amendments were put to the test, they immediately revealed their flaws. The poet and his ‘cultural acolytes’ confronted us with a sincere picture of where the hypothesis was wrong and where it was right.

The main problem was (and is) tropism. The adequacy of any given working hypothesis resides in the manner in which it accumulates meanings in a single-threaded arrangement, organizing the organic chaos of real life into a scientific exposé. The process is similar to the *Matthew Effect* (of *Accumulated Advantage*), according to which social groups (and researchers in particular; see also *Stigler’s Law of Eponymy*) enforce a preferential attachment process. A famous person is given credit for the activities of others or the ideas presented by more famous people take precedence upon those presented by less famous ones, even though those ideas are similar (or the one and the same). In other words, ‘the rich get richer and the poor get poorer’—to quote Percy Bysshe Shelley’s aphorism based on the parable of talents from the Gospel of Matthew (25:29).

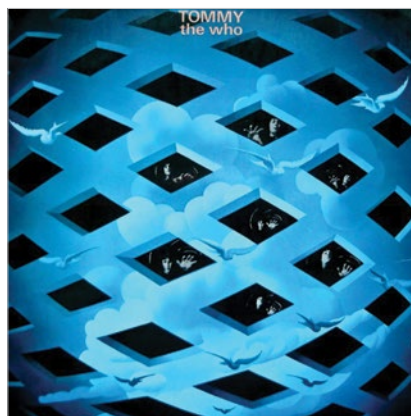
It is hardly surprising that the initial working hypothesis concerning the creation of the double LP *Cantafabule* was based on a ‘progression of reputations’ in 1976:

Andrei Ujică, too young at the time to be given credit for the lyrics, was nevertheless given credit for the idea of a concept album, in view of his connections with the Pop Rock band and his familiarity with the musical fashions of the time. Nevertheless, this preferential treatment was also determined by the fact that he became famous later on and his reputation begged for his inclusion in the working hypothesis. In a similar manner, Șerban Foarță was given credit for the lyrics because of the many volumes of verse that he published after 1976. His full authorship of those lyrics was never questioned, but he was not given credit for the symbolic key of interpretation itself, as he was considered to be (again) too young, since he had not yet published a volume of verse at that time. The *Matthew Effect* dictated the attribution of that symbolic key of interpretation to the writer and priest Mihail Avramescu, since he was the most famous person that the author of the hypothesis could find at the top of the cultural pyramid of 1974-1976. This ensured the success of the hypothesis in the eyes of peer academics (and in the eyes of the author as well), but also led to a series of exaggerations, one more inflated than the other. Some of them replicated the average exaggeration of many studies from the field of medieval literature.

Here is an example of this type of tropism. For one reviewer, the meaning of the word ‘chantefable’ depended on its precise source, similar to the manner in which central concepts are dealt with in the history of medieval literature. Knowing that the Central University Library of Timișoara had only an adaptation (for the general public) of the story of Aucassin et Nicolette, dating back to 1966, the reviewer noted the presence of three editions at the Central University Library of Iași, dating back to 1903, 1925, and 1973. This led to an amendment to the original working hypothesis. In the new interpretation, it was argued that the lyricists might have borrowed it from Iași. The amendment replicated part of the original hypothesis, which stated that another book—containing the text of Philippe de Thaon—could have been borrowed from Cluj. The reviewer had good reason to offer this interpretation. The chief argument of the amendment was that the oldest edition in the collections of the Central University Library in Iași, a volume by Hermann Suchier (fifth edition, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1903), could have stirred the enthusiasm of Romanian academia

◀ Illustration for the mystical poem *Mantiq-ut-Tayr* (‘Language of the Birds’) by the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Persian writer Farid ud-Din Attar. The birds, symbolizing the souls, gather to search for the Simorgh. Painting by Habib-Allāh of Sava, c.1590-1610. One of the four folios of the poem, now kept in the collections of The MET, in New York, f. 11r. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold, and silver on paper. Leaf: 33 × 20.8 cm.

Courtesy of the MET Open Access policy.



▲ Jon Anderson: *Olias Of Sunhillow* (Atlantic – K50261, LP, stereo, 1976).

The Who: *Tommy* (Track Record – 613 013/4, 2 x LP, stereo, 1969).

Déry Tibor, Presser Gábor, Adamis Anna: 'Képzelt Riport Egy Amerikai Pop-Fesztiválról' Összes Dalai (Qualiton – SLPX 16579, LP, stereo, 1973).

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.

on account of the dedication from the first pages of the opus. That dedication had been written by the editor himself in honour of Alexandru Philippide, a famous professor at the University of Iași, as a testimony of mutual friendship ([...] *professeur à l'Université d'Iassy, en témoignage de fraternelle amitié*). The hypothesis was put to the test of Andrei Ujică, whose busy schedule did not allow for a proper discussion, but who kindly pointed out orally that both he and Șerban Foarță were completely unaware of the existence of such books. In the current interview, Șerban Foarță actually explains that he had never read the story of Aucassin et Nicolette and the origin of the word 'chantefable' is to be found in Robert Desnos' *Chantefables et chantefleurs*.

Much in the same manner, the source of the unicorn song was grossly misidentified in the working hypothesis. In an informal discussion, Andrei Ujică explained that Șerban Foarță had a pocket-size anthology of French medieval poetry in his own private library and that there was no need for them to travel to Cluj or elsewhere in order to copy the medieval French text of Philippe de Thaan. The mundane nature of these explanations goes to show that scholars—in spite of their overconfidence and prowess—are unable to weigh down and measure the immense complexity of the individual's history. No scientific method is able to take that into account.

Another misleading interpretation, clearly influenced by current fashions in academia, is the overwhelming use and abuse of ideology and politics in the construction of scholarly analyses. When Șerban Foarță was asked about the possible implications of the lyrics in that particular direction, he rejected all interpretations of that sort and insisted that there was no political subtext in *Cantafabule*. At one point, he even provided the most unexpected explanation, of a private nature: the Aromanian language of one of the songs was not chosen in order to enforce a historicist reading, but to pay tribute to a grandfather figure, Aromanian by birth, who played an important role in the poet's formative years. This is disappointing from an ideologically-oriented point of view, but the information is priceless from the standpoint of individual history, as it testifies to the overwhelming importance of the personal, private aspect of the literary act.

What literary and text historians usually miss in their

study of the old sources is the private reference. It remains opaque and cannot be decrypted. Decryption leads to distortion, thus leading the analysis astray. From this point of view, one is left to wonder (and ponder) about the onset of academic pareidolia. *Mutatis mutandis*, some of the most elaborate historical, political, or ideological interpretations of the literary works of yore could be no different from Charles Manson's interpretation of The Beatles' *White Album* in an apocalyptic sense. Both types of interpretation have one aspect in common: a lack of knowledge of the cultural context and/or cultural meaning of the work. When a single interpretation key is enforced, the isolated private references of authors pile up and mechanically enforce the same interpretation, based on textual pareidolia, since the precise meaning of private references is impossible to identify. This applies to all types of interpretations, including semantic macro-structural ones.

During the evaluation process, one of the additional ideas which reinforced the working hypothesis took into account the possibility that the desire for a concept-album may have been determined by the connections of Phoenix with other Pop Rock bands or persons from their entourage. Since Phoenix had jammed with the Hungarian band Locomotiv GT at the festival of Sopot in 1973, Locomotiv GT's concept album, the 'Imaginary Report...' (*Képzelt riport egy amerikai popfesztiválról*, Qualiton, 1973—another work with complex literary reverberations), could be one of those influences. Since the Romanian band Sphinx, rivals of Phoenix, from Bucharest, were also trying to create a concept album, later pressed as *Zalmoxe* (Electrecord, 1978), being influenced by Jon Anderson's LP *Olias of Sunhillow* (Atlantic Records, 1976), there could be some other obscure models to take into account. Last but not least, Cornel Chiriac and his show at Radio Free Europe could also play a significant role in the shaping of an idea. However, Andrei Ujică let us know that he and the members of the band were completely unaware of such influences in 1974-1975 and that the idea of a concept album was based on well-known concept albums of the time, such as The Who's double LP *Tommy* (Track Record / Polydor, 1969). This suggests, on the one hand, that research cannot assess the importance assigned by an individual creator to his models. On the other hand, the working hypothesis was based on a shaky chronology, as it did not take into account the delay in the assimilation of cultural tendencies. Retrospectively, it is hardly surprising that more famous models were favoured (see the same *Matthew Effect*, acting on a different level), regardless of the existence of alternative sources of inspiration. In other words, the creative process was not determined by immediate influences. Those influences had to be assimilated first, and the assimilation depended on the individual and his / her milieu.

The idea of a totalizing concept-album was born out of the band's previous experiences, not from foreign influences. In an email from 28 March 2021, Iosef Kappl explained to us that the 'Chantefables' happened as a continuation of a concept-album idea that they already had in previous years (the now lost 'Master Manole' show and planned LP), but the members of the band could not get around to it, and for a long time they had been left wondering as to how to put it into practice:

The idea of the 'Chantefable' comes from that medieval French bestiary. After the two successful LPs—'Those Who Gave Us Names' and 'Flute Bud', we set out to create an ample musical work, motivated as we were by the pressing of such ample works in the international music scene, especially the Anglo-American one. The first idea in this sense was to create the Rock Opera 'Master Manole', on the libretto of our lyricist Victor Cârnu. This libretto was actually a play. Victor turned it into an opera libretto. But after the libretto fell prey to communist censorship and its only copy was kept by the censors, we abandoned the idea of the Rock Opera 'Master Manole', which was boiled down to only one piece of music with the same title, using the well-known text of Vasile Alecsandri's collections of popular ballads. Although our plan with the 'Master Manole' opera had failed, we still did not abandon the idea of creating a more ample musical work based on a concept. This is how the idea of the 'Chantefable' appeared. Andrei Ujică submitted it to us.

*Ideea Cantafabulei vine de la acel bestiar francez medieval. După cele două discuri de succes, Cei ce ne-au dat nume și Mugur de fluier, ne-am propus să creăm o lucrare muzicală mai amplă, motivați fiind de apariția unor astfel de lucrări pe scena muzicală internațională, mai ales cea anglo-americană. Prima idee în acest sens a fost realizarea operei Rock Meșterul Manole, pe libretul textierului nostru Victor Cârnu. Libretul acesta a fost de fapt o piesă de teatru, pe care Victor a transformat-o în libret de operă. Însă după ce libretul căzupe pradă cenzurii comuniste și unicul exemplar a fost reținut de cenzori, am abandonat ideea operei Rock Meșterul Manole, aceasta reducându-se doar la o singură piesă muzicală cu același titlu, pe textul cunoscut din culegerile de balade populare ale lui Vasile Alecsandri. Deși planul nostru cu opera Meșterul Manole eșuase, totuși n-am abandonat ideea creării unei lucrări muzicale mai ample cu concept. Astfel a apărut ideea Cantafabulei, pe care ne-a propus-o Andrei Ujică.*

It is therefore safe to assume that the concept created by Andrei Ujică and Șerban Foartă simply answered the need for a concept album, a need that the band had probably felt many times before. This is manifest in the subtitle of the second Phoenix LP—*Introducere la un concert despre muzica veche la români* ('Introduction to a concert about early music in the Romanian lands'). That theoretical subtitle, known from the liner notes of the back cover (signed by the music critic Octavian Ursulescu) was Andrei Ujică's idea, a sort of compromise solution to be used until they would get closer to a more coherent concept album. As a result, the genesis of the 'Chantefables' double LP should be placed at the crossroads of the band's and the lyricists' careers, in a sort of no-man's-land where ideas flowed and changed shape from one day to the next.

According to Andrei Ujică, the two lyricists first had the idea of summoning beasts and started identifying them only later. The choice of Dimitrie Cantemir 'Hieroglyphic history' could have been the starting point, well before the idea to use an early 12<sup>th</sup>-century Old French poem. The

members of the band were nonetheless unaware of these literary beginnings, as they were only presented with the idea when it had matured enough and the medieval French bestiary of Philippe de Thaon struck them as a first impression. Just as Iosef Kappl in his letter, Nicolae Covaci confirms it in his book (Covaci 1994, p. 294-295). Moreover, the members of the band were unaware of the religious message of their double LP as a whole. They were certainly aware of the Christological implications of the story of the bird Phoenix, but they did not pay much attention to the rest, as spirituality did not influence most of their everyday lives—at least according to Costin Petrescu, whose religious interest was on the rise in 1974-1975.

This also suggests that the concept-album had quite different meanings for everyone involved in its creation. Andrei Ujică focused his attention on the 'diamesic' cultural qualities of the LP (that is, a variation across the medium of communication). Șerban Foartă saw it as pure poetry and disguised both himself and Andrei Ujică as anonymous, almost medieval personae, hidden behind a theory of 'canonical' poetry in the volume that they jointly published in 1976. The members of the band perceived it as a symbol that they were willing to disseminate across the country without understanding its true meaning, etc. These differences created a plethora of meanings for the work as a whole. They are obvious when we confront Nicolae Covaci's ideas, published in his first autobiographical book, and those presented in the interview that Șerban Foartă and Andrei Ujică gave to the literary student magazine in 1976. But they are also visible within the immediate private stories of the band and its entourage. For instance, speaking of the beginning of the *Cantafabule* idea, some people remember different things.

In the same email from 28 March 2021, when asked about the possibility that the choice of animals for the *Cantafabule* LP could be a result of the use of animal nicknames during the band's tours (as suggested in the autobiographical text of Elisabeth Ochsenfeld), Iosef Kappl gave an interesting point of view, being well aware of the manner in which memory reshapes history:

Now, of course all of us discover something personal in everything that happened back then in the gang, but which was not necessarily filtered through the [entire] Phoenix community, remaining a personal memory, as is the case of the episode told by Mrs. Ochsenfeld.

*Acum, sigur că fiecare dintre noi descoperă câte ceva personal din toate cele câte se întâmplau atunci în gașcă, dar care nu a fost neapărat trecut prin filtrul comunității Phoenix, rămânând o amintire personală, așa cum e cazul episodului povestit de doamna Ochsenfeld.*

The case is not singular. According to Ujică, his future wife Marietta Theodorescu (or Poenaru) was the reason why a Latin poem was included in the volume of poetry published in 1976. She was a Latin scholar and Ujică remembered that poem as an homage to her. This does not necessarily contradict Foartă's assertion that he had the idea to write the same Latin poem based on Baudelaire. It just goes to show that the one and the same cultural act has very different meanings, each of them independent from the other, in the eyes of each person involved one way or the other in the creative process. And that none of these meanings is preferable to the other, as they are all valid at the same time. The problem with an academic interpretation is that it is compelled—for the sake of its cogency—to sacrifice one meaning in favour of the other, to amputate reality and project it back as a coherent interpretation.

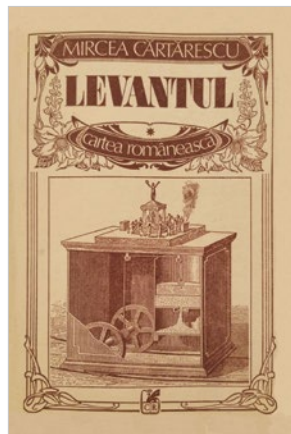


In the case of *Cantafabule*, this was partly determined by the manner in which Șerban Foarță continued to re-write (and re-publish, twice) the 'Texts for Phoenix'. The verses gradually changed form and meaning. The pro-'canonical' introductory text was eliminated. The whole idea of medieval-like anonymity was eliminated as well. And the poet's point of view became the most important aspect, obscuring all the other ones. As a consequence, our research fell prey to a fascination for the philological reconstruction of an original text. This became all the more interesting as Foarță's rewritings mirrored famous situations from medieval philology, such as Joseph Bédier's hundred-year-old study about the impossibility of making a stemmatic edition of the *Lai de l'Ombre* (1928). But this also led to confusions of all types and manners. Both the author of the hypothesis and several peer reviewers were fascinated by the presence of models, be they the fatrasies of medieval French literature or Old Romanian texts from the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, yet none of those models were known to the poet at the time he wrote the lyrics. Foarță came to know some of them later (and to include them in his more recent rewritings of the 'Texts for Phoenix'). However, he found them simply by accident, because they fit the *Cantafabule* concept, not the other way round. Stylistics is hardly a tool to base one's research. It is impossible to disentangle the layers of a given text in the absence of dated versions pointing to its precise evolution. Since research cannot accurately comprehend the cultural evolution of a given individual, Șerban Foarță's subsequent notoriety as a learned poet led us astray, into believing that his learnedness was more or less the same in 1974-1976. It made us wonder about the chronology of the different versions of the 'Siren' song, perhaps in connection with Old French fatrasies, even though the most evident interpretation choice was to consider that the *Cantafabule* version was the first one ever made. Iosef Kappi confirmed it in the same private email:

For instance, the 'Siren' is not an adaptation of an original text, but was created by the tandem Foarță-Ujićă for *Cantafabule*, in the context of that description of mythical beings; it is a creation disconnected from that original text published under the title 'Serenade'. The symmetrical shape and the rhythm of the lyrics prove that this text was created to be sung. We owe this to Andrei Ujićă, who helped adapt Șerban Foarță's lyrics to music. However, the 'Siren' is an exception, in the sense that it was created by the two lettered men before there was a certain composition. I composed the music on an already existing text.

*Spre exemplu, 'Sirena' nu e o adaptare a unui text original, ci a fost creat de tandemul Foarță-Ujićă pentru Cantafabule, în contextul descrierii ființelor mitice; este o creație detașată de acel text original publicat cu titlul de 'Serenadă'. Forma simetrică și ritmul versurilor dovedește faptul că acest text a fost creat pentru a fi cântat. Acest lucru îl datorăm lui Andrei Ujićă, care s-a ocupat de adaptarea textelor lui Șerban Foarță pe muzică. Totuși 'Sirena' constituie o excepție, în sensul că a fost creată de cei doi literați înainte de a fi existat o compoziție anume. Muzica am compus-o pe textul care exista deja.*

Interpretative tropism often tends to visualize an author as an immobile persona, whose language, ideas, or style do not vary (nor improve) across time. Ideally, if Șerban Foarță were a medieval author, such as Marie de France or Philippe de Thaon, scholars would attribute to him many other works (and ideas). Let us not forget that scholars attributed several such anonymous works to the poetess Marie de France—*La vie Seinte Audree* ('The



◀ First edition of the epic poem of Mircea Cărtărescu, *Levantul*, Bucharest, Cartea românească, 1990. The twelve cantos of the poem tell the mock story of a journey from the Levant to Bucharest undertaken by a young revolutionary. With the help of various friends (a pirate, an inventor, a Frenchman, etc.), he removes the tyrant ruler of his native Wallachia.

Source: Wikimedia Commons.

life of Saint Audrey', a 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century hagiographical text in verse)—or to Philippe de Thaon—*Le livre de Sibille* ('The Book of the Sibyl', based on a late dating in of the manuscripts of the 'Bestiary'). These attributions were based on the neo-Lachmannian method defined as *usus scribendi*, that is, on the identification of a set of linguistic, stylistic, and rhetorical features that can be said to characterise the way of writing of a specific author or scribe. In a way, this is the method that we ourselves used in the evaluation of the chronology of Șerban Foarță's verses about the Siren. And we were wrong.

What Foarță and Ujićă wished to convey through *Cantafabule* and the volume of verses entitled 'Texts for Phoenix' was the idea of a 'canonical' poetry and literary 'canon'—a poetry that did not need any authors, since it could exist on its own. Andrei Ujićă explained it in the interview for the literary student magazine in 1976, when he assured the readers that the poems were based on a plurality of meanings and that none of those meanings could take precedence over another. This goes against the (often neo-Lachmannian) philological quest for an author and places the philologist's prowess on the same level as a basic reader's inquisitiveness. As Șerban Foarță pointed out, the reader is entitled to her / his own interpretation, by virtue of this canonical nature of poetry (or literature in general). As a result, her / his private reading begins a life of its own. This is not different from the philological argument, which creates an interpretation based on the opinion of a scholar (who is also a reader) and ultimately creates a text that is always different from the original one(s). In spirit as well as in letter.

The main problem of interpretative tropism is that it always misses the most important aspects of literary works. In the case of the 1976 LP, the idea behind the 'Chantefables' was to write a different text for each animal, in a different style and type of language, belonging to a specific author, written in his idiomatic vocabulary. Unfortunately, this was not possible in the short time-frame that the lyricists had at their disposal before the band had to record the double LP. The song entitled 'Zoo-machy' had to create a stylistic and lexical clash, mimicking the clash of the animals by confronting different literary periods and different authors in a Babylonian display of poetry. All that remains from that initial project is 'Halcyon's Mirror' (*Oglinda Alcyonului*), the prose-poem published by Andrei Ujićă a year later in the literary magazine *Echinoc*. The author considers it to be imperfect, but it represents a testimony of the initial concept, as the prose-poem uses words extracted from a text by Ion Heliade Rădulescu (1802-1872). This underlying notion was probably manifest to contemporary writers, such as the poet Mircea Cărtărescu, whose mock epic poem *Levantul* ('The Levant', 1990) retraces the history

of Romanian literature using the vocabulary and style of different authors. At a certain point in his story, Cărtărescu includes a quotation from *Cantafabule*, thus paying tribute to one of his many models. It is difficult to determine whether Cărtărescu was aware of the initial intention of Foarță and Ujică, if he had read through the lines of the 1976 *Cantafabule* LP or if he simply came up with such an idea on his own, in the 80's, when he wrote his post-modern epic poem. Another interview would need to be done in order to clarify this aspect. Alas, there was no time for this.

The ultimate message of the 'Chantefables' and 'Texts for Phoenix', both pressed (or released) in 1976, was of a literary nature, because the two lyricists were writers first and foremost. Literature (not religion) was their ultimate goal. The spiritual undertones of those lyrics and verses came from their close relationship with the spirituality of old texts, from a certain communion of spirit that went against Bakhtin's 1937 essay 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', where chronotopes are set in time. Perhaps the chronotopes are simply human beings, each one of us collecting from different authors what we need in order to build a logosphere of our own.

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In the film 'Videograms of a Revolution' (*Videogramme einer Revolution*, 1992), a collation based on material from over 125 hours of amateur footage, news footage, and excerpts from the state Romanian television, Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică disentangle individual storylines from the mass historical narrative of the December 1989 Romanian Revolution. Farocki and Ujică suggest that history could be interpreted from many perspectives, often linked to the individual. In his 2010 feature-length film 'The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu' (*Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu*), a three-hour-long collage of material from the National Archives of Romania, presenting the point of view of the dictator, Andrei Ujică plays once more with a complex intertwining of history and memory. In a way, the first part of our conclusion was written in this particular key, taking into account a similar idea. The second part must nonetheless show the other side of the coin.

We can draw a line between what was wrong in the hypothesis and what is still open to debate. Leaving aside the discussion concerning collective memory and notions such as inhibition, re-exposure effects, social contagion

errors, retrieval disruption, or collective false memories, there is something profoundly dissimilar that separates the individual or collective memory from history: their aim. And even though the current experiment showed how biased academic methods can be, there are equally as many biases in memory.

History strives to be objective, while the ultimate point of memory is to be sincere, but sincere does not automatically mean objective. As the years have passed, the protagonists of the story have already recollected their 1974-1976 memories many times, sometimes in a row. They have reflected on the genesis of *Cantafabule* in connection with their careers, not least of all because the Phoenix double LP acquired cult status and generated tremendous interest in Romanian society. For some protagonists, *Cantafabule* represented a new beginning in their own lives; for others, it was a page that had turned. Thus, they tried to make sense of the original context and make representations of it for themselves and for others. At the time of the creation of the songs, none fully realized what they were part of. Who could have predicted such an outcome? But the passage of time made them understand the role they played in the creation, leading in turn to a revaluation of their own lives. The retellings were made in different contexts, spread over entire decades, therefore the stories were irreversibly staged, both by their individual protagonists and by all of them as a group. Indiscreet questions triggered defence mechanisms, which altered the stories. Yet in spite of all these aspects—inevitable, after all, there is no better or more effective way to test a hypothesis than to confront the exegetes and creators of the work itself, provided that their own biases are identified, drawing a line between what they can remember and what they cannot.

Even though literature was the ultimate goal in *Cantafabule*, a literary text is not only an aesthetic act. Its no-

▼ DVD cover (English version) of the Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică film *Videogramme einer Revolution* (1992).

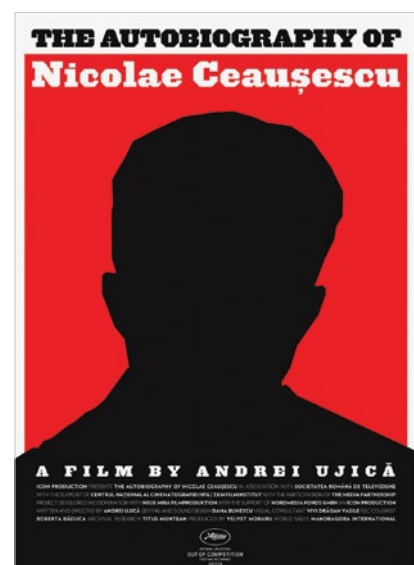
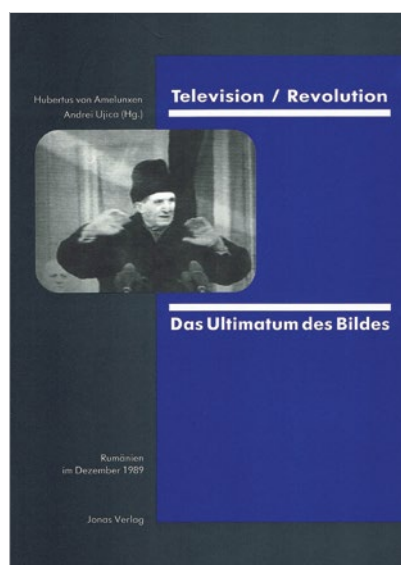
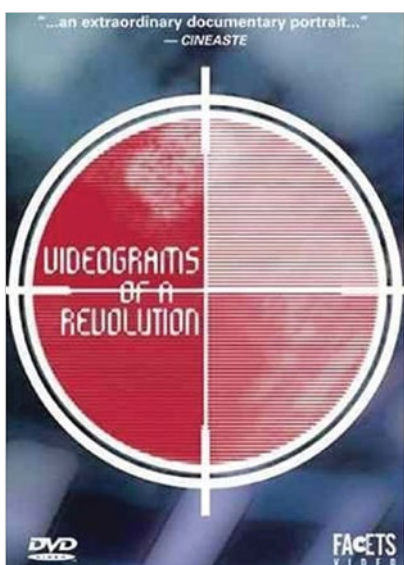
Source: <https://www.amazon.com/>.

Cover of the book *Television-Revolution: Das Ultimatum des Bildes. Rumänien im Dezember 1989*, dir. Hubertus von Amelnunxen and Andrei Ujică, Marburg, Jonas Verlag, 1990.

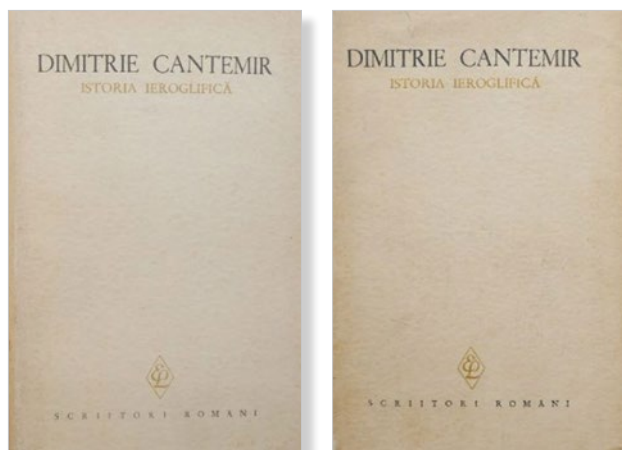
Source: <https://www.abebooks.com/>.

Poster for the Andrei Ujică film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (2010).

Source: <https://www.imdb.com/>.







- ▲ The two volumes of the first critical edition of the text of the 'Hieroglyphic History': Dimitrie Cantemir: *Istoria ieroglifică*. edition and introductory study by P.P. Panaitescu, I. Verdeș, 2 vols., Bucharest, Editura pentru literatură, 1965.

Source: <https://casaliterelor.ro/>.

tional content cannot be analysed based on purely formal qualities. As a consequence, despite the reiterated rebuttal (by both lyricists) of the following idea, it is still tempting to link the *Cantafabule* project to prince Cantemir's 'Hieroglyphic History'. And this was done, heatedly and repeatedly, because it seemed obvious. In 1965, the remarkable *roman-à-clef* was (finally) properly edited. In 1973, the Romanian Communist Party decided that Cantemir, who had been granted a prominent place in the Communist pantheon, be celebrated on a national scale. The celebrations included not only a second, 'academic' edition of the 'Hieroglyphic History' (which remained largely unknown outside a narrow scholarly circle, as all academic editions do) but also mass editions (see for instance the volume of Doina Curticăpeanu), a plethora of conferences, an overabundance of articles and studies, a play, a radio play, etc. Our protagonists' memories do not and cannot preserve the echoes of those events, but at that time, in 1974-1976, Cantemir's masterpiece was a reference difficult to ignore, especially because it invited an alchemic interpretation. Little does it matter if Foarță and Ujică ignored it—a hardly plausible alternative, but acceptable as a possibility. The other protagonists were certainly under this influence. And the influence continued to grow. Dan Chișu created the zoomorphic costumes for the members of the band to wear during their shows. Who is to say that those costumes

had nothing to do with the costumes worn by the actors of the 1973 play? And who is to say that a play staged at the Puppet Theatre of Timișoara in 1979-1980—based on *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle—had nothing to do with *Cantafabule* or Dan Chișu's costumes? This adaptation was made by Andrei Ujică, Șerban Foarță signed the prologue, Victor Cărcu (former lyricist for Phoenix) directed it, and Mircea Baniciu (former member of Phoenix) composed the music for the play. Another unicorn, but in a different context. Or was it the same transmuted unicorn?

To quote Cantemir, an alchemist knows how to transform matter. He is actually 'the one who strives to make gold out of copper; the one who knows how to transmute the forms of matter' (*Cela ce silește a face din aramă aur; cela ce știe a preface formele materiei*). After all, a writer or a poet does exactly the same. It is hardly surprising that the intellectual (and most of all literary) circles of the Romanian elite were addicted to this type of esoteric enjoyments in the 1970s. By that time, a scholar had even claimed that there had been a Romanian 'esoteric generation' in the interwar period (Șerbu 1973, p. 205), but this could be just the systematizing glaze of academia projecting coherence upon works where there was little coherence or none. Whatever the case may be, the so-called 'esoteric generation' barely survived the rise of Communism. Several members fled the country (Mircea Eliade), some died in prison, while others 'retreated from the world': they wrote but did not publish (Mihail Avramescu), at least until the very end of the Ceaușescu era (Vasile Lovinescu—who had little in common with Avramescu), and their works were presented orally within small circles of initiates. During the communist 'iron' times, such charismatic characters, remnants of a 'golden' age, fascinated many intellectuals. Their legend strongly grew after 1989, making it very difficult to approach the

- ▲ A theatre adaptation of Cantemir's 'Hieroglyphic History' at the National Theatre in Iași, 1973.

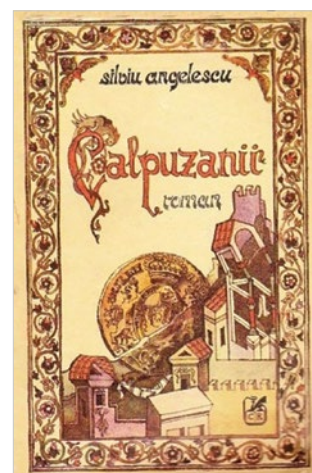
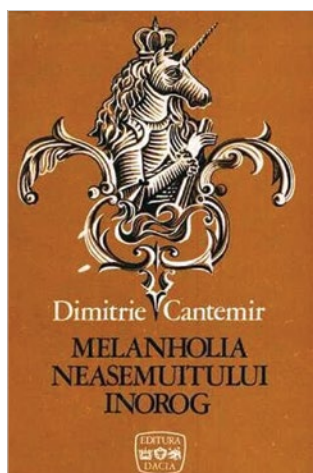
Source: images published by Albala 1973.

- ▼ Dimitrie Cantemir, *Melanholia neasemuitului inorog*. Povestiri exemplare din 'Istoria ieroglifică' ('The Melancholy of the Incomparable Unicorn. Exemplary stories from 'Hieroglyphic History'), selection of texts by Doina Curticăpeanu, Cluj, Dacia, 1973.

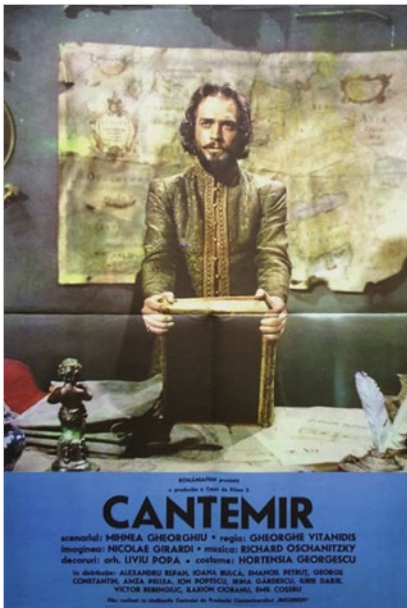
Source: <https://www.okazii.ro/>.

- ▲ First edition of Silviu Angelescu's novel *Calpuzanii* (Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1987).

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/>.







- ▲ Poster for feature film *Cantemir* (1973), directed by Gheorghe Vitanidis for the three-hundredth anniversary of prince's Cantemir's birth (1673).

Source: <https://www.imdb.com/>.

- ▼ Posters for two films with soundtrack composed by Dorin Liviu Zaharia. The first one—'The Stone Wedding' (*Nunta de piatră*, 1973)—represents the feature film debut of directors Dan Pița and Mircea Veroiu and consisting of two medium-length films based on short stories by Ion Agârbiceanu ('Fețeleaga' and 'At a wedding'). The second one—'Gold's Wraith' (*Duhul Aurului*, 1974)—is also based on two short stories and directed, respectively, by the same two directors.

Source: <https://www.dalles.ro/>.

subject from a scientific point of view (see the most recent solid attempt to study the interwar Romanian esoteric writings in Buleu 2021).

Notwithstanding this detailed evidence, the discrete pre-1989 attraction was stimulated by a larger interest in symbols and archetypes. In a cultural climate marred by oppression, lack of viable mainstream moral and intellectual models, as well as double talk, the true meaning had to be veiled and deciphered. Truth came in layers. All good stories were 'hieroglyphic histories', no matter if they were written at the beginning of the early-18<sup>th</sup> century or in the late 1980s, such as Silviu Angelescu's *Calpuzanii* (1987). Perhaps this is why the initial working hypothesis was sent off course in the direction of Mihail Avramescu when it should have simply stuck to a brief analysis of a general intellectual milieu of the time.

Avramescu was indeed a fascinating character, which in spite of recent but uncoordinated efforts remains known only to a handful of aficionados. This polytropic 'Jonathan X. Uranus' / 'Ierusalim X. Unicornus' is often mentioned in the texts of mainstream intellectuals who were also forgotten but rediscovered after the fall of Communism, such as Nicolae Steinhardt and Andrei Scrima—the Tennis Archimandrite, *Arhimandritul Tennis*, as Mihail Avramescu calls him in the 'Infra-Human Comedy'. Consequently, the 'esoteric' father will continue to fuel the imagination of scholars. The same is true for Romanian interwar and post-war esoteric tradition. Still largely unstudied, it attracted the attention of authors such as the Italian neo-fascist Claudio Mutti, who tried to instrumentalize the Romanian disciples of a traditionalist thinker

like René Guénon—and not only (Mutti 1999; cf. Junginger 2008, p. 34-35, for a brief and just evaluation of Mutti's works). All these ideas definitely 'deserve better', an elliptic phrase in which 'better' means a constant reality check of the working hypothesis. However, this also means that, irrespective of all these (faux) signs, Cantafabule is a different animal altogether.

As the first part of the conclusion has shown, the main problem is created by a blend of subjectivity and mechanical methodology (both in philology and historiography). Research must learn to stop ascribing general values to details, because those details belong to memory and history at the same time. When history leaves the wider perspective of cultural phenomena and recreates a narrative, that narrative is flawed because it cannot stand the test of memory. Therefore, the actual participation of Andrei Ujică and Șerban Foarță in certain cultural events of the time is highly irrelevant. The same goes for the members of the band or for the artists who made the covers of the LP. They could have or have not seen movies, read books, or listened to music, but they could have just as well borrowed ideas and concepts from the cultural milieu that they were all sharing. It is difficult to determine whether Phoenix actually knew that Dorin Liviu Zaharia (former vocalist of the band Olympic '64) had already composed the soundtrack for (and played a minor role in) two movies by Dan Pița—'The Stone Wedding' (*Nunta de piatră*, 1973) and 'Gold's Wraith' (*Duhul Aurului*, 1974). Costin Petrescu (former drummer of Olympic '64, by then drummer for Phoenix) could have facilitated that contact. He confided in us that he was writing private surrealist poems at the time, inspired by his experiences with the previous band, Olympic '64. However, this does not mean that Phoenix were copying Zaharia's interest for traditional music and symbolic writings or that Zaharia copied Phoenix, the other way round. Dorin Liviu Zaharia was actually creating his music and lyrics under the influence of the much wider obsession for esoteric writings in the Bucharest intellectual circles, just as Andrei Ujică and Șerban Foarță did in their own intellectual circles of Timișoara, perhaps in connection but not necessarily as a result of their meetings with Mihail Avramescu.

In the same manner, Nicolae Covaci had heard Marek Grechuta and the Anawa Cabaret perform their *poezja*

*śpiewana* in Gdansk, in 1973, but he misunderstood what that music meant and imagined that they were doing something similar to what No To Co, another Polish band, were doing. This happened because the blend of Pop Rock and traditional roots was already fashionable at the time and many bands were experimenting with it all over the world. Similarly, religious subjects were also on the rise in the Communist Block. In Poland, No To Co had recorded *Gloria in excelsis Deo* among the songs of their Folk Rock LP of traditional carols pressed in 1975. In Czechoslovakia, The Plastic People of the Universe—an underground music collective under the guidance of Ivan Martin Jirous, a theoretician of contemporary art—recorded their show ‘Easter Passion Play’ (*Pašijové hry velikonoční*, 1978) at the farm of then dissident Václav Havel. It was later smuggled across the Iron Curtain and pressed as an LP in Canada, in 1980. Nevertheless, this does not automatically suggest that the meaning of *Cantafabule* should be evaluated according to an Eastern Bloc cultural determinism. Phoenix had nothing to do with these trends. Their reverberations influenced them via another route.

Getting back to the lyrics of *Cantafabule*, specifically to their literary version, published as a volume of poetry in 1976, it is hardly surprising that a certain ‘Otto Willik’ signs the presentation of the interview with Ujică and Foartă in the literary student magazine. This was the pseudonym of William Totok, a local writer from Timișoara and member of the by-then-dissolved ‘Action Group Banat’ (*Aktionsgruppe Banat*). Strikingly, that introductory text was written and published by Totok shortly after his incarceration by the secret police (18 November 1975–29 June 1976). In a recent interview, Totok stated:

After I got out of jail, I felt like I was plagued. Acquaintances were crossing the street when they saw me. Nobody knew me anymore. From that moment on, I was tracked all the time. From the very first night after I left [prison], there are recordings of what I talked about at a friend’s home. It was a dramatic period, because I was excluded from everywhere.

*După ce am ieșit din închisoare parcă eram ciumat. Cunoscuții treceau strada când mă vedeau. Nu mă mai cunoșteau. Din acel moment, tot timpul am fost urmărit. Din prima seară de când am ieșit există înregistrările cu ce am vorbit la un prieten acasă. Era o perioadă dramatică, pentru că eram exclus de peste tot (Both s.a.).*

Perhaps this is why the 1976 interview and the introductory text of a political dissident had to be published in an obscure student literary magazine. The public readings of this group of German-speaking writers from the Banat had a Marxist orientation, but they followed in the footsteps of Alexander Dubček’s ‘Socialism with a Human

Face’. They were interrupted by folk guitar interludes of the singer Eugen Eliu. The archives of William Totok preserve a recording of a poem-song performed by Eliu in February 1975 and entitled ‘Homeland or death’ (*Patria sau moartea*). The lyrics had been written by Andrei Ujică and the performance was recorded at the time when the writing of the poems and songs for *Cantafabule* was also in progress. Ujică’s lyrics speak of Salvador Allende, a ‘romantic and revolutionary president’ (*președinte romantic și revoluționar*), and of his tragic fate. We should link these ideas to an event from the same spring of 1975, when Elisabeth Ochsenfeld (then Sepi) and Valeriu Sepi were presenting animal metamorphoses in their joint exhibition at the Banat Museum. During the opening of that exhibition, Ochsenfeld had sung songs in the company of Latin American refugee students. The chorus of Andrei Ujică’s text—‘Our only freedom is hope!’ (*Singura noastră libertate este speranța!*)—must have had a special resonance in those times. Especially since the members of *Aktionsgruppe Banat* were to be pursued and imprisoned by the Romanian secret police starting with the summer of that very same year.

The lyricists do not include these details in their narratives, because memory is presented in a literary (and often linear) manner, leading to the expected expurgation of unnecessary aspects of the story. Reality is nevertheless a maze in which each individual plays an essential part in the development of any given event. In the end, it all comes down to Isaiah Berlin’s essay *The Hedgehog and the Fox* and its quotation of Archilochus: *πόλλ’ οἶδ’ ἁλώπηξ, ἅλλ’ ἐχῖνος ἐν μέγα* (‘a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog knows one big thing’). If writers and theorists fall into two categories based on the two different methods they use—hedgehogs see the universe through the lens of a single defining idea, while foxes draw on a variety of experiences, because they do not believe that the universe can be reduced to one thing—then the same may be applied to researchers who often fall into these two categories as well, perhaps because things have not really advanced that much since 1953, the year the essay was published. Let us then leave the last word to Isaiah Berlin:

The proposition that history could (and should) be made scientific is a commonplace in the nineteenth century; but the number of those who interpreted the term ‘science’ as meaning natural science, and then asked themselves whether history could be transformed into a science in this specific sense, is not great. The most uncompromising policy was that of Auguste Comte, who, following his master, Saint-Simon, tried to turn history into sociology, with what fantastic consequences we need not here relate. Karl Marx was perhaps, of all thinkers, the man who took his programme most se-



◀ The second LP of the Czechoslovak band Plastic People of the Universe, first performed live as *Pašijové hry velikonoční* at Václav Havel’s farm in Hrádek near Trutnov, Czechoslovakia, May 1978. This Passion Play was recorded after their imprisonment, illegally smuggled to the West, and pressed in Canada (Boží Mlýn Productions – BM 8001, stereo, 1980).

The last album of the Polish band No To Co: *Koledowe Śpiewanki / Christmas Songs* (*Polskie Nagrania Muza* – SX 1240, LP, stereo, 1975). Most songs had religious subjects.

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.





▲ Aktionsgruppe Banat *before their persecution in 1975.*

Source: Front cover of the academic journal *Études germaniques*, 67, 3 (*Rumäniendeutsche Literatur 40 Jahre « Aktionsgruppe Banat »*, dir. Dorle Merchiers, Paris, Klincksieck / CNRS), 2012.

riously; and made the bravest, if one of the least successful, attempts to discover general laws which govern historical evolution, conceived on the then alluring analogy of biology and anatomy so triumphantly transformed by Darwin's new evolutionary theories. Like Marx (of whom at the time of writing *War and Peace* he apparently knew nothing) Tolstoy saw clearly that if history was a science, it must be possible to discover and formulate a set of true laws of history which, in conjunction with the data of empirical observation, would make prediction of the future (and 'retrodiction' of the past) as feasible as it had become, say, in geometry or astronomy. But he saw more clearly than Marx and his followers that this had, in fact, not been achieved, and said so with his usual dogmatic candour, and reinforced his thesis with arguments designed to show that the prospect of achieving this goal was non-existent; and clinched the matter by observing that the fulfilment of this scientific hope would end human life as we knew it: 'if we allow that human life can be ruled by reason, the possibility of life [i.e. as a spontaneous activity involving consciousness of free will] is destroyed. But what oppressed Tolstoy was not merely the 'unscientific' nature of history—that no matter how scrupulous the technique of historical research might be, no dependable laws could be discovered of the kind required even by the most undeveloped natural sciences. He further thought that he could not justify to himself the apparently arbitrary selection of material, and the no less arbitrary distribution of emphasis, to which all historical writing seemed to be doomed. He complains that while the factors which determine the life of mankind are very various, historians select from them only some single aspect, say the political or the economic, and represent it as primary, as the efficient cause of social change; but then, what of religion, what of 'spiritual' factors, and the many other aspects—a literally countless multiplicity—with which all events are endowed? How can we escape the conclusion that the histories

which exist represent what Tolstoy declares to be 'perhaps only 0.001 per cent of the elements which actually constitute the real history of peoples? History, as it is normally written, usually represents 'political'—public—events as the most important, while spiritual—'inner'—events are largely forgotten; yet *prima facie* it is they—the 'inner' events—that are the most real, the most immediate experience of human beings; they, and only they, are what life, in the last analysis, is made of; hence the routine political historians are talking shallow nonsense (Berlin 1993, p. 15-16).

Hopefully, our *Cantafabule* experiment has proven this once again. Scholars row their ideas on the 'reflective' surface of a watery corpus, the depth of which they can rarely measure with the help of their subjects' memories, but they are not entitled to pervert memory with the tools of history, nor history with the tools of memory. One always needs to maintain a certain balance and fix limits to the scope of one's research. There are boundaries which cannot be crossed:

To do this, above all, to grasp what human will and human reason can do, and what they cannot. How can this be known? Not by a specific inquiry and discovery, but by an awareness, not necessarily explicit or conscious, of certain general characteristics of human life and experience. And the most important and most pervasive of these is the crucial line that divides the 'surface' from the 'depths'—on the one hand the world of perceptible, describable, analysable data, both physical and psychological, both 'external' and 'inner', both public and private, with which the sciences can deal, although they have in some regions—those outside physics—made so little progress; and on the other hand, the order which, as it were, 'contains' and determines the structure of experience, the framework in which it—that is, we and all that we experience—must be conceived as being set, that which enters into our habits of thought, action, feeling, our emotions, hopes, wishes, our ways of talking, believing, reacting, being. We—sentient creatures—are in part living in a world the constituents of which we can discover, classify and act upon by rational, scientific, deliberately planned methods (Berlin 1993, p. 67-68).

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