MIRARI, MIRABILIA, MIRROR

REFLECTIONS OF REALITY IN LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are fully responsible for the originality of their papers and for the accuracy of their notes.

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Mirari, Mirabilia, Mirror

Reflections of Reality in Literature and Linguistics

INTRODUCTION

One of the most common activities that people do on a regular basis is looking in the mirror. Whether people like what they see or not, whether the mirror distorts the image of the reflected object or sometimes replaces it with a new image, looking at the self in a mirror puts everybody in some sort of puzzlement (*mirari*), which turns this activity into an uncanny experience. Since a mirror reproduces what comes from outside, the practice of mirroring creates the impression of a parallel space and time, which reflects the acknowledged division between reality and illusion. Being the marvelous (*mirabilia*) instrument for showing people themselves, mirrors can act as both deceivers and carriers of truth, as separators between what we want to see and what we fear to see.

The unforeseeable evolution of this banal object, once rare and expensive, has determined the direction our civilization actually takes. In classical antiquity mirrors were attributed a heuristic value, which explained the natural phenomena, miracles and the unseen atomic world. In the Middle Ages, mirrors played an essential part in folklore and folk tales. The metaphor of the mirror as a beautifying instrument for women was the major theme of many religious works which gave birth to the mirror literature (*Speculum Virginum*). The Renaissance invented the glass mirror, "the technological marvel of the age" (Herbert Grabes), which made the individual more aware of her/his identity and made possible a new reflexive self-consciousness. In early modern, modern and contemporary times, mirrors have been employed as metaphors for rationality and knowledge, strongly rooted in psychology, linguistics and semiotics. Richard Rorty considered that knowledge is nothing but a mirror-image of the world.

Reflecting and *speculating* upon the world around us, while *considering* the information that we have about it, all this is done by means of words. The connection between language and thought has been analyzed ever since antiquity. Language has been seen as an expression of thoughts (Aristotle), it reflects an immediate, sensorial experience (Empiricism), or is a mere expression of reasoning (Rationalism); it creates a representation of

reality (Wittgenstein), shapes our views of the world (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) or articulates innate abilities to communicate (Chomsky).

A synchronic analysis of language offers a snapshot of reality at a specific time in the development of a linguistic community; analysed in diachrony, language provides an indicator of the change of mentalities and of technical and scientific progress. Therefore, it mirrors the world we live in, but it can also skillfully mystify reality, when need be. It reflects people's personalities, it is therefore as much a mirror of its users', as it is of the world they are part of and wonder about. As Ben Johnson said, "Language most shows a man: speak that I may see thee!" More often than not, people tend to hide behind words, cultivating ambiguities and innuendoes, irony and vagueness, and the word becomes a multi-faceted mirror, reflecting for each of us the meaning that we are inclined to associate with it and/or able to grasp.

Given that the boundaries between reality and illusion are often blurry, it would be more appropriate and comprehensive to study the various ways that mirrors have reflected reality throughout the ages from diverse disciplinary stances. Indeed, as the present volume, *Mirari, Mirabilia, Mirror, Reflections of Reality in Literature and Linguistics* suggests, the ambivalence of the mirror reflects both divinity and humanity, which explains the mirror's evolution from a luxury object to a quotidian accessory. In their attempt to frame interdisciplinarity, the authors delve into science and art; literature and discourse studies; literature and philosophy; cultural and gender studies; theoretical and applied linguistics; translation, comparative studies, and EFL teaching methodology studies.

The volume is divided into two sections: *Reflections of Reality in Literature and Cultural Studies* and *Reflections of Reality in Linguistics and Teaching Methodology.*

In the first section of the book, *Reflections of Reality in Literature and Cultural Studies,* five chapters highlight various literary and cultural approaches to the reflective power of narratives in both oral and written forms.

In the first chapter, *The Enlightenment as Wunderkammer: Mirabilia, Knowledge, and the Paradigm of Homo Narrans*, Elena Butoescu

revisits the Enlightenment from the perspective of the cabinet of curiosities, a Wunderkammer that mapped out a territory of reverberating stories told by *homo narrans* about the mirabilia of the East: looking in the geographical mirror, the European storyteller marvels and wonders at the paradigmatic ambivalence of knowledge which reasonably serves to decode the metaphorical meanings of existence. Butoescu comments on how eighteenth-century intellectuals sought to encourage spurious publications to promote education, a practice that stands proof of the paradoxical nature of the Enlightenment.

Cosmin Dragoste's chapter, *Im Spiegel des Wortes. Rolf Bosserts Lyrik*, argues that Rolf Bossert's poetry is best understood as a specular interface between his own body, with physical organs mutating into poetic ones, and the reality of life in communist Romania. A member of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, a literary group founded by writers of German ethnic origin who used literature as a form of resistance against the totalitarian regime, Bossert's literary experiments revolve around the central metaphor of the eye, which often becomes a collective mirror registering the increasingly oppressive events of life.

Roxana-Andreea Ghiță's essay, *Postmoderne Selbstspiegelung und (Re)-Konstruktion der Geschichte in den Romanen „Helden wie wir" (1995) von Thomas Brussig und „Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă" (2007) von Mircea Cărtărescu*, deals with the fictional potrayal of the 1989 revolution in the novels *Helden wie wir* by the German writer Thomas Brussig and *Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă* by the Romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu. The analysis focuses on strategies of postmodern autodiegetic narration and functions of metaisation in the representation of history. Ghiță explores how questions of authorial self-reflection are intertwined with the reflection of revolutionary upheavals and the reconstruction of the individual and collective past in the medium of the postmodern novel.

In the fourth chapter, *How Print Culture Reflects Orality: Literacy and the Formation of Literary Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*, Dragoș Ivana assesses the orality-print culture dyad in order to determine the extent to which these categories intermingled and reflected each other in eighteenth-century England. Although understood as two oppositional

modes of transmitting knowledge in the early decades of the century, the oral tradition became the subject matter of a wide range of printed texts, as well as of new literary forms, such as the periodical essay and the newspaper and, ultimately, of the novel, a genre which, by convention, rose to prominence in 1740. Once oral culture has been appropriated by the world of print, readers were offered new forms of entertainment which substantially contributed to shaping literary taste and to cultivating readers' aesthetic pleasure.

As Loredana Salis shows in the fifth chapter, *What She Loved Best in the World. Desire, Beauty and Nationalist Propaganda in 'The Mirror of Truth' by Constance Markievicz (1909)*, the transgressive, the destructive and the creative potential of mirrors can be so powerful as to reconcile dreams and reality, while pursuing beauty. In her reading of *The Mirror of Truth*, Salis pays special attention to its economies of desire and the nexus between desire and beauty in their relation to mirrors. Written by Constance Markievicz and published in 1909 in the Irish nationalist-feminist monthly *Bean na hÉireann*, *The Mirror of Truth* is a peculiar piece of nationalist propaganda, exemplary of Markievicz's rebel writings. Largely unknown even among the Irish scholarly community, this is an allegorical tale well worth re-discovering today.

The second section of the book, *Reflections of Reality in Linguistics and Teaching Methodology* consists of eight chapters dealing with topics on applied linguistics from the perspective of discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics (multilingualism), and teaching methodology.

Examples from media discourse start off with Tania Baumann's contribution *Der Spiegel im Spiegel der Zeit. Funktionen von Metaphern in Pressetexten*, which discusses, from a diachronic perspective, the different functions of metaphors in the headlines of the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel* (in English: *The Mirror*), one of the most influential media publications in Germany. The study examines a corpus of cover stories dealing with important periods of West German history: the young democracy of the 1950s, the 1968 movement, reunification, the Merkel era, and the right-wing populist AfD. Based on a holistic concept of metaphor that integrates rhetorical-stylistic and cognitive approaches, Baumann's

analysis investigates the text-structuring, illustrative, and cognitive functions of metaphors in the interplay between reading incentive strategies, information transfer and opinion formation.

In her contribution entitled *Media Discourse – between an Objective Reflection of Reality and Emotionalism*, Andreea Bratu makes an analysis of the ways in which English language newspapers (*The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Guardian*) report on the bushfires that ravaged Australia in 2019, by enhancing the dramatic effects of the disaster in order to trigger an emotional response from the readers. The analysis examines the rhetoric devices used to this purpose, the voices employed to render the facts more vivid and authentic, as well as the impact that the reports have on the readers and on the reconsideration of their social role and cultural identity.

In the eighth chapter, *Formale und inhaltliche Spiegelgleichheit im Dienste der Intensivierung: Zu Zwillingsformeln im Deutschen*, Bogdana Crivăț explores the structural, prosodic and contextual features of pair words (*Zwillingsformeln*, lit. twin formulae) in contemporary German, where such phraseological units are extremely common. Public discourse, advertising and media language as well as fiction readily exploit the advantages of such syndetic constructions. Crivăț's study also highlights the stylistic and communicative functions of pair words, which can be regarded as memorable expressive intensifying structures which possess a special appeal to users, and add both colour and emphasis to their speech.

Starting from the idea that language can both mirror and construct the social world, Antonio Pinna shows in his extended study *Aspects of Synthetic Personalization Reflected in Travel Journalism: a Phraseological Approach* (chapter X) how synthetic personalization reflects the commercial orientation of travel journalism. The author uses a phraseological approach to analyse a large corpus (*The Guardian* Travel Corpus compiled by the author and a colleague at the University of Sassari for a more extended project) and identifies two main phraseologies that are used to give advice and to provide alternatives to the readers, who seem to need guidance while making wise consumer decisions.

In chapter XI, *The Contextual Symbolism of Colours and the Mirroring Effect in Backcountry Devils by Jennifer Christie*, Claudia

Pisoschi makes a pragma-stylistic analysis of the short story's linguistic items and structures, focusing on the key elements with chromatic dimensions which function as mirrors of the main character's covert psychological facets. Colours are examined in point of their contextual symbolism, i. e. as reflections of the main characters' traumas, inner restlessness and propensity for violence outcomes. The three stages of Elsa's evolution (*separation/desertion, expiation* and *return*) and the three dominant colours analysed (*white, red* and *black*) encompass and symbolise the character's journey in search of her own identity.

In chapter XII, *Foreign Language Proficiency Reflected in English-Medium Instruction Settings*, the authors discuss aspects related to the foreign language proficiency of the students who attend an EMI-based study programme at the University of Craiova, while highlighting the opportunities and challenges that these students encounter during their studies with regard to studying in a foreign language. Their study presents not only the benefits of studying in EMI environments, as perceived by the direct stakeholders involved in the process, but also the challenges and limitations encountered.

The volume closes with a chapter by Emilia Ştefan, which illuminates the phenomenon of multilingualism in contemporary society, seen as a reflection of the ever-accelerating dynamics of global change. Her essay *Mehrsprachigkeit im Spiegel des globalen Wandels* looks not only at the dominance of English and other popular languages such as French, German, Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese in technological development, sales, marketing, banking and social work, but also at the situation of minority languages that have not traditionally been associated with a successful social status.

The editors

"Mirrors should reflect a little, before throwing back images."
(Jean Cocteau, *The Blood of a Poet*)

PART ONE

Reflections of reality in literature and cultural studies

I. The Enlightenment as Wunderkammer:
Mirabilia, Knowledge, and the Paradigm of *Homo Narrans*

Elena Butoescu

Introduction

Before attempting a full and accurate investigation into the dynamics of the Enlightenment and the particular case of George Psalmanazar, it is necessary to clearly define important concepts in the research questions. Three key terms merit clarification: Wunderkammer, mirabilia and *homo narrans*. These terms, which are in semantic and lexical proximity, need elucidation mainly because in this article they are attributed a different context than the one which accommodated their semantic function in the first place.

Curiosity is all about investigation and questioning, and we are curious creatures, thirsting to collect, collate and understand - at least in some small part - the world around us. David Hume defined curiosity as a primordial matrix, from which sprang "that love of truth, which was the first source of all our enquiries" (286). Barbara Benedict used the term "curiosity" to convey a double entendre that was specific for the early modern context: on the one hand, she identified the ordinary, trivial type of "popular curiosity," seen in proximity with a certain "appetite for sensational spectacle" (229); on the other hand, Benedict dressed the same concept up in a smart coat when describing it as "learned inquiry" (229), a virtuous attribute given to a word which was to become a culturally-embedded concept. In fact, various authors of major studies of early modern curiosity treat it as a concept all people's wonderings stemmed from. For instance, Geraldine Barnes explains curiosity in terms of exotic performance, especially when she describes William Dampier's "narrative cabinet of curiosities" (36), which seemed to have been designed with the intention of placing the discursive space of voyages into a legitimate historical context. By the same token, Justin Stagl overlaps curiosity with travel experiences, considering the latter as a form of circular type of

learning. The dissemination of learning how to turn the unknown space into a familiar context in order to make it meaningful is the outcome of curiosity:

> An individual with an inquiring mind approaches the objects of its curiosity, explores them through observation, inspection, or manipulation, and then relinquishes them, only to return and to repeat this sequence of activities (Stagl 2).

Since curiosity and wonder coexisted from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment,[1] bridging the gap between creativity and scientific discovery, the Wunderkammer, or "cabinet of curiosities" became the quintessential physical embodiment of that human desire to seek out new knowledge and wonderment. Whether in official cabinet form, a box under the bed, a book on a shelf, a stamp album or – at the institutional level – a library or a museum – the Wunderkammer has always been with us. An invention of the sixteenth century, the cabinet of curiosities was a direct outcome of the Age of Exploration. Its business was to sort out and classify rare objects, exotic exhibits, and natural creatures in order to display them for either private or public eye, its function being that of promoting understanding of their significance. The discovery of the New World and the expansion of contacts with Asia and the Americas changed the way in which people perceived the world and their own roles within it. There was a vast world out there to discover and exotica, of one form or another, was invading Europe. Exotica makes the connection with the second term, *mirabilia*, the Latin word which revealed the wonders and the marvels of the East and also a term used for the wonder books of the Middle Ages. *Mirabilia* mirrored the importance of the role of narrative in translating the

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[1] The two terms made a pair even earlier, in the Aristotelian tradition of wonder and knowledge. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle stated that "All men by nature desire to know" (3343), knowledge being in conjunction with wonder, which is the trigger for "pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end" (3349). Philosophy stemmed from wondering about the world; the human desire to know would not have been possible without wonder, an unsettling experience which enables us, humans, to explore our internal and external environment in order to create meaning out of it. For the Aristotelian tradition, see also Marr, p. 1 and passim.

interest that the Age of Exploration and the Grand Tour invested in foreign travel into a collection of objects that was called the chamber of curiosities and that would become the forefather of the museum. Based on the etymology of the root *mir*, which is the essence of mirror and *mirabilia*, both the chamber of curiosities and the museum offer visual[2] display of the collections in a seductive manner, which, on the one hand, satisfies the epistemological curiosity of the consumer, while on the other hand, it reorders the known world and its taxonomies into new relations and new possibilities to address a broader audience. The whole process of revision functions as a mirror which conceals and reveals reality at the same time.

An object of ad*mira*tion and a trigger of wonder (*mirabilia*), the mirror distorts the image of the reflected object or sometimes replaces it with a new image. A regular activity that people do is looking in the mirror. Whether people like what they see or not, whether the mirror distorts the image of the reflected object or sometimes replaces it with a new image, looking at the self in a mirror puts everybody in some sort of puzzlement (*mirari*), which turns this activity into an uncanny[3] experience. Being the marvelous (*mirabilia*) instrument for showing people themselves, mirrors can act as both deceivers and carriers of truth, as separators between what we want to see and what we fear to see. Mark Pendergrast has pointed out

[2] Jacques Le Goff identifies the predominance of the visual impact on the audience the world of objects had as early as medieval collections: "The root of *mirabilia* is *mir* (as in *mirror*, *mirari*), which implies something visual. […] there was, I think, an important reference to the eyes – important because a whole world of the imagination, a whole series of images and metaphors is implied" (27). Therefore, by means of visual evidence desired by an audience, the brain is stimulated in such a creative manner that generates a process of imagination which, in turn, produces metaphors in a chain of narrative structures that offer new ways of seeing, relating to and acting in the world. Actually, this idea connects with the importance of narrative in the development of the Enlightenment ideas and ideals.

[3] I employ the term "uncanny" in this context in a slightly different manner than Sigmund Freud's description of the "unheimlich:" whereas Freud considers the term as the subject of aesthetics and attributes it a rather negative connotation, the opposite of "heimlich," which denotes the familiar and the homely, I do not endow the word with such a singular connotation. On the contrary, I use the term "uncanny" to explain the bizarre experience someone might have when looking in the mirror, which is not a negative episode, even if an uncomfortable one, but a different encounter. According to Freud, the "uncanny" belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (123). In this article, the term "uncanny" is related to curiosity and surprise, rather than fear.

a similar duality when defining the mirror as either a means of "self-knowledge or self-delusion" (ix). Along the same line of thought, Sabine Melchoir-Bonnet highlights the same duality of self-reflection, "at once both a liar and guide" (108), which shows the flamboyant perception of anything ornamental that the mirror reflects as well as the unfamiliar images of the body that nobody was able to configure before the invention of the *speculum*. Used for both creating illusions and revolutionizing science, mirrors act as dual objects expressing "The ambiguity of the ties between being and seeming, false appearance and truth […] nature versus artifice, the body versus the face, and privacy versus social life" (Melchoir-Bonnet 143).

It is this duality that I refer to in connection with the paradox of the Enlightenment. And how could people better represent reality than through the mediation of narrative, which functions as an image reflected by what each historical context mirrors? *Homo narrans* as a master metaphor represents the essential nature of human beings. Whether in history, biography, poetry or fiction, "recounting and accounting for constitute stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish a meaningful life-world" (Fisher 170). Telling stories is how we communicate in order to make sense of life. Telling stories is what makes us human. The narrative paradigm highlights all forms of discourse as "stories, that is interpretations of some aspect of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character" (Fisher 170). The American scholar of medieval English literature John D. Niles, writing on the importance of storytelling in human lives, examines the fundamental part a human being has in assuming the paradigmatic role of *homo narrans*:

> All stories, it can be said, are a form of mythopoesis. Whatever else in the realm of culture that we value is to an important degree dependent on the stories that people tell. It is hard to imagine what human life would be like without oral narrative, for it is chiefly through storytelling that people possess a past (2).

In other words, all forms of narrative derive from storytelling, which is a mixture of *mythos* and *logos*. Stories become the way humans explain reality to themselves. This is one of the reasons why the Enlightenment, despite its stubborn emphasis on rationality and intellectualism, did not make an exception when it came to storytelling which, through incredible discoveries, amazed all Europe.

Narration and the Crisis of Representation

The paradox of the Enlightenment as both rational and gullible never ceases to amaze contemporary scholars who highlight the division between the classical world of reason and the rhetoric of modernity. The metaphorical intertwined with the rational and mirabilia (a collection of the wonders of the East) intertwined with John Locke's empirical knowledge in an attempt to mirror the eighteenth-century change in European mentality. This crisis reflected the controversial attitudes regarding such concepts as "Truth" and "Nature." The crisis of authority mirrored a crisis in authenticity as well as one of representation, which affected the European literary stage of that period and resulted in the publication of fraudulent books. Newtonian physics, based on rational mechanics, and Psalmanazar's fictitious Formosan language were two sides of the same coin. The paradox of the Enlightenment is echoed in controversial viewpoints regarding such concepts as "Truth" and "Nature" as well as considerations concerning the origins of the Enlightenment. In *La Crise de la conscience européenne*, Paul Hazard emphasizes the transformations in European culture and mentality that appeared in the late seventeenth century, a period associated with the rise of modern science and the advance of intellectual reform. According to Hazard, the Enlightenment as a global phenomenon stemmed from "the crisis of the European mind" that in the decades before and after 1700 – the learned world of late-Renaissance humanism – responded to the intellectual changes brought about by John Locke's theory of knowledge as derived from sensory experiences and by other theories that turned European thought and intellectual attitudes into a critical and modern approach to

history and philosophy. Hazard would pinpoint this period as bridging the confessional era to the Enlightenment age.

However, other critics addressed this issue from different perspectives. Jonathan Israel places the "crisis of the European mind" somewhere about mid-seventeenth century and identifies it with the rise of Cartesianism and the subsequent spread of "mechanical philosophy" or the "mechanistic world-view" (14). The fact that the Church became deeply divided contributed to the general crisis of the European mind. Moreover, philosophy complicated and intensified conflicts between rival theological confessional factions (19). As a result, there was lack of cohesion and unity both in theological outlook and in the philosophical theories, which denied miracles and the supernatural, while claiming that the human mind was a *tabula rasa* and there were no innate ideas. This hiatus caused collective and traumatic individual experience and raised fears about the end of the world. Israel concludes that this rupture had political implications, such as the reaction against divine-right monarchy and absolutist ideology (21).

Another critic, Daniel Mornet, identified the origins of the French Revolution in the ideas disseminated through French society by such institutions as coffee houses, freemasonry and journalism. Roger Chartier took Mornet's ideas further by investigating and reexamining the connection between the *transmission* and the *reception* of these revolutionary ideas by the society. Robert Darnton stalked down another path: he thought the objectives that were instrumental in spreading progressive ideas during the Enlightenment did not only come from the French philosophers, but also from the literary guerrillas of Parisian society, from Grub Street writers, hacks, and other *frondeurs littéraires*, whose narratives greatly contributed to the advancement of knowledge. After all, Andrew Marvell and Oliver Goldsmith were themselves Grub Street writers, a fact which does not diminish their contribution to the history of English literature. Goldsmith acknowledged that an author's reputation was alive as long as his name would "ensure a good price for his copy from the booksellers" (qtd in Kernan 75). Darnton's theory reflects Goldsmith's statement, which might give the readers a different insight into the highbrow view of the Enlightenment: