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# «Juif naturellement et cependant Ulysse»<sup>1</sup>

## Representations of Jewish Identity in the Work of Benjamin Fondane

Camelia Crăciun

Born in 1898 in Iasi, Romania, as Benjamin Wechsler, the poet, philosopher and literary critic became well-known to the Romanian public as Beniamin Fundoianu, while later, after leaving Romania and settling in France, he published and achieved popularity under the new pseudonym of Benjamin Fondane. These name changes, determined by the literary and social environment of his activity, are also significant for the reinvention of the poetic and socio-cultural self of the writer; as Leon Volovici, one of the most important literary critics and biographers of Fondane wrote, the «identity metamorphosis»<sup>2</sup> of Benjamin Fondane represents a key element in understanding his artistic and intellectual development and the successive pseudonyms should be viewed as a significant symptom.

Perhaps symbolically, the original family name of the poet, Wechsler, could be translated as *changer*. In his early years he used a variety of different pseudonyms in literary publications and other journals in Iasi and Bucharest including Alex Vilara, Wechslerescu (his original Jewish name with a Romanian name suffix), and Iasanul (from the name of his city of birth, Iasi, in Moldova). For a while, the poet also chose pseudonyms of Judaic resonance such as Ofir (the name of a town mentioned in the Bible) and Hashir (*song*). For his career as a Romanian writer, the poet finally decided on Beniamin Fundoianu, derived from the name of a place (Fundoaia, Dorohoi county, northern Moldavia) where he grew up and where his paternal grandfather was *arendas*<sup>3</sup>. By choosing a Romanian family name and, even more, one associated with a region / village, the poet seemingly joined the group of Jewish intellectuals deciding to integrate pro-

<sup>1</sup> Ulysse, Les Cahiers du «Journal des poètes», Bruxelles, 1933, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Volovici's article *Metamorfozele identității*, in: *Caietele culturale Realitatea evreiască – Strigat întru eternitate*, edited by Geo Serban, 1998 and also *Metamorphoses de l'identité*, review *Europe*, year 76 / no. 827, March 1998.

<sup>3</sup> *Arenda* was a system of lease of land, estates and property, sometimes also involving collecting taxes and dues. *Arendas* was the person contracting this obligation and administering the land or property. The term and system comes originally from Polish and spread across Eastern Europe.

professionally and socially during a period when the situation of the Jewish community was still unclear and nationalistic pressure was making itself felt in everyday life. On the model of Romanians identifying themselves in connection to the region they were from, Benjamin Wechsler chose his pseudonym Fundoianu as proof of his cultural affiliation and emotional connection with the Romanian land and culture. Later, after migrating to France, Benjamin Fundoianu adopted the closest possible French version of his name, becoming for the French public Benjamin Fondane. The final stage in these pseudonym changes was represented by Isaac Laquedem, the mythical name of the «Juif errant», which is how he signed his works in the press of the *Résistance*. These changes symbolized his cultural trajectory, oscillating between Jewish background, Romanian culture, and French language to finally return to Jewish roots perceived in universalistic and metaphysical terms.

The main purpose of the research is to focus on representations of Fundoianu's Jewish origins as they appear within his works over the years. Using symbolic name changes as a structural device, the current paper identifies a number of stages in the personal and artistic discourse of the poet, analyzing the intellectual identity of the artist chronologically during its consolidation.

### *Benjamin Wechsler – the Origins*

Examining the intellectual environment of Benjamin Fundoianu, Leon Volovici concluded that the poet «s'inscrit donc, dès son enfance, dans le trajet culturel de sa famille et de son milieu: le milieu bourgeois et intellectuel juif de Roumanie (surtout de la Bucovine et de la Moldavie), émancipé, suivant les principes illuministes du mouvement Haskala, lié dans la même mesure à la tradition culturelle judaïque (les plus âgés savent l'hébreu et maîtrisent le yiddish), à la culture allemande (ceux qui étaient originaires de Bucovine) et dans la même mesure familiers avec la littérature roumaine, avec laquelle la génération de Fundoianu s'identifie complètement. A cette triple initiation culturelle, s'ajoute celle de la culture française, tout aussi familière».<sup>4</sup> Fundoianu's family represented a remarkable example of Jewish intellectual elite, exceptional within the wider group of Romanian Jewish intellectuals who were mostly coming from bourgeois professional families or from poor workers' backgrounds. Originating within a reputed Jewish intellectual family with great merits for the establishment of Jewish Romanian culture, Fundoianu's artistic discourse successfully integrated his Jewish roots and identity, sublimating them into an intellectual rather than a religious and ethnic identity.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, large traditional Yiddish-speaking Jewish communities inhabited Northern Moldavia, especially Iasi, the birthplace of the poet, and the places where Fondane grew up, Fundoaia and Hertza. These communities are briefly portrayed in his

<sup>4</sup> Leon Volovici, *Le paradis perdu. Correspondence familiale*, in: *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 2 (1998), 7.

volume of Romanian poetry *Privelisti*. The Eastern European Jewish lifestyle, religious observance, traditional costume and festivals appeared in the cycle of poems *Hertza* and in *Alte privelisti*, as well as in autobiographical writings.

A small businessman from Iasi and the son of a thriving *arendas* of Fundoaia, Benjamin Fundoianu's father had a stable middle-class economic and social status, while the poet's mother was coming from the well-known Schwarzfeld family, intellectuals who founded and promoted Jewish-Romanian historiography and journalism. Her brother Elias was a philologist and was expelled in 1885 and moved to France after attacking the problem of anti-Semitism in the press. Two other brothers, Wilhelm and Moses Schwarzfeld, were editors of Jewish periodicals. Together with Wilhelm, Elias wrote *Istoria evreilor din Romania* on the history of the Jewish community in Romania. The poet's maternal grandfather, Benjamin Schwarzfeld, originally from Galicia, was part of the Haskala<sup>5</sup> movement, a poet of the Hebrew language and the founder of the first Jewish schools in Iasi, Moldavia after his migration to Romania. The son-in-law of Moses, Fondane's uncle Adolphe (the poet Avram Steuerman-Rodion) was also an important figure of the time, while A. L. Zissu, the famous founder of the Zionist newspaper *Mantuirea* and one of the most important Jewish politicians in Romania was a friend of the family.

Although Romanian was Benjamin Fundoianu's mother tongue, he was also familiar with Yiddish from which he translated pieces for the Romanian Jewish press and which also functioned as a nostalgic connection with his childhood and deeper identity. He is reported to have learned the Hebrew alphabet and started reading the *Tanakh* at the age of three. As he grew up in the warm and protective environment of his prosperous and well-educated Hassidic grandparents in Hertza, Fondane apparently went to the *kheder*<sup>6</sup>, thus acquiring a solid Biblical education, evidence of which can be found in his poetry.

The early beginnings of his creativity were directly influenced by the intellectual environment he grew up in; through his uncles and the family circle of friends, young Benjamin was soon acquainted with people who influenced his literary and intellectual education. Poets and journalists such as A. Steuerman-Rodion, Alfred Hefter and I. M. Rascu read his work and published it, including the young Fundoianu in their literary and politically leftist circles. Fondane declared owing his return to tradition and to the richness of Yiddish language to the famous Yiddish poet Jacob Groper. At the same time, he participated in meetings of the Toynbee Hall circle, which was known for its Jewish cultural and Zionist activities; the family friend A. L. Zissu influenced him greatly in this direction as Fondane started his professional journalistic activity in Zissu's Zionist publication *Mantuirea*.

<sup>5</sup> Haskala was the Jewish equivalent of Enlightenment.

<sup>6</sup> Kheder was a form of traditional education for small children focusing on Judaism and Hebrew language knowledge.



Aside from the influence of the intellectual network and family, formal education also played an important role. Studying in regular Romanian schools, his official education focused mainly on Romanian history and literature, together with French and German as foreign languages; thus he was familiar with Romanian, foreign languages and universal culture from home and also from school. As a result, his first poetic attempts, written in Romanian, were pastiches of Romanian, German and French poetry. He was attracted to French literature and he also practised his skills in translating from Yiddish and German. At the time when Fondane was developing his intellectual identity, Iasi had become a vibrant centre of Yiddish and Jewish culture; here Abraham Goldfaden founded a theatre company and staged one of the first shows in Yiddish, the *Green Tree*, which would fascinate and influence Franz Kafka. Intellectual life was also animated by performances by a Moscow-based Hebrew language theatre company, *Habimah* (the Scene). Thus from his early years Benjamin Fundoianu embraced both Romanian culture and his Jewish roots, together with French and German literatures and languages.

After completing primary, secondary and high school education in the capital of the Moldavian province, Iasi, Fundoianu enrolled at the law school there. However, the reputation which Iasi had enjoyed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a Moldavian cultural capital and academic centre began to wane. Iasi became more provincial while Bucharest, especially after 1918, was strengthened in its role as the capital of Greater Romania. Bucharest offered more resources and opportunities for professionals, especially in literary life and journalism. What is more, in the early 1920s Iasi University became the centre of anti-Semitic student demonstrations influenced by Professor A. C. Cuza, the leader of an extreme right wing party, who propagated his ideology and recruited party members among the students. Benjamin Fundoianu studied Law in Iasi for three years, but abandoned his course before taking the degree. In fact, he was already living in Bucharest, where he had been writing for the Romanian and Jewish press. A. C. Cuza was well-known for deliberately failing his Jewish students in exams, and as a result Fundoianu repeatedly failed in political economy until finally he decided to give up law school, move to Bucharest and dedicate his time to journalism and literature.

Thus the future poet was exposed to a complex set of influences combining the Jewish intellectual background of his family, Romanian language education and culture acquired through literary influences and networks, and more international influences from French and German cultures.

### *Benjamin Fundoianu – the Romanian Period*

Benjamin Fundoianu left Romania for France in December 1923 when he was 25. By that time he was already a published poet, a productive literary critic, essayist and journalist. He had already made his debut with *Tagaduinta lui Petru*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Tagaduinta lui Petru*, Iasi, Chemarea Publishing House, 1918.

(1918), a metaphysical play of Biblical inspiration, followed in 1921 by the controversial volume *Imagini si carti din Franta*<sup>8</sup> collecting his articles of literary criticism on French literature and culture. His journalistic activity was abundant, and he worked as editor or collaborator for a number of publications, both Jewish and Romanian. Prolifically active, on his departure, he left behind a book project,<sup>9</sup> essays, manuscripts, the plan of a theatre company<sup>10</sup> and several autobiographical pieces.<sup>11</sup>

Quite often during these formative years Fundoianu wrote on Judaism, the Jewish community or his own Jewish roots. But without exception the volumes<sup>12</sup> republishing Fundoianu's work after the Second World War focused on his poetic works and literary criticism, namely the collection of articles from *Imagini si carti* and the poetry published after his departure in *Privelisti*<sup>13</sup> (1930). But these republications ignored his «Jewish articles» and thus offer an incomplete account of the poet's activity in Romania. A collection of these fascinating articles was finally published by Leon Volovici and Remus Zastroiu in 1999 under the title *Judaism si elenism*<sup>14</sup>, opening up a new perspective on his journalistic activity, which had previously been perceived as limited to literary matters.

Unfortunately, relatively few studies have examined the Jewish presence in Fundoianu's Romanian creation. This interesting topic focusing on the Jewish identity represented in Fundoianu's Romanian period began with studies by

<sup>8</sup> *Imagini si carti din Franta*, Socec Publishing House, 1921.

<sup>9</sup> As a reaction to the controversy generated by *Imagini si carti din Franta*, Fundoianu planned a book collecting his literary articles on Romanian literature; but the volume was never published, as he left the country.

<sup>10</sup> The theatre company *Insula* (The Island) was created in 1922 by Fundoianu together with his sister Lina, an actress, and his brother-in-law Armand Pascal, a director and scenographer, both of whom had experience in theatrical productions as a result of their work with Copeau in France. As the first avantgardist theatre in Romania, the company selected repertoire mainly from Romanian literature, intending to replace the traditional staging with original avantgardist-influenced productions. Unfortunately the enterprise failed after a few performances and within less than a year due to anti-Semitic demonstrations and a lack of funding (for further information see Olivier Salazar-Ferrer, Benjamin Fondane, Oxus, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> *Manuscriptum*, VII, (23), nr.2/1976.

<sup>12</sup> Fundoianu's works were «rediscovered» only a few decades after his death; the volume *Poezii* edited by Paul Daniel and Gheorghe Zărafu with a study by Mircea Martin, Minerva, Bucuresti, 1978, republishing earlier versions of Virgil Teodorescu's anthology in 1965 and Paul Daniel's edition from 1974 with *Privelisti*, poems published in periodicals and left in manuscripts and a few translations from French. The second volume collecting articles from Romania and France and French essays was republished only in 1980 as *Imagini si carti*, edition of Vasile Teodorescu with a study by Mircea Martin and translations by Sorin Marculescu at Minerva Publishing House (containing *Tagaduinta lui Petru*, *Imagini si carti din Franta*, articles on literature and theatre and miscellaneous, a Romanian version of Rimbaud *le Voyou* and *Faux traite d'esthetique*).

<sup>13</sup> Collecting a part of his poems written between 1917 and 1923, *Privelisti* selected his most accomplished poems of rural inspiration and appeared in 1930 at *Cultura nationala* Publishing House.

<sup>14</sup> With a critical comment by Leon Volovici and Remus Zastroiu, *Judaism si elenism*, Hasefer Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.

Leon Volovici<sup>15</sup> and Monique Jutrin,<sup>16</sup> sections of the monographs by Marin Bucur<sup>17</sup> and Olivier Salazar-Ferrer,<sup>18</sup> and the special issue of *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*.<sup>19</sup> But these works have been rather exceptional. The substantial secondary literature<sup>20</sup> on Fundoianu's Romanian activity has preferred to overlook his biographical experience and the representation of Judaism and Jewish life in Romania in his works. For this reason, the analyses which have resulted, while providing solid studies of Fundoianu's beginnings in poetry and literary criticism, his connections with avantgardism and symbolism, and his aesthetic principles, have neglected his Jewish identity, a major factor in his personal and intellectual profile and of great significance within his whole oeuvre. One explanation for this is that for a long time Romanian literary studies and historiography were not able to deal with Jewish Romanian history; under the Communist regime, references to religion were discouraged. Even after 1989, the lack of researchers trained in Jewish studies led scholars to ignore a fundamental aspect of Fundoianu's life which they were simply unable to interpret. The image of Fundoianu that the Romanian public received was incomplete, focusing on traditionalist versus avangardist temptations, but omitting the ethnic and religious aspects which were essential to an understanding of the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Jewish community was still struggling to obtain civil rights and anti-Semitic demonstrations were commonplace.

#### *Fundoianu's Presence in the Romanian Jewish Press*

In an article published in *Mantuirea* in support of the struggle for civil rights for the Romanian Jewry Benjamin Fundoianu responded as follows to remarks made by Luigi Luzzati, the former prime-minister of Italy: «yes, if you had lived in Romania, it would have been impossible [...] not to become Jewish again and fully Jewish».<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Leon Volovici, «Fundoianu/Fondane – Metamorfozele identitatii» in: *Caiețele culturale Realitatea evreiască – Strigat întru eternitate*, edited by Geo Serban, 1998 and *Metamorphoses de l'identite*, review *Europe*, year 76 / no. 827, March 1998; Leon Volovici (see footnote 3), issue dedicated to the topic *Periple d'un Juif irresigne*; Benjamin Fondane, Judaism as individual experience and existentialist philosophy, Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Volume II, Jerusalem 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Monique Jutrin, *Benjamin Fondane ou Le Periple d'Ulysse*, Paris 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Marin Bucur, *Privelistile poeziei*, Albatros Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Salazar-Ferrer, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 10).

<sup>19</sup> *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, no. 2 / automne 1998, *Periple d'un Juif irresigne*.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Martin, *Introducere în opera lui B. Fundoianu*, Editura Minerva, București, 1984; Bucur, *Privelistile poeziei* (see footnote 17); Jutrin, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 16); Victor Stoleru, *B. Fundoianu/Benjamin Fondane*, Editura Grai și Suflet – Cultura Natională, București 2000; Petre Raileanu/Michel Carassou, *Fundoianu/Fondane et l'Avant-garde*, Bucharest 1999; Salazar-Ferrer, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 10); Gabriella Farina, Benjamin Fondane e le gouffre. Un emigrante nella metafisica dell'esistenza, Artemide Edizioni, Roma, 2003; issue *Europe* on Benjamin Fondane, 827 (1998); *Caiețele culturale «Realitatea evreiască»* issue on Fundoianu-Aristocrat al frondei. Strigat întru eternitate; *Bulletin de la Societe d'Etudes Benjamin Fondane* (1–6) and *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane* (1–8), Kfar-Saba, 1994–1996/1997–2008; *Non Lieu*, issue on Benjamin Fondane, no 2–3, 1978.

<sup>21</sup> Article *Dacă aș trai în România...* from *Mantuirea*, I, 1919, nr. 15, 7 February.

In this personally motivated discourse, many of Fundoianu's articles on Jewish topics were generated by an unavoidable political involvement; however, in the atmosphere of political conflict, these articles were published mainly in the Jewish press. Eric Freedman<sup>22</sup> has shown that Fundoianu's contributions on Jewish life appeared in publications including *Egalitatea*, *Hatikvah*, *Hasmonea*, *Adam* and *Mantuirea*, although occasionally he also published articles on Jewish topics in mainstream Romanian cultural publications, but mainly for signalling cultural events. The majority of the «Jewish articles», and the most relevant ones in terms of their political message, appeared in *Mantuirea*, a Zionist publication where Fundoianu worked as an editor,<sup>23</sup> hired by Schwarzfeld's family friend, journalist and politician A. L. Zissu. In *Lumea evree*, Fundoianu had a permanent column, *Idei si oameni*, whose title was chosen as homage to his first mentor, Steuerman-Rodion.<sup>24</sup> In his articles published in the Jewish press he discussed the political issues of his time and the cultural and social events which were significant for the Romanian Jewish community. These ranged from the creation of a Jewish state, Zionism and the emancipation of Romanian Jews to interviews and a series of articles on Judaism.

This clear separation of discourses – one aimed at the general Romanian public focussing on literary, critical and philosophical topics of Jewish culture, the other for the Jewish audience and referring to politics, community life and Jewish culture – was confirmed in his use of pseudonyms; as Remus Zastroiu<sup>25</sup> has noted, the poet used different pseudonyms according to the target public, the publication and the topic of the contribution. In the Zionist press debating the problem of the Jewish state or translating Yiddish poetry, Fundoianu signed himself B. Wechsler, or F. Benjamin while in literary journals in Iasi and Bucharest he went under the names of B. Fundoianu, Wechslerescu, Iasanul, and others. This formal and internal separation was determined by the situation of the Jewish community in that period, which existed separately as a culture, neither politically emancipated, nor well integrated into Romanian society, and subject to reactions from the Romanian nationalistic movement. The separation of Jewish culture and Jewish issues from wider intellectual life in Romania led Fundoianu to activate different sides of his intellectual personality according to the audience and their interests.

### *Poetic Recreation of Jewish Life in Moldavia*

A great part of Fundoianu's Romanian poetry was structured according to a fascination for the natural and rudimentary and based on an exploration of the rural world and, from here, of the whole of nature. In this respect, my reading challen-

<sup>22</sup> In Eric Freedman's *Bibliographie selective des écrits relatifs au judaïsme* in: *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*. *Periple d'un Juif irrésigné*, 2 (1998).

<sup>23</sup> According to researchers, he worked here as corrector and later as editor between 24 January 1919 and 4<sup>th</sup> December 1922. See Remus Zastroiu, *Les cahiers d'un «Inactuel»: B. Fundoianu journaliste*, *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 6 (2003), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Zastroiu, *Judaism si elenism* (see footnote 14), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Zastroiu, *Judaism si elenism* (see footnote 14), 4.



ges Mircea Martin's thorough study of Fundoianu's aesthetics, which concluded that Fundoianu was «a poet of spiritual loneliness, of inability to communicate and to adhere»<sup>26</sup> as «there is no profound communication, the poet not looking in nature for elements with which to resonate, or to attribute to nature his own sufferings or fervor».<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, in the same essay Mircea Martin claimed that Fundoianu was «an expressionist, raising the value of details to a general level, offering to a concrete figure a symbolic value, so that it loses neither its power of plastic suggestion, nor its metaphysical function».<sup>28</sup>

Starting from the evocation of a defined place on his emotional map, the poet uses this place as a means for presenting a larger space, building up a whole universe of plants, animals, human beings, meteorological phenomena, temporal events and customs connected to the natural passage of time and maturation of life in its natural habitat. As a result, literary critics categorized his poetry as traditionalist, perceiving elements specific to the Samanatorist trend which enjoyed certain dominance within Romanian literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also a strong Symbolist influence, often declared by the poet in his theoretical articles at the time. But the special connection that the poetic persona establishes with the complexity of nature has led some more recent critics to identify elements of Expressionism<sup>29</sup> in Fundoianu's Romanian works. This undermines his classification as a traditionalist revealing a clear interest in modernist currents and new poetic discourses. Favours modernist literary trends in his work, especially Symbolism and Expressionism, Fundoianu intended to transform his initial poetic models, reacting against a poetic tradition based on ruralism, Christian Orthodoxy, and peasantry with which he could not identify. The complexity of his artistic influences can be perceived in this fragment: «Toamna e-atit de rumena in tîrg, / Cu flori in par, roscate, de olane, / Ca strada umbla ca un cocostire [...] / Mincati de ploaie, pomii se usuca, / Ca dupa o navala de omizi – / Si linistea e tare ca o nuca, / Si soarele s-a spart in caramizi».<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Fundoianu was an anti-traditionalist in the sense that he «rejected the organicist-ethnacist conception of tradition»<sup>31</sup> which imposed a certain repertoire, doctrine and poetic identity which was difficult for a Jewish poet of Romanian language to accept.

If we exclude his first published volume in 1918, *Tagaduinta lui Petru*, which is understood to belong as much to theatre as to poetry and which represents the reconstruction of a historical event in a series of literary exercises, then the only volume of poetry published in Romanian is *Privelisti*, which appeared in 1930. This volume benefitted from mature selection which eliminated literary attempts and failures. Thematically it preferred reconstructions from an idyllic perspective

<sup>26</sup> Martin, *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20), 164.

<sup>27</sup> Martin *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20), 162.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20), 180.

<sup>29</sup> See Martin, *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20).

<sup>30</sup> *Provincie* (see footnote 12), I, 29. (Edition of B. Fundoianu, *Poezii*, preface of Dumitru Micu, chronological table by Paul Daniel and George Zarafu, BPT, Minerva, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> Martin, *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20), 100.

of Northern Moldavian rural life with its patriarchal atmosphere. Animals, plants and human beings were described as living in universal harmony, close to the solar Expressionism of his period with Symbolist tones. His attachment to the place where he spent his childhood was remarkable and transcended the poetic content in the cycle *Hertza*. A series of poems on the same topic left unpublished (or not represented in volume) were also included in the material for analysis.

Geographically, the poetic rural reconstruction was clearly localized in the Moldavian region. His pseudonym was a tribute to the place of his idyllic childhood reconstructed in poetry, while a separate cycle of poems was dedicated to *Hertza*, his other favourite place, evoking the life and the nature there. His ironic remark concerning the remoteness and isolation of the villages refers to «So-seaua duce numai din Hertza la Fundoiaia»<sup>32</sup> which also links the two neighbouring places. Further on, exploring the surrounding areas, the poet writes that «Auzi tacerea lunga si gri care e toamna / Si diligenta care vine din Dorohoi».<sup>33</sup> The locality described, a *tirg*, possibly a *shtetl*, echoes opposite reactions when evoked by the poet; a paradise of peace and rustic tranquillity («In *tirg* miroase-a ploaie, a toamna si a fin»<sup>34</sup>), the place was also hated for its backwardness, poverty, and poor infrastructure («*Tirg* ticalos, cu ulite si strazi / Sparte de ploi, de vite si de care – / Aici, in cimp, pe vremuri, crestea soare / Aici crestea ovaz».<sup>35</sup>). An even less flattering description refers to it as a place of boredom, sleepiness, stillness and passivity: «Ca-n Hertza cind tacerea ma-nzapezea pe-o banca / Imi amintesc: amurgul cazut pe jos de somn, / In *tirgul* cu sopirle sub pietre, far-un pom, / cu coperisuri trase peste ferestre gluga.»<sup>36</sup>

At the margins of the *tirg*, the Moldavian landscape monopolizes the poet's interest through a complex process of interferences between regna; often, plants, animals and meteorological events take on human characteristics to bring the whole of the surrounding nature closer to human life and to tame it, while at the same time, human beings start looking and behaving like the elements surrounding them: «surisul tau ma cauta ca-n riu / o undita – / si vrabii linga tine slovesc / romanul».<sup>37</sup> The process of *humanization* not only affects the animals and plants, the living forms around, but also the earth, the seasons, the rain, and objects. Natural phenomena and objects borrow human traits in an osmotic experience. But the process of mutual taming has its reverse too. Human beings in their turn take on traits from the surrounding nature and can thus better integrate into the natural landscape through a process of *integration into the natural order*. This mutual exchange and contamination suggests continuity between natural processes and beings and a common subjection to a greater organic order, all of which suggests expressionist and pantheist tones in Fundoianu's poetry. For the poems in *Privelisti*, human beings are not important and the poet is not embar-

<sup>32</sup> (E ziua cea din urma...), above edition of Poezii (see footnote 12), I, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Hertza, above edition of Poezii (see footnote 12), I, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Hertza, above edition of Poezii (see footnote 12), I, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Provincie, above edition of Poezii (see footnote 12), I, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Hertza, above edition of Poezii (see footnote 12), I, 18. (Above Edition).

<sup>37</sup> Cintece simple: Marior, above edition of Poezii (see footnote 12), I, 39.



rassed to declare his lack of faith in human nature («Si omul trece iarasi prin ziua, mediocre»<sup>38</sup>) in the larger context of nature and cosmic processes. Without being individualized (apart from the rare cases when the poetic voice actually addresses a human presence – mostly a woman or a companion), the people from the poems are pictured in a collective image, as a group, mainly *peasants*, easier to integrate into the rustic landscape and likely to have a harmonious relationship with their natural surroundings. For the sake of the ever-present harmony, as a necessary part of the universe just like plants, animals and cosmic processes, and subject to the same laws, the poet makes the peasants a part of the picture but without taking any interest in their individuality. The domination of silence and peace gives the feeling that life has evolved inside a protected space, albeit a vegetal one, as everything is contained within a non-conflictual conquest of natural changes. This harmonious natural *pantheistic* community leads easily to a mystic feeling rather than a precisely denominated religious one. To explain the presence of this background against the reconstruction of Jewish life in Northern Moldavia, Marin Bucur wrote that «the recreation of the lyric universe with motifs from patriarchal poetry (the tîrg, the field, the cart with oxen, the peasant's yard, the boyar's court, the old houses, the gardens, the pub) came from a need to authenticate a human space with a mix of destinies and genesis, where one ancient history connected to another ancient history».<sup>39</sup>

In *Privelisti* the Jewish community was a natural part of Fundoianu's poetic reconstructions. This community was demographically remarkable in Northern Moldavia, organized in shtetls or small tîrgs, basically semi-rural settlements of compact communities preserving traditional cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics of the Ashkenazi group specific to Eastern European Jewry. When he evokes the area of Hertza and Fundoaia, the Jewish presence is an essential part of the image captured in his poems. As he had been born in the Moldavian Jewish community of Iasi and grown up in the religiously observant family of his grandfather, the *arendas* of Fundoaia, the emotional background attached to the evocation of Jewish life in Moldova was the result of the inner reconstruction of his own memories and nostalgic projections of his early years. The representation of the Jewish community in his poetry was ethnographic and naturally integrated into a rural, bucolic, almost pantheistic representation of the space, but at the same time an emotional reconstruction of the atmosphere and of the Jewish life experienced by the young boy participating in religious festivals and included in the performance of traditional customs of everyday life.

Moving on from the quiet of the countryside, the poet introduces the Jewish community by means of linguistic characteristics: «In case oameni simpli vorbesc pe ovreieste».<sup>40</sup> He understood that the language was the primary noticeable feature which sets the group apart from the diffuse community of peasants within the overall picture. The importance of language is also stressed in a different

<sup>38</sup> Hertza, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), I, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Bucur, *Privelistile poeziei* (see footnote 17), 78.

<sup>40</sup> Hertza, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), I, 14.

poem, where Fundoianu shows his attachment to the written Hebrew present on tombstones in the cemetery: «Si as iubi o piatra cu scrisul ovreiesc. / Toamna, in cimitirul urban din bariere, / Pune tristetea-n lespezi a stupilor cu miere».<sup>41</sup> Yiddish and Hebrew as cultural markers identified the community and represented an emotional bond for the poet who, although familiar with both languages, decided from the very beginning to communicate his poetic message in Romanian. This set of languages coexisting on the emotional level, one enforced by official education and family, the other present through traditions and religious performance in his childhood, brought a certain ease in reshaping his poetic persona, message and sensitivity within different idioms – and his later adaptation to French was further proof of this.

The commercial activities of the Jewish traders selling their merchandise are representative of everyday life, which is also described by the poet in terms of the problems with language and communication. With compact and separate communities in the region and a lack of cultural assimilation, Fundoianu reflects the absence of linguistic communication: «Ovreii vind prin semne la tarabe / Dorinti si ustensile de voiaj»<sup>42</sup>. Using linguistic and professional traits of the Jewish community, the poet's representation of the village as a «small Jewish tirg», as in «E tirgusorul umed, ploios si ovreiesc»,<sup>43</sup> permanently situates the community within a series of agricultural, peasant-like landscapes.

Apart from the precise geographic reconstruction through references to Hertza and Fundoaia, the poems also refer to certain historical events and processes. A large-scale migration to America, usually by ship, in search of a better and safer future, took place in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Migrants came from all over Europe, but this phenomenon was especially prominent in Romania; this period coincided with the years which Fundoianu spent as a child in the village and the Jewish community: «Astepti in toata seara aceeaasi diligenta / Care debarca aceiasi ovrei ce se intorc. / In case, stiu vapoare ce pleaca spre New York / Si bancuri unde-oceanul a descarcat ciolane».<sup>44</sup> The narrative of migration to America by ship, so often present in his later creations from the French period as the saga of the emigrant, appears in another poem left in manuscript (Te vad din nou uitata intr-un parete-n rama); in *Hertza* the poet reconstructs in an emotional confessional tone the destiny of a loved one who leaves family and birthplace for New York and has difficulties adapting there, eventually dying.

An essential part of everyday life, religious festivals and practices were present in Fundoianu's memory and poetic recollections of his childhood. Living in his grandparents' house, the young boy was impressed by his grandfather performing the prayers and the rituals on Jewish festivals and he captured these emotionally in his poetry. Representing vividly, as it did, the emotions of a child, the religious performance took on the appearance of a world catastrophe; at the same

<sup>41</sup> Cintece simple. Marior, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), I, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Alte priverlisti, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), I, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Provincie, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), II, 58.

<sup>44</sup> *Hertza*, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), I, 17.

time, recreating the episode as a spectator, the poet also identifies with the community aware of the theatrical aspect of the ritual performance. Finally, the blending of the religious event with natural phenomena exacerbated its impact on participants and the *integration* of the mystical feeling into the wider universe naturally brought the community with its traditions and culture closer to the local environment: «Seara, un murmur negru crestea din sinagogi: / Cereau desigur – altfel ai fi voit sa rogi – / Ca sa-i fereasca cerul, cum le-a ferit stramosii, / De panica adusa din cimpurile rosii. / Deodata, dupa geamuri se aprindeau faclii; / O umbra linistita intra in pravalii / Prin usile-ncuiate si s-aseza la masa. / Tacerea de salina incremenea in casa / Si-n sloiul noptii jghebul ograzii adapa. / Bunicul intre flacari de sfesnic se ruga: / Sa-mi cada dreapta, limba sa se usuce-n mine / De te-oi lua vreodata-n desert, Ierusalime! / Tavanul plin cu ingeri de ghips urca in cer; / Ce foc in sfesnicarul obloanelor de fier! / Un suflu –n viscolire se limpeze parca, / Si casa, clatinata in noapte, ca o barca, / Se desprindea din strada tirgului si plutea. / Somnul, ca un paharnic, fara oprire bea / Si nu mai stiu cu cine vorbea bunicul. Nime / Nu asculta cum dinsul plingea, din adincime, / Si-amesteca in capul nepotului sau timp / Ruga din casa scunda cu mugetul din cimp».<sup>45</sup>

To conclude, the representations of Jewish life in Fundoianu's poetry appear in an integrated way that connects the individual with the landscape through a mystic view of nature inspired by Judaism, which goes far beyond the two earlier interpretations focusing either on Romanian rural poetic influence or on the lack of community with nature. In this respect, Marin Bucur wrote that «B. Fundoianu brought into modern Romanian poetry the previously unknown space of the Jewish communities, a mix of provincial ghetto and the peripheral settlements of a humble modest humanity which attached itself to the pure landscape [...]. It was the evocation of a space integrated with the older territories of Hassidic wisdom, where a world pursued by the history of its millennial exile ordered its life as a rural society, with the customs of the place, its field for ploughing, the oxen cart and the meadow for the cattle, but which, in its own soul, preserves the nostalgia of its original place. [...] The song of the land blends with the song of the Exodus».<sup>46</sup>

### *Judaism and Biblical Sources in Romanian Poetry*

Beniamin Fundoianu's Romanian poetry represents the result of the first years of activity of the young poet who, by the age of 25, had ended his literary career in Romanian and had already begun living and writing in France. The beginnings, the development and the artistic crystallization of the young artist's discourse are documented in one published volume, together with pieces left uncollected in publications of the time, as well as in manuscripts. Many literary forms, influences and models can be identified, as well as different sources of inspiration and language registers which functioned as early lyrical exercises. Among these

<sup>45</sup> Hertza, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), I, 18–19

<sup>46</sup> Bucur, *Privelistile Poezii* (see footnote 17), 78.

varied poetical pieces, a few poems were inspired by Judaic and Biblical sources, manifested through the presence of cultural references or of motifs and episodes. From his poetic beginnings, Fundoianu's creation demonstrated a clear Judaic influence present in the cycle of poetry *Sonete biblice* from 1916, in his early poems in prose *Plazmuiri in noapte*, published in the Zionist publication *Hatikvah*, and in the poem *Metempsihoza* centred on spiritual identification with the life of the Jewish people in history.

In Fundoianu's early poetry, the diversity of styles, poetic language registers, artistic schools and forms ranges from localized Romanian Samanatorism or Poporanism literary trends<sup>47</sup> influenced by his early readings of Romanian literature to Expressionism and Symbolism during his more mature years, expressed in both poems and theoretical articles. The combination of archaisms, neologisms, and regionalisms within his poetic language demonstrates the same search for a personalized discourse intended to individualize his creation. Except for the poems collected in *Privelisti*, the poetic self was diffuse, reconstructing many historical or theatrical masks as literary personas in a form of poetic exercise, but without transmitting a personal discourse; this resulted from the fact that, in these works, the poet concentrated more on form, style, manner and language than on the message and on the poetic persona, not having attained a crystallized discourse yet. Fundoianu experimented with form and structure too. His early poems published in periodicals or collected by his editors from manuscripts, were more than mere artistic exercises, with a refined use of language registers and poetic substance. They varied in lyrical form from *sonnet* to *ode*, *ballad* and even *Sapphic stanza*. This firm interest for the fixed forms in poetry may suggest that the poet wanted to explore artistic models belonging to Antiquity and to the medieval period, with their rigorous structures and fixed rules. These models became classical and were taken up periodically by poets trying their pen with them; Fundoianu was doing the same, trying to find his own style and abilities to mould his sensitivity.

The same variety of influences was also visible in the poetic discourse; the young Fundoianu was a poet searching for his poetic voice and experimenting with literary models, deriving inspiration from a number of sources, from Eminescu, Vlahuta, Macedonski or Dimitrie Anghel,<sup>48</sup> and trying out the latest literary trends. In Fundoianu's poetry, one may encounter Dimitrie Anghel's floral obsession together with his formal structures, George Bacovia with his autumnal depression, Topirceanu's irony and Eminescu's classical structures. The young poet was also interested in world poetry, such as that by François Villon, Baudelaire, and Virgil with its bucolic and pastoral erotic reconstructions. Inspiration

<sup>47</sup> Poporanism and Samanatorism were two literary and cultural trends emerging during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Romania around two literary publications, «Viata romaneasca» and «Samanatorul». Both promoted a revitalization of Romanian culture through inspirations from rural life, folklore, national traditions, village life, idyllism and peasantry.

<sup>48</sup> In his analysis on Fundoianu's early poetry in *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20), 152–157, Mircea Martin identified influences from different Romanian and French poets.



for his poetic work came from the most diverse sources; he was inspired to recreate vivid scenes from Greek and Roman history and mythology, the Western medieval period, Romanian history and also Oriental cultures. Fascination for Italy and its Romantic landscapes, and cultural fascination for the Orient as a source for exotic representations motivated a number of poems located epically in the Ottoman period; the Arab stories with Scheherazade and the poet Hafez became sources of inspiration for poetic exercises. Romanian historical poetry too was a model for an exercise using syntagms and motifs celebrated by Romantic national poetry (Alecsandri and Eminescu) and employing a specific language register originally from the patriotically engaged poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the creation of nation-states.

The paradoxical presence of Christian sources may be explained by his profound acculturation to Romanian culture and identity as a result of education and readings. Born in an area populated by Christian Orthodox Romanians and educated and acculturated both in school and through literary and historical knowledge, Fundoianu was familiar with Christian Orthodoxy and perceived it as integral part of the peasant life which he often described (for example in *Lugubru bate-n zid tictacul* Fundoianu writes «Implora un calic, saracul, / Pomana-n numele Precistei... / Pling clopotele, jalnic pling / Clopotnitele la biserici. / Rizind trec in caruta clerici»<sup>49</sup>) as a natural integration and continuation of peasant life in the middle of nature. Whether as a genuine influence of the Romanian literary environment or simply as a strategy employed for easier intellectual and artistic integration through poetic discourse, Fundoianu used a series of New Testament episodes and references as in his debut volume, *Tagaduinta lui Petru* (1918), including a Christian prayer at the end of the poem, but in the context that «le point de vue de l'auteur n'est assurément pas celui d'un évangéliste, mais celui d'un Juif du vingtième siècle qui s'interroge sur ce moment précis de l'histoire où le christianisme naît du judaïsme».<sup>50</sup> Equally, in the context of rural pastoral poetry exercises, the poet employed images, motifs and a language register from Christian tradition. Apart from the reconstruction of religious episodes inspired by the New Testament, Fundoianu also used religious vocabulary as a poetic register: «Clopotnita pe cer si-nfige fierul / si cu mireasma-si tainuie altarul»<sup>51</sup> and «Si nu-i voi pune cruce, nici monument, nici schit!».<sup>52</sup>

In the context of these literary exercises with their varied sources of inspiration, the Biblical and Judaic themes also became pretexts for poetical creations; the poet used a similar style of historical reconstruction and poems in prose starting from a Biblical episode or figure. *Moise*, for example, reconstructs in a theatrical way the moment when the great Biblical character contemplates the fire in Sodom and Gomorrah while *Scara lui Iacob* presents the revelation of God to Jacob. In *Ultima verba. Cintarea lui Samson*, Fundoianu recreated the

<sup>49</sup> (*Lugubru bate-n zid tictacul*), above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), II, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Monique Jutrin, *Le Reniement de Pierre*. «Un point des Evangiles assez complexe», *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 11 (2008), 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Manastire*, above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 11), II, 52.

<sup>52</sup> *Renuntare* above edition of *Poezii* (see footnote 12), II, 24.

monologue of Samson to his lover while *Monologul lui Balthazar* has Balthazar appearing to Daniel. Using well-known Biblical figures in representative and recognizable hypostasis, the poet appeals to the religious background of the audience, exploiting an already existing horizon of expectation, but approaches the reconstruction of the well-known episode in a modern manner, employing different innovative language registers and forms.

In particular, Fundoianu uses the *psalm* for a whole category of poems inspired by religious events and personalities; the psalm, a poetic structure and model which expresses a natural connection between the individual voicing his discourse in a prayer or a monologue, and the divinity to which it is addressed, became renowned due to its presence in the Christian and Jewish Bibles. Thus, *Psalmul leprosului*, *Psalmul lui Adam*, *Psalmul lui Abel*, *Psalmul Sulamitei*, and *Psalmul inedit al lui David* were basically monologues through which the characters meditate on their own existence and situation while attempting to communicate with God through a prayer. Mircea Martin's literary analysis of Fundoianu's work, despite not taking into consideration the strong Judaic element in Fundoianu's poetry, explains the presence of these poetic pieces through the clear influence of Tudor Arghezi's poetry.<sup>53</sup> Yet while Arghezi's psalms were mainly inspired by Christian elements, Fundoianu's poetry featured motifs from the Old Testament and a different religious perception: «If for Arghezi, the divine and the sacred were above the human, raised and hidden in the sky, unknown by anybody, for Fundoianu the divine is the landscape of the human soul, or beyond it, a meadow on which he could walk while having a dialogue with the creator. [...] The psalms of Fundoianu are the songs of praise of a man but not of a humble subject. [...] Fundoianu's God lives next to him, with the cattle and the trees, like a peasant caring for his creatures».<sup>54</sup> The religious feeling in Fundoianu's psalms also explains the connection with nature. Moreover, the psalm as a religious poetic form belongs to Judaism as well as to Christianity and the books of psalms of David, Moses and Adam were important parts of the Hebrew Bible and a clear influence of Judaism in Fundoianu's work.

Representations of the Jewish life and culture in Fundoianu's Romanian creations are manifested in a rather compartmentalized way. His «Jewish articles» were published mostly in the Jewish press; his psalms<sup>55</sup> and poems inspired by the Hebrew Bible originally appeared in Jewish publications and were not included in the volume published in 1930, while the messianic lyric influences, the process of de-mythisation of nature and the pantheistic tone in *Privelisti*, although testifying to a strong Hassidic tradition, were integrated into the substance of the poems and associated with expressionism and symbolism. Recollections of Jewish life in Moldova benefited from the personal and emotional way of capturing them in the larger context of a rural milieu ethnographically

<sup>53</sup> Martin, *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20).

<sup>54</sup> Bucur, *Privelistile Poezii* (see footnote 17), 159.

<sup>55</sup> *Sonete biblice*, *Moise*, *Scara lui Iacob*, *Ultima verba*. *Cintarea lui Samson* were published in Zionist publication *Hatikvah*; *Psalmul leprosului* and *Monologul lui Balthazar* in *Lumea evree*, *Psalmul lui Adam* in *Adam*.



represented. This clear separation between works inspired by Judaism and Jewish life, which were addressed to the Jewish community and appeared in Jewish publications, and works on literary criticism and poetry addressed to a wider public in the Romanian language is evidence of the low degree of cultural acceptance and integration of the Jewish community in the wider Romanian environment and thus of a fragmented identity. This situation selectively activated different facets of the poet's intellectual identity in different cultural and political contexts; Fundoianu adjusted his discourse according to the public.

### *1923 – Departure for France*

The departure for France in 1923 and the continuation of his activity in French, although perceived by critics as a fracture in his trajectory, represents a continuation of his poetic quest. He abandoned a set of local cultural references in the process of the essentialisation and universalisation of his discourse for the wider world. Nevertheless, the experience of migration and self-exile brought the replacement of Romanian by French as his artistic language and removal from his network of friends and from the standing he had already gained with the Romanian public. His new condition of emigrant effected a great change in his identity and his perception of his own Jewishness.

As Monique Jutrin has speculated, the motivation for his migration remains unclear: «l'on s'est interrogé sur ce départ: rupture, crise, exil? En fait, plutôt que de rupture, parlons de «passage»; de Fundoianu à Fondane, la continuité est plus importante que la rupture».<sup>56</sup> There was certainly a determination to assert his artistic personality in a larger space with universal circulation and in a more widely spoken language which could ensure a wider dissemination of his works; the «cultural complex of small cultures» affected many other Romanian avant-gardists,<sup>57</sup> Jewish and non-Jewish, and a number of other artists and intellectuals were frustrated by the marginality of Romanian culture and determined to have a European career. In this respect, the publication of his controversial book *Imagini si carti din Franta* (1922) which consisted of a selection of his articles on French culture and literature and was accompanied by a preface declaring that «our literature was a simple parasitism» and that this situation was generated by «our incapacity to assimilate – even more: our lack of remarkable talents, able to transform a foreign nutrition into something ordered and organically ours. Don't we have a soul of our own – a soul distinct and personal – since we can't create a literature able to stand up for itself, without any debt for outside?»<sup>58</sup> The pro-

<sup>56</sup> Monique Jutrin, B. Fundoianu et la modernité, Cahiers Benjamin Fondane, 5 (2001,2002), 9.

<sup>57</sup> The interwar period in Paris attracted many other Romanian intellectuals, mostly Jewish, deciding on a career in French literature and art; Ilarie Voronca, Claude Sernet, Tristan Tzara, Victor Brauner, Constantin Brancusi, but also many others coming for study or periodical participation in artistic events: Emil Dorian, Mihail Sebastian, Felix Aderca, Max Blecher, etc.

<sup>58</sup> B. Fundoianu, *Imagini si carti*, edition of Vasile Teodorescu, introductory study of Martin, Minerva (see footnote 12), 25.

vocative and sarcastic conclusion which perplexed traditionalist national vanity was that «our culture evolved, assigned for itself a profile and a state of mind, became a colony – a colony of French culture»<sup>59</sup> and that «by the fourth grade of high school, one can exhaust our cultural tradition».<sup>60</sup> This generated a heated polemic which was not free of allusions to Fundoianu's Jewish background. Moreover 1922 was not a good year for such a provocation; Fundoianu's vexing assertions came at a time when nationalism had recently been exacerbated by the creation of Greater Romania and the post-war promotion of national culture and tradition in an attempt to nationalise and homogenise the specificities of regional and ethnic groups.<sup>61</sup> Believing in Fundoianu's radicalism, in his rejection of common ideas, conventionalism, clichés and ossification, Mircea Martin wonders if the writer did not deliberately «preface his book this way in order to underline by contrast the freedom and individuality of the comments inside it».<sup>62</sup> The book was a direct provocation addressed to Romanian intellectuals and culture, an attempt to shake up the intellectual inertia of his time, the ossification of literary traditions and the rejection of avant-gardism. But it was also a clear intellectual statement expressed in an admirably self-confident tone and revealed remarkable ease with the French language, and familiarity with its literature and intellectual scene. His approach was that of a critic at ease in French literature, perceiving the situation as a detached Romanian intellectual already living abroad, integrated intellectually into French space and dealing with French topics without complexes, which increased his ability to analyze critically the Romanian scene. From this point on, his divorce from his literary career in Romania described in the 1930 preface to *Privelisti* as his «poetic death» had already become inevitable for an intellectual who was still living in Romania, but already felt himself to be a French intellectual.

In addition to all this, the anti-Jewish attitude of society and especially the anti-Semitic demonstrations in universities in the early 1920s could also have contributed to Fundoianu's departure. The failure of his theatrical project *Insula* was supposedly due to the same anti-Semitic and nationalist demonstrations. Apart from the financial difficulties which were officially declared to be the reason for the failure, Olivier Salazar-Ferrer explained the demise of Fundoianu's theatre project by quoting Claude Emile Rosen, a member of the *Insula* group, who speaking of the social environment of the production, confessed that «Nous nous trouvons dans un océan de malveillance».<sup>63</sup>

Although he would never return, his departure was not definitive as friends and relatives joined him in Paris and extensive correspondence was maintained with his Romanian collaborators leading to a series of publications. His sister and brother-in-law rapidly joined him in Paris: «ces présences vont recréer un

<sup>59</sup> Imagini si carti (see footnote 12), 25.

<sup>60</sup> Imagini si carti (see footnote 12), 26.

<sup>61</sup> Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*, New York 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Martin, *Introducere in opera* (see footnote 20), 64.

<sup>63</sup> Salazar-Ferrer, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 10), 28–29.

microcosme roumain au coeur de Paris. Il y retrouvera aussi ses compatriotes Ilarie Voronca, le comédien Luca Gridu [...], Claude Sernet, Constantin Brancusi [...]. D'autre part, parce qu'il continuera à collaborer de façon substantielle aux revues roumaines». <sup>64</sup> In fact in 1930, with help from his friends back home, Fundoianu published his celebrated volume *Privelisti* in Romania. Nevertheless, this departure had intimate effects. In the preface of *Privelisti* Fundoianu declared that his «poetic death» had occurred in 1923 together with his departure, in his words «this volume belongs to a poet who died at the age of 24, in 1923. Since then, his footprints were long gone across the continent». <sup>65</sup> Metaphorically, the poet suggested the impossibility of compromise: «Dead? No, assassinated according to all the rules of art, after a long moral uremia, where his will to accomplish and his will of being started a terrible fight, each pulling out the other's feathers, and bleeding as in the famous rooster fights in France. To the one biting the dust I survived». <sup>66</sup> Fundoianu also admitted that for the four following years he was unable to create: «I thought that poetry inside me suddenly exhausted by a hand bringing seven years of thin cows», <sup>67</sup> until he wrote his first poem in French, ironically entitled *Exercice de français*, published in *Contimporanul* review back home and dedicated to his friend, Ion Vinea. His (inner) exile, even more dangerous and complicated than the geographical one, had become a permanent characteristic of his work.

### *Benjamin Fondane – the French Period*

After his departure for France, Benjamin Fundoianu changed his literary name to Benjamin Fondane and under the influence of Leon Chestov turned towards Existentialist philosophy; studies such as *Rimbaud le Voyou* (1933), *La conscience malheureuse* (1936), *Faux traite d'esthetique* (1938) and *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* (posthumous, 1947) mixed philosophy and aesthetics and confirmed him as one of the leading thinkers of Existentialist philosophy. His philosophical thought was illustrated and supported by his poetic activity in a complex ideological continuity between theoretical writing and lyrical production; his major poems *Ulysses* (1933), *Titanic* (1937) and *Exode. Super Flumina Babylonis* (posthumous, 1965) essentialised the poetic discourse of Fondane which focuses on the poetic and existential self and on the search for answers to the poet's philosophical questions. In this way, his French poetry became a monumental attempt to define his new intellectual quests and was deeply connected to his philosophical works; his main poems and his existentialist philosophy belonged to the same intellectual flux.

<sup>64</sup> Salazar-Ferrer, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 10), 32.

<sup>65</sup> Above edition of Poezii, 1983, preface for volume *Privelisti* (see footnote 12), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Above note of Poezii (see footnote 12), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Above note of Poezii (see footnote 12), 8.

As Leon Volovici stated, Fondane «places himself, therefore, among those existentialist philosophers who, owing to certain particular features, could be classified under the label of «Jewish» existentialism»<sup>68</sup> and «speaks of an existentialist thought directly related to prophetic thought, a philosophy «de la liberté; du possible, de l'absurde»».<sup>69</sup> In his profound identity search, his Jewish roots became the center and the substance of his creation. They structured his philosophical writings: elements of Kabala were visible in his study on Rimbaud, while his existentialist discourse itself owed a lot to Judaism, «on reconnaît ici les fondements mêmes de la tradition juive: la croyance en un Dieu qui renouvelle tous les jours l'acte de la Genèse, le refus d'accepter le mal comme nécessité inscrite dans l'existence, le pouvoir de la prière et du cri, l'espérance messianique».<sup>70</sup>

The condition of being Jewish stood out in all three major poems as a symbol of the human and of artistic existence with its permanently mobile, restless and searching position. A significant motif and obsession ever-present in Fondane's French work and which migrated from his tragic existentialist philosophy to poetry and from poem to poem was the image of the emigrant, of the exile in various forms such as the traveller, the doomed poet, and Ulysses, all connected by an obsession with voyage, apocalyptic changes, rootlessness, unfortunate human nature, and conscience. In different forms, these topics and motifs appear in all his French poems and the issue of the «unhappy condition» of the human being also haunted his philosophical writings. A possible explanation for this focus on the idea of rootlessness and displacement could be the inherent trauma of migration, of removal from the familiar language, country, and social networks where Fondane had already achieved literary celebrity in exchange for a new free space of total foreignness, alienation and difficult beginnings. Another factor which caused Fondane to face his circumstances and translate them into metaphysics was the political radicalization of international (and French) political life: «Although he integrated very well in France or maybe, to be more precise, from the moment when his integration stopped being a problem for him, Fondane leaves the impression that he assumes in a more and more profound way his Jewish condition. Actually, this internalization does not have to do so much with integration, but with increasing terror, with the circle getting smaller and smaller around Judaism».<sup>71</sup>

Starting from Fondane's declaration in connection with his poem *Ulysse* that «il semble qu'il y ait des poèmes qui ne se déprennent pas du poète, le poursuivent, le harcèlent, l'obligent sans cesse à le reconsidérer, et dessinent finalement une sorte de destin»,<sup>72</sup> critics noticed that the motif of Ulysses recurred in his poetry from his Romanian beginnings until the last poems and in time it became

<sup>68</sup> Leon Volovici, Benjamin Fondane. Judaism as individual experience and existentialist philosophy, Jerusalem 1990, 81.

<sup>69</sup> Volovici, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 68), 82.

<sup>70</sup> Gilla Eisenberg, B. Fondane, Juif témoin, Cahiers Benjamin Fondane, 2 (1998), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Mircea Martin, «Exista in figura destinului nostru lucruri ce nu pot fi schimbate», volume B. Fundoianu. Strigat intru eternitate, Caietele culturale «Realitatea evreiasca», edition of Geo Serban, Bucharest, 1998, 69.

<sup>72</sup> Messages, Thouars, France, 1942.



a symbol of his poetic self, his double in poetry. But it was also reshaped as «le Juif errant», as a Jewish version of the mythological character, in order to represent human destiny and the condition of the poet himself. Thus, the tragic existentialism in Fondane's work found a metaphorical and literary representation through this complex structure of images.

In this constellation of literary and philosophical motives and obsessions, *solitude* appeared prominently and generated the pretext for the poet to investigate human nature through an exploration of his own existence: «Voici la vérité je suis seul / seul dans ma propre nuit où mon ombre se couche»<sup>73</sup> declared the poet exasperatedly with reference to his intimate state of being. His loneliness was part of an initial process of analyzing his own position in the larger social and metaphysical context, reaching exasperation, desperation and an instinctive search for divinity: «SEUL! j'étais seul soudain au monde avec mon rire / j'étais seul! je cherchais où pouvait être Dieu».<sup>74</sup> The dramatic and resigned conclusion «il n'y a pas de vide et je suis seul au monde»<sup>75</sup> opened the way for a further examination of his condition moving towards a contextualization of the poet's connection with his roots and space, territory, language, and mankind.

### *Images of Rootlessness – Foreigner, Migrant, Traveller*

The poet perceives himself in all three poems as a migrant, a foreigner, a rootless being: «Moi-même étais-je sans racines».<sup>76</sup> The condition of being in constant tension with the place of current residence is traumatic and became the central motif of the poetry written after his departure.

The perpetual *foreigner*, without a country, subjected to endless emptiness, became the poetic voice of Ulysses: «je suis un étranger je le sais / je n'ai pas de patrie attachée à mes pieds / plus rien qui me relie à quelque quai du vide».<sup>77</sup> Being a foreigner means assuming a condition that others have imposed on him, and is finally accepted as he is a man who does not live in his own country and does not have even one of his own, but is attached to the void itself. Expanding on the condition of being a foreigner, the poet suggested the impossibility of communication; the individual can be a foreigner within his own group as the language places barriers between people: «Car nous sommes étrangers les uns parmi les autres / notre langue n'est pas pareille / quand même il n'y aurait qu'une seule langue au monde, / qu'un seul mot dans le monde. / Je parle: qui est là pour m'entendre?».<sup>78</sup> Thus the individual can be a foreigner among his own people and to himself too. The image of the human being suggests the prototype of the foreigner: «Non de ceux qui sont étrangers sur une terre étrangère / ni étrangers parmi les étrangers / mais de celui qui est étranger parmi les siens /

<sup>73</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 44.

<sup>76</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 31.

<sup>77</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 58.

<sup>78</sup> L'Exode. Super Flumina Babylonis, preface of Claude Sernet, La fenetre ardente, 1965, 39.

étranger pour lui-même / car l'homme n'est pas chez lui sur cette terre / étranger où qu'il aille [...] / cette terre n'est pas à lui.»<sup>79</sup> Being a foreigner also brings the impossibility of creation, of performance, of joy and living life to the fullest; the poet rhetorically questions his audience on this issue, which became a self-evident fact as there was no normality in this new situation of the poetic self: «Comment voulez-vous que je chante sur une terre étrangère?»<sup>80</sup>

Instant identification with a group of *migrants* makes the poet idealise their symbolic condition and finally associate with them through the similarity of their existence; rootlessness, anxiety, lack of physical property and material connection with a definite place, indecisiveness and subjection to fate transform the wretched people into «prophets», «diamonds» and «salt»: «émigrants, diamants de la terre, sel sauvage / prophètes du vouloir-vivre dans l'infortune / je suis de votre race / je suis un chercheur d'or je n'ai pas des racines / je mange tous les jours le pain de mon angoisse / je pose mon poing dur sur la table du monde / je suis de ceux qui n'ont rien, qui veulent tout / je ne saurai jamais me résigner».<sup>81</sup> By identifying his intellectual condition with the material reality of a group of migrants, the poet idealizes the group and invests his own spiritual quest in this socially marginal category. But he also takes over their visual and material attributes to materialize his own state of mind into a more credible image. The process of migration as a personal experience is briefly described as a mechanical act of changing places and communities endlessly in a permanent actualization of *displacement*, where the emotional consequence is signalled through the difficulty of adapting to the new language: «j'ai quitté les trottoirs de la ville, pour d'autres trottoirs de villes / les millions d'hommes pour d'autres millions d'hommes / les mêmes à n'en plus finir / je n'en avais jamais assez / pourquoi me suis-je déplacé / les mots se meurent de changer de bouche».<sup>82</sup> The permanent condition of migration is symbolized by the image of the endless route and road against which any emotional manifestation and reaction would prove useless: «à quoi servent sanglots et plaintes? / la route marche et ne finit pas».<sup>83</sup> The permanence of this condition made the poet question his fate and the divine decisions which had made his will futile; his permanent travel was able to «throw him on the road» despite his will: «pourquoi suis-je parti quand même / et qui m'a jeté sur les routes».<sup>84</sup> The endless travel is turned into mechanical metaphors with metaphysical hints; migrants with their ceaseless movement become the living proof of the round earth: «nous étions une preuve que la terre était ronde».<sup>85</sup> At the same time, life is confounded with the travel and road itself: «une vie sans escale / une vie attachée à une roue et qui tourne».<sup>86</sup>

<sup>79</sup> L'Exode (see footnote 78), 41.

<sup>80</sup> L'Exode (see footnote 78), 69.

<sup>81</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 31.

<sup>82</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 18.

<sup>83</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 35.

<sup>84</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 68.

<sup>85</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 67.



The poetic self is an inborn *traveller*. Defined as a tourist, at the beginning of his poem *Titanic*, the traveller is not unique, as he is among many other individuals with whom he is easily confounded: «Quelque part / le voyageur s'égare dans une forêt d'hommes [...] / Mais il y a-t-il encore des voyageurs, des pas / dans le sable, des touristes dévorés par des squales».<sup>87</sup> Yet by the end of the poem, the famous «Mon voyage n'est pas fini...[...] / Le voyageur n'a pas fini de voyager»<sup>88</sup> became a symbol for human existence subject to fate and tragedy. Essentialising the meanings that Fondane allotted to migration as a process, Gabriella Farina also perceives it philosophically in the context of his theoretical studies: «Emigrare diviene così con Fondane il simbolo di un pensiero e di una vita che ama tutte le variazioni, che nutre una misteriosa complicità con l'Ineluttabile e forse anche una certa fascinazione della tragedia».<sup>89</sup>

Subjected to this obsessive image of the rootless person, Fondane included in his poem the *Chanson de l'Emigrant* in which the main themes of the endless road, and of never-ending travel were presented in a folkloric tone, a popular song which had appeared a couple of decades earlier, inspired by the massive migration of Jews from Eastern Europe to America. The image of travel, migration and exile confounds itself metaphorically with the Biblical Exodus. Thus Fondane's consciousness of being in exile empathically enforced the revelation of the sufferings of the Jewish people.

### *Forms of Jewish Self-Identification*

The poet identifies himself as being Jewish in a number of ways and this identification turns into a metaphor representing the artist's condition as well as the human being as such due to certain characteristics on which Fondane grounded the image of the Jew in his work. His self-portrait started unmistakably with him declaring himself «Juif naturellement et cependant Ulysse»;<sup>90</sup> thus his Jewish identity is connected both with Biblical tradition, religion and metaphysical experience, and with the recent social history of the pogroms, massive migrations and Jewish life described in his poems. His rootless persona still remembers the village of his childhood in the manner of the Chagall's paintings whose works he commented on while in France: «ville de petits juifs accrochés à l'air».<sup>91</sup>

The strong identification with tradition, the past, religion, and history is a continuation of the less engaged and less passionate poems from his Romanian period, when he sometimes used Judaism as a source for intellectual exercises of recreating atmosphere. In the same way Ancient Greece and the Ottoman Empire had served as pretexts. But here, in contrast to the earlier work, Jewish history is employed to reinforce identity and identification with the universal destiny of rootlessness: «j'étais venu de loin, de plus loin que l'Histoire! / Le Nil me ra-

<sup>87</sup> *Titanic*, Les Cahiers du «Journal des poètes», Bruxelles, 1937, 20.

<sup>88</sup> *Titanic* (see footnote 87), 88.

<sup>89</sup> Farina, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 20), 25.

<sup>90</sup> *Ulysse* (see footnote 1), 15.

<sup>91</sup> *Ulysse* (see footnote 1), 23.

contait le soir / ma romance. J'avais / fait la Mer Rouge à pied. Avais-je cru, / avais-je vraiment cru qu'on pouvait t'arrêter / Histoire, avais-je cru / que le fusil sans Lui / allait changer le cours des temps?». <sup>92</sup> In times of crisis the poet remembered to pray and to reconnect with Judaism and tradition as the center and salvation of his being: «Me voici Aaron. / Je me mets à genoux et je sanglote et crie / en une langue que j'ai oubliée, mais dont / je me souviens aux soirs émus de Ta Colère: / Adonai, Elochenu, Adonai Echod!». <sup>93</sup>

The second path of identification followed the existing Jewish communities; Eastern European Jewry, specifically the Northern Moldavian Jewish community, was described as the original point of departure for exploration of the wider world: «je viens d'une petite ville blanche où pissaient les vaches / les héliotropes débordaient le soutien-gorge des haies / [...] / ville de petits juifs accrochés à l'air / les trottoirs étaient des rubans sales / j'étouffais de bonheur de dégoût / ça sentait le pain frais et le hareng salé / l'amour sentait la bouse humide / j'ai chanté tout cela mais j'ai voulu partir / je voulais l'univers pathétique». <sup>94</sup>

The Romanian background was reduced to the function of locating the birthplace of the poet. As we have seen, the evocation of the Moldavian shtetl was accompanied by an idyllic description of the rural surroundings which were populated with peasants, animals and plants in a description with a pantheistic tone influenced by Hassidism. Despite its secondary function, the Romanian locality determined the association of the landscape with a specific Eastern European culture, and with a typical Romanian rural space; involuntary associations with current events sent the poet back in time to his birthplace: «pourquoi l'océan me fait-il penser à ces plaines de Besserabie / on y marchait longtemps et c'était long la vie steppe!» <sup>95</sup>. The poet never went as far as to name the country, despite naming places and regions belonging to it; as a perpetual migrant, the poet questioned himself rhetorically and generically about his nameless country of birth: «Qui se souvient encore de son pays natal?»- <sup>96</sup> The failure to materialize his country within his French poetry fits with the quasi-definite and demonstrative separation of Fondane from Romania; he never returned to his country of origin, despite the past he had abandoned there, as his desire to leave it came as a strong rejection of the original space: «Je n'avais pas revu la terre / qui me pressait de voyager? / Les morts m'appelaient, les vivants, / je ne pouvais les démeler. / Il y avait tant de visages / et les pays dormaient debout – / encore, encore de la terre, / je n'en avais jamais assez!». <sup>97</sup>

<sup>92</sup> L'Exode (see footnote 78), 56.

<sup>93</sup> L'Exode (see footnote 78), 54.

<sup>94</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 23.

<sup>95</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 25.

<sup>96</sup> Titanic (see footnote 87), 81.

<sup>97</sup> L'Exode (see footnote 78), 23.

*The Jew as a Perpetual Migrant*

At this point, the poetic and philosophical equation within Fondane's work started to reveal itself. The poet as a lonely traveller, empathically identified with groups of Jewish migrants focalized his obsessive voyages and his tragic Jewish condition in the image of «le Juif errant» which finally eclipses the symbolism of Ulysses. The motif of the wandering Jew has had a long career in world literature and culture and is employed in Fondane's work in connection with his own poetic and largely human self: «Ulysse serait-il une nouvelle métamorphose du Juif errant? Chez Fondane, le juif errant se superpose souvent à l'émigrant, à l'homme sans terre ni langue, traqué, persécuté. La condition de l'émigrant incarne la condition terrestre de l'exilé. Mais ce n'est qu'un aspect du voyageur, car celui-ci se révolte contre un destin imposé, il refuse d'en être passivement le jouet, il réclame un sens et un lieu, se situant dans l'Histoire et contre l'Histoire. [...] Cette revendication d'un sens, d'un sens de l'Histoire, est profondément ancrée dans le judaïsme».<sup>98</sup>

Although not very visible on the surface of the poetic discourse, the Jewish identity groups the other elements around itself and structures the message of the poem: the poet, travel, human existence. Everything seems to be reduced to the all-embracing Jewish condition; the poet, human existence and travel grant attributes to the wandering Jew as much as to the poet; human existence and travel take on characteristics of the mythical character himself.

The dramatic image of the Jews traveling on a ship was only one among other representations of the fatal voyage: «vous rêvez des ponts de troisième où des juifs chassieux / sanglotent en hébreu, assis sur des caisses d'oignons, / ils pleurent immobiles, perclus d'étoiles froides, / et personne ne les attend de l'autre côté de la nuit...».<sup>99</sup> The poet identified with the Jewish group through an empathic attitude and evocation of the dramatic story of the Jewish migrants pushed towards other lands by persecutions, pogroms, and poverty: «où allez-vous mes frères / [...] / votre sang fouette mon sang, votre paupière me soulève / vous chevauchez la nuit des temps / vous êtes ma soif permanente / je vous ai vus quittant les poches des provinces / avec, pour tout passé, une conjonctivite / les pogroms de Russie vous avaient chassés hors des villes / vous n'aviez que votre vie dans les valises / pauvres juifs qui ramiez sur une mer de sang / quel or vous attirait dans les pays de tête / quels crépuscules vouliez-vous semer en terre / émigrants vous n'aviez pas de racines / ressemeurs de mots, bijoutiers d'accidents / vous aviez une source terrible d'énergie / dans vos mains je lisais une ligne de vie».<sup>100</sup> This long description of Jewish destiny transferred the mythical attributes of a perpetual wanderer to the presentation of the real group by creating a constructed assumed past and a previous existence. Empathizing and identifying with the common history and past, the poet transforms the otherwise realistically described group on the ship into a symbolic embodiment of the literary figure of the wandering Jew.

<sup>98</sup> Monique Jutrin, *Ulysse. Poesie et destin*, Europe review, 827 (1998), 75.

<sup>99</sup> *Titanic* (see footnote 87), 33.

<sup>100</sup> *Ulysse* (see footnote 1), 30.

*From Individual Discourse to Universal Representation*

The artistic self voicing the discourse had by this point become a representative for mankind, a witness, a symbol, the universal individual, but still a man among others: «Oui, j'ai été un homme comme les autres hommes, / nourri de pain, de rêve, de désespoir. Eh, oui, / j'ai aimé, j'ai pleuré, j'ai haï, j'ai souffert».<sup>101</sup> But at the same time, the ambition of representing humanity was present in his poems as in «Mes mots mes maux sont ceux de tout le monde»<sup>102</sup> or «Le sang le sang du monde passe à travers mes reins».<sup>103</sup> This desire to stretch beyond individuality and to represent more than a common human being granted him the right to voice the drama of the people, as well as his own. Being like everyone else and sharing the same feelings and experiences offered foundations for collecting emotions, actions and processes; by connecting to the wider category, to the world or mankind, the poet suggested the channelling of shared commonality into a louder voicing process performed in his poems. Between programmatically declaring that «Je ne suis qu'un témoin»<sup>104</sup> and his project of «écorcher l'univers»,<sup>105</sup> the Poet became a character in *Ulysses*: «J'étais un grand poète né pour chanter la joie».<sup>106</sup> The precise function of voicing joy and songs turned into the capacity of telling the story of himself, his people, and mankind. In this larger context, «la figure du voyageur s'éclaire de manière plus tragique. En elle se confondent son destin d'homme, de poète et de juif. L'on est frappé par une identification croissante avec un destin collectif, une solidarité avec les siens, avec son peuple, dans un texte où résonne fortement la rumeur de la catastrophe».<sup>107</sup>

*Conclusions*

Discussing the Jewish presence in Fondane's work, Leon Volovici noticed that «Just as the Jewish world from his native Moldavia became in his youth a source of inspiration for his lyrical *Privelisti*, in the essays published in the 1930s Fundoianu / Fondane transcended the Judaic structures, still involving it as a passageway for the process of exploration of the meaning of creation and as a possible answer to his philosophically existentialist questions».<sup>108</sup> Although not very visible during his Romanian period, the Judaic influence on Fondane's creation was a strong foundation grounded in his origins, childhood, traditions and culture. Placed in a marginalized position (appearing in articles published in the Romanian Jewish press with limited circulation), in the situation of a simple literary source of inspiration among others or functioning as an ineffable, but sub-

<sup>101</sup> L'Exode (see footnote 78), 14.

<sup>102</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 20.

<sup>103</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 18.

<sup>104</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 74.

<sup>105</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 15.

<sup>106</sup> Ulysse (see footnote 1), 9.

<sup>107</sup> Jutrin, Ulysse. Poesie et destin (see footnote 98), 74

<sup>108</sup> Volovici, preface for Judaism and Elenism (see footnote 14), 16.



stantial presence in his poetry of *Privelisti*, the representations of Fondane's Jewish identity contained a note of discretion. Due to socio-political circumstances Fondane kept his Jewish sources and works «at home» for the community audience; this publicly divided identity (although unable to function on a more profound level, as the metaphysical substance of his poetry – even the pantheism, perceived as «traditional» and of rural inspiration in *Privelisti*, contained a strong Hassidic and Judaic *Weltanschauung*) was activated differently according to the audience and intellectual milieu; he adjusted the cultural references, the topics and the sources of inspiration. This situation was generated by the low level of social and cultural integration of the Jewish community in Romania at that time, associated with a lack of political and civic acceptance, with anti-Semitic manifestations and the lack of civil rights.

In the representations of his Jewish identity after his migration to France, a process of repositioning and reshaping the Jewishness at the centre of his identity has transformed it into a metaphor for his universal human poetic identity. His poems testify to a displacement of his Jewish identity from the marginal strata of his creation towards the centre of his artistic work and self. In a wide-ranging meditation on the destiny of mankind, Fondane employs the symbol of «le Juif errant» in its modern version of «Jewish Ulysses» as a cultural metaphor for the common trait of migration, travel, exile through space, time, and human existence. Both a common human being and a Jew, Fondane gave up all the ethnic, local, traditional traits of his condition as Moldavian Jew, Romanian speaking, Eastern European, in order to represent humanity as the Poet, the one who is able to translate these symbols and communicate the general beyond the particular. To support the centrality of this poetic equation of traveller-Jew-poet-Man, the solid Judaic foundations of his philosophy determined a certain continuity between his theoretical and poetic work, allowing researchers to treat his French poetry as a long-term process of rewriting a single poem with different circumstantial variations: the poem of *Ulysses*, *Exodus* / Exile, travel / migration under different hypostases. His own experience of migration together with his metaphysically assumed condition of being Jewish determined this profound mutation and concentration on Jewish identity as an intellectual, humanist, and philosophical approach to a general reality: «elements from the Bible and Jewish mystics are fused in a modern poetry intended not as a variation on biblical themes, nor as «Jewish» or «religious» lyrics, but as the lyrical proof of the tragic consciousness of a man, who chose the biblical voice because it was his. Hesitating between metaphysical despair and the longing for universal brotherhood, the poet transformed himself into a suffering and pathetic prophet, searching in the Jewish tradition for the meaning of existence and his own destiny».<sup>109</sup>

In this case, the experience of *exile*, both as a practical experience and as a poetic symbol for the alienation and permanent condition of the poet and ultimately of the whole humanity symbolized by the Jewish condition, proved to be crucial in determining the crystallization of Fondane's discourse from the Romanian pe-

<sup>109</sup> Volovici, Benjamin Fondane (see footnote 68), 83.

riod into the existentialist philosophy. For him Judaism and Jewish identity meant exile, just as much as human condition and poetry represented alienation and permanent quest. Integrating into his own life the concept of exile as his destiny, Fondane's life and work can be seen as the illustration of the fact that «d'un certain point de vue, l'existence ne serait donc que cela, un exil permanent, exil qui est inscrit dans la biographie et dans le nom même de cet auteur. Benjamin Fondane abrite en lui une identité portative, un enracinement dans une terre, et pourtant il voyage».<sup>110</sup> To sum up, the greater significance of his work is that it uses the Jewish experience as a metaphor to express human existence in its universal and essential substance.

*«Juif naturellement et cependant Ulysse». Representations of Jewish Identity in the Work of Benjamin Fondane*

The article analyses the place that Jewish identity, the connection with the Jewish community, culture and religion received within the work of Benjamin Fundoianu / Benjamin Fondane. Discussing the representations of Jewish identity in Fundoianu / Fondane's work, a great difference could be noticed between his Romanian and French periods, meaning before and after his migration. As well, apart from the fact that being Jewish in France meant in late 1920s and 1930s a different thing from the previous decades in Romania, the experience of migration, removal from family, friendships, social networks, as well as from a certain popularity brought by his great creativity in Romania shocked the inner world of the poet and made it revolve around itself. In this context, analyzing the changes in ways of representing his Jewish identity, as well as his connection with the Jewish world, the conclusion is that they differed and shifted from an ethnographic, religious identification destined mainly for the Jewish public in Romania through his presence in Jewish Romanian publications, towards a universal metaphor dominating his poetic and philosophical work in French. In my interpretation, the experience of migration, of deliberate removal from a familiar environment generated an essentialization and redefinition of his creative and metaphysical self around the centrality and universalism of his Jewish identity.

*«Juis naturellement et cependant Ulysse». Repräsentationen jüdischer Identität im Werk Benjamin Fondanes*

Der Beitrag analysiert den Ort, welchen eine jüdische Identität, die Verbindung mit der jüdischen Gemeinschaft, Kultur und Religion im Werk von Benjamin Fundoianu / Benjamin Fondane erhielten. In der Analyse der Repräsentationen von jüdischer Identität in Fundianus/Fondanes Werk wurde ein grosser Unterschied zwischen seiner rumänischen und seiner französischen Periode, d.h. seinem Schaffen vor und nach der Emigration nach Frankreich erkannt. Neben der Tatsache, dass Jüdischsein in Frankreich in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren etwas anderes hiess als während der vorausgegangenen Jahrzehnte in Rumänien, war es die Migrationserfahrung, die Entfernung von Familie, Freunden und sozialen Netzwerken sowie von der Popularität, die er sich durch seine grosse Kreativität in Rumänien erarbeitet hatte, welche die innere Welt des Autors schockten. Auf diese innere Welt konzentrierte er sich nach der Emigration verstärkt. In diesem Kontext lässt sich aus der Analyse der Veränderung in der Repräsentation der jüdischen Identität Fondanes und seiner Verbindung mit der jüdischen Welt schliessen, dass sich diese von einer ethnographischen, religiösen Identifikation, die durch die Präsenz in jüdischen rumänischen Publikationen in erster Linie für das jüdische Publikum in Rumänien bestimmt war, hin zu einer universalen Metapher bewegte, welche sein französischsprachiges dichterisches und philosophisches Werk bestimmte. In meiner Interpretation hat die Migrationserfahrung,

<sup>110</sup> Marc Kober, *La vie-fantome*, Europe review, 827 (1998), 63.



der freiwillige Weggang von einem ihm bekannten Umfeld zu einer Essentialisierung und Redefinition des kreativen und metaphysischen Selbst Fondanes geführt, welche sich auf die Zentralität und den Universalismus seiner jüdischen Identität konzentrierte.

*«Juif naturellement et cependant Ulysse». Les représentations de l'identité juive dans l'œuvre de Benjamin Fondane*

L'article analyse la place que prennent l'identité juive et la connexion avec la communauté, la culture et la religion juives dans l'œuvre de Beniamin Fundoianu / Benjamin Fondane. L'analyse des représentations de l'identité juive dans l'œuvre de Fundoianu / Fondane révèle une grande différence entre sa période roumaine et sa période française, c'est-à-dire avant et après sa migration. À part le fait qu'être juif en France dans les années 1920 et 1930 signifiait autre chose qu'en Roumanie dans les décades antérieures, l'expérience de la migration, de la séparation de sa famille, de ses amis, de son réseau social, ainsi que d'une certaine popularité acquise grâce à sa grande créativité en Roumanie, ébranla le monde intérieur du poète qui se replia et se concentra sur lui-même. Dans ce contexte, l'analyse des changements dans la façon de représenter son identité juive, ainsi que de sa connexion au monde juif, démontre que Fondane passa d'une identification ethnographique et religieuse, destinée principalement au public juif en Roumanie par sa présence dans des publications juives roumaines, à une métaphore universelle dominant son œuvre poétique et philosophique en langue française. Mon interprétation est que l'expérience de la migration et de la séparation délibérée de l'environnement familial afin de chercher un nouveau contexte engendra une essentialisation et une redéfinition de son soi créatif et métaphysique autour de la centralité et de l'universalisme de son identité juive.

*Schlüsselbegriffe – Mots clés – Keywords*

Jüdische Identität – identité juive – jewish identity, Intellektuelle – intellectuels – intellectuals, Migration – migration – migration, rumänische Zwischenkriegszeit – période d'entre-deux-guerres roumaine – Romanian interwar period, Akkulturation – acculturation – acculturation, französische Kultur – culture française – French culture, der «herumirrende Jude» – «le Juif Errant» – wanderin Jew, Ulysses – Ulysse – Ulysses, Reise als Metapher – le voyage en tant que métaphore – travel as a metaphor, Existentialismus – existentialisme – existentialism

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