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Foreign Bodies, Foreign Souls

National Physiognomy in Modern Romanian Art

In the 19th century, Swiss writer Johann Kaspar Lavater's studies were quite popular readings in the Romanian provinces. Lavater had theorized and produced the principles on physiognomy, the so-called science of interpreting human characteristics based on bodily features. He and his teachings were mentioned in many writings. Moreover, influenced by his observations, some Romanian writers started producing their own physiognomic remarks. Although some raised a point that his theories were not scientific and accurate, there were still many who accepted them as being foolproof.

However, it was not only writers who responded to Lavater's findings, but also artists to whom the Swiss theoretician specifically addressed an entire section of his study, entitled *On portrait painting*. (Lavater 1840, 170–179) His methodological guidance became increasingly influential, and among the European artists and art theoreticians who made use of physiognomy in their works and offered or discussed specific types corresponding to specific characters, some were Romanians. Writer and philologist Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu in a study dedicated to the physiognomic fundaments of a Vlad Țepeș portrait, concluded that “Just as chronology fundaments itself on astronomy, so does iconography fundamente itself on physiognomy.” (Hașdeu 1864, 9) Romanian national painter Nicolae Grigorescu relied on physiognomy and phrenology,¹ being “well-grounded in these specialties, as they were part of the theoretical skilfulness of his art.” (Niculescu 1965, 231) Caricaturists were especially indebted to express such mental drives. “Don't be alarmed, [...] for I won't bring you a dissertation on physiognomic art, my intention is only to show you some signs caricatur-

¹ Pseudo-science concerned with the study of the human skull in order to determine the mental faculties and character of the individual.

ists work after”² – this is how Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, an important Romanian writer and philologist, appeased his readers in an article reminiscent of Lavater in its content and title, *Those inside judged by those outside*. (Heliade-Rădulescu 1841, 16) Although not always specifically mentioned, there were tacit physiognomic demands in the many requirements critics imposed on artists in order to apply psychological analysis when portraying human models. For a certain art-connected 19th-century public, recent disciplines outside the artistic domain, such as modern physiognomy, phrenology or criminology, became as important as the long-time principles of portraiture in art history. And their influence kept going also in the 20th century as well.³

But just as physiognomy turned into a trend, a far more powerful set of ideas was growing in force: nationalism. Beginning with the second half of the 19th century the construction of a national identity at the level of visual representations became a matter of full interest for Romanian artists. Drawing up a Romanian national typology developed in alliance with a contrastive effort of creating foreign national typologies, as well. The search for the most representative ethnic types now strongly called on the principles of physiognomy, as the portrayal of the subjects had to be total, both physically and psychically. Lavater himself, but also other theoreticians more or less in sympathy with his observations, developed elaborate expositions on the issue of national physiognomy; their general belief was that nations developed collective physical types due to their particular historic evolution. This opinion was shared also by Romanian national poet Mihai Eminescu, who admitted that “according to Lavater, it is known that certain actions impregnate through physiognomy in the individual, so that he wears this expression for his entire life. The great historic conditions that rolled over the nation, independently of its will and thus not as a product of its psychological structure, must leave their character traits in the physiognomy of the nation; they later become the very physiognomy of the nation.” (Vatamaniuc 1988, 354)

2 All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

3 In 1905, Sextil Pușcariu, a Romanian philologist and historian, advised that a portraitist should keep in mind the physiognomic experiences and emphasize the physical features that express the character of the model. (Pușcariu 1905) In 1908, Gheorghe Popovici, artist and art teacher at the School of Fine Arts in Jassy, expressed his disappointment in his students’ incapability to capture affective dispositions such as joy, wonder, hate, sorrow or psychic types, such as the cunning individual, the criminal or the innocent one. (National Archives of Romania 1908, 10) In 1910, artist and art critic Vasile Ravici still asked the artists to use Gall, a renowned promoter of phrenology, and Lavater in the study of portraiture. (Ravici 1910)

But historical change-overs could not have operated only physical refashioning. This is the idea from which the exterior typology of the Other began to be interpreted as to suggest his/her elusive nature: the national character or national behavior. In the second half of the 19th century, foreigners as pictorial subjects, were often defined in physiognomic terms by the artist, or by the viewer (in the form of the art critic). By means of anthropological theories and social prejudices, artists cemented an ethnic imagery, wherein facial and bodily particularities became markers of collective predispositions and temperaments, specific to different nations. In 1871, after writing a short essay on phrenology and physiognomy, Alexandru Asachi launched in his magazine a series of graphic types, among which some ethnic types could be deciphered. (Figure 1)⁴ Combining pseudo-scientific principles with exercises of imagination, caricaturists improvised anthropomorphic transformations with ethnic hints.⁵ Human expression, fundamental in portraiture, was no longer discussed only in universal artistic terms, as traditional art theory had done, but increasingly in anthropological and ethnological terms. The racially connected facial expressions became a matter of interest in the artistic scholar education.⁶ And art critics and historians started to use physiognomic

4 For instance, when warning his readers to keep away from both grumpy and big-teethed men, he illustrated the former with a Levantine figure, perhaps a Greek or a Turk, and the latter one apparently with an Englishman, similar to the caricatures of the time. Also, the human type inclined to business is represented as being a Jew.

5 Romanian caricaturists made use of comparative physiognomy when designing laborious developments from a specific animal to a specific ethnic type, or side-by-sides between specific animals and specific ethnic types, so as to suggest behavioral similarities. Thus, on one occasion, Constantin Jiquidi displayed the transformation of Deutscher Michael ("The German Michael," national personification of the typical German and of Germany) into a pig, suggesting slothfulness. (*Vespea*, year I, no. 5, 12 November 1889) Another time, a caricaturist signing Burgstaller presented the transmogrification of a Jew into a vulture, pointing out in this way how covetous Jews were. (*Adevărul ilustrat*, year II, no. 5, 1 April 1896)

6 Three of the books the School of Fine Arts in Jassy acquired for its students at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were Paolo Mantegazza's *La physiognomie et les sentiments*, Théodore Piderit's *Mimique et physionomie*, and Charles Darwin's *L'expression des emotions*. (National Archives of Romania 1901, 31; 319) Mantegazza, although critical of Lavater, extracted some of his principles and reshaped them. Focusing on the facial features, Mantegazza developed a theory of racial and *ethnical expressions*. He identified the Grotesque or Simian Expression, characteristic to the Negroes and the Negritoës, the Stupid Expression, characteristic to Hottentots, Bushmen and Australians, and the Intelligent Expression, specific to Europeans. The students would have encountered a completely different opinion in Darwin's book showing his antiracial position: "the different races of man express their emotions and sensations with remarkable uniformity throughout the world." (Darwin 1872, 131) However, Darwin admitted that some emotional reactions,

observations in their works, in order to define the national character and temperament when analysing visual representations of foreigners.⁷

Although there were multiple practices of both imagining and imaging national physiognomies, these processes often resulted in an axiological absolute: while the Romanian was equally handsome and smart, the foreigners were portrayed with various corporal and mental deficiencies, varying from nation to nation. The anamnesis the foreigner was symbolically given by the artist reveals – even for today's viewer – a blemished psychosomatic nature which back then was determined on the basis of anthropological assumptions, folkloric beliefs and social prejudices. This pathological anatomy is now our subject of examination. Dear reader, will you please be of assistance in my cultural enquiry into the pictorial Other, as we distinguish between real bodies and prejudicially constructed ones and try to indulgently understand how the physical appearance conveyed, for some artists and for a specific audience, an ethnic psychology.

Body and head

What happens when a Hungarian hires a painter to create the portrait of his recently deceased father? A burst of hilarity, since we are discussing of an anecdote, illustrated in 1900 by Nicolae Mantu, a Romanian caricaturist. (Figure 2) The painter from the caricature created a typical Hungarian, with “boots, spurs, twisted moustaches and cap,” since he did not possess any photograph of his subject. The son obviously does not recognize his father, and blurts out stupidly: Oh, poor dad, he passed away only four months ago and look how much he has

such as blushing, manifest differently in different races, giving the example of Jews, Blacks, the Lepchas of Sikkim. Darwin was in fact more interested in promoting the anthropomorphism, ascribing human emotions to animals, and studying human expressions compared to those of animals. Piderit, who was also critical of Lavater, proposed a new type of physiognomy, considering that only facial muscles and the correlated facial expressions are linked to the intellectual activity. He noted, for instance, that the monkey-like head of a Negro can hide high-mindedness, whereas a classically shaped head of a White can possess rusticity. (Piderit 1888, 205)

⁷ In a biography dedicated to the portrait painter G. D. Mirea, author Nicolae Petrașcu eulogized the artist's talent in capturing the ethnic character of his subjects. In the case of a French boy, “his entire countenance [...] breaths a live, open and immediate intelligence: the intelligence of the Frenchman.” (Petrașcu 1943, 63) Petrașcu also mentions the portrait of Bessy Ionescu, the British wife of Romanian politician Tache Ionescu, “on whose visage, of delicate beauty, one can see the serious-mindedness of her race, and behind the crystal of her eyes, her deep in thought soul.” (Petrașcu, 55)

already changed! More than one century ago, the painting and the surrounding scene rounded off a general ethnic frame: each of the two Hungarians manifest a specific race trace, as perceived by Romanians: cockiness (the Hungarian from the painting) and idiocy (the Hungarian from the left).

Mantu conveyed these ideas by means of gestures and face expressions, but the viewer could also benefit from some anthropological connections. The typical Hungarian of the caricatures was fat, and fatness had been associated with a slow mindset since antiquity and onwards. *Polisarkia*, the state of having too much flesh, was the result of the imbalance of humors. The phlegmatic individuals consumed large quantities of food, and as a result, they lived in a concomitant state of slothfulness and stupidity. (Gilman 2010, 24) The obese, in simple contrast to the athlete bestowed with beauty and goodness (*kalos kai agathos*), was unrighteous, stupid and ugly. In the first treatise on physiognomy published in Romanian in 1785 (a translation after a German study), the reader was advised to beware of the thick and fat people, for they were wasteful, full of flaws and especially wicked. (*Curioznică...* 1785, 10) The warning was reactivated in 1909, when an extract of the treatise was published in *Universul literar*, a national journal.⁸

“A thick belly, a thick understanding,” is a statement presumably quoted by Lavater, but originally made by Galen. (Lavater 1840, 263) Fat handicapped cerebration, especially when it was in direct connection with the head. Another observation, also quoted by Lavater, is relevant in this direction: “Heads of much bone and flesh have little brain. Large bones, with abundance of flesh and fat, are impediments to the mind.” (Lavater 264) For the 19th-century viewer, there were many reasons to think that big-bellied and fat-headed individuals, quite often represented in caricatures, suffered from mental disabilities. In Romanian caricature, and sometimes also in painting and sculpture, many foreigners were constructed with bulky heads. Macrocephalia was a typical method in caricature, but in cases such as the previously discussed scene, the large head was in congruence with the large body, translated into fatness or heaviness. Hungarians were tubby, Russians were bulky, and Germans too, among their various somatic types, as represented in visual arts, developed one that was either corpulent or brutishly big. Some typologies were adopted from the European press, but they fit excellently into the Romanians’ own perception, and they supported a large range of prejudices. What was the common feature? Big meant stupid.

8 *Universul literar*, 26, no. 40, 28 September 1909.

However, when historian and journalist George Barițiu advised his readers that “a voluminous head with a triangle-shaped forehead shows lack of intelligence” or “a head with the skull covered with fat and meat proves most of the time little intelligence, especially if that head is small and round,” he was not only pinpointing the intellectual impairments caused by fatness, but also by cranial problems. (Barițiu 1853, 64) It was not only the flesh, but also the skull that communicated presumptive mental difficulties. In physiognomic terms, ill-shapen or disproportional heads – either too large or too small – often certified mental retardation and reprehensible behaviors. And such convictions were to be translated into visual rules.

In 1870, when analyzing Romanian artist Gheorghe Tattarescu’s painting *Hagar in the desert*, a critic observed that Ishmael⁹ was deformed and had an abnormally big head. The critic who was definitely aware of Lavater’s theories, since he would mention them in a later article, considered that the painter had deliberately transformed Ishmael into a monster, out of national hatred for his descendants, “who don’t belong to our Orthodox confession.” (Laerțiu 1870) The deformation was plausibly thought-out. In 1865, Tattarescu wrote a short manual on the human proportions for art students, so he was aware of and demanded the classical body construction.

Some of the foreigners who were considered large-headed, and therefore, stupid, were the Bulgarians.¹⁰ Writer Corneliu Moldovanu made a complete anthropological portrait of the Bulgarian: “Bay Ganyo¹¹ as a representative type of his race, has a big head, sloping and small forehead,¹² large cheekbones. His

9 Biblical character traditionally considered the ancestor of the Arab people.

10 There is a kernel of truth here. French geographer Élisée Reclus, in his *Universal Geography*, described Bulgarians as being squat, strongly built, with large head on broad shoulders. However, farther intellectual connections, such as those made by Romanians, were dismissed: “Greeks and Wallachians ridicule them, and many proverbial expressions refer to their want of intelligence and polish. This ridicule, however, they hardly deserve. Less vivacious than the Wallachian, or less supple than the Greek, the Bulgarian is certainly not deficient in intelligence.” (Reclus 1876–1894, 189)

11 Fictional character invented by Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov, subsequently a personification of the typical Bulgarian.

12 Besides the volume of the head, the sloping small forehead was also a Bulgarian anthropological marker signaling primitivism and narrow-mindedness. Historian Nicolae Iorga wrote of “Bulgarians with narrow forehead and hairy skull.” (Iorga 1972, 339) Elisabeta Odobescu-Goga, an aristocrat, did not forget that during the First World War, Bucharest was overrun with “oafish Bulgarians with narrow foreheads.” (Rostás 2004, 228) And poet Tudor Arghezi wrote down, with visible repugnance: “The pages of the English magazines were filled with faces as expressive as that

stubby and heavy body, his rhythmless movements, his gestures are rough. In his Turanic nature there is no harmony, in his obtuse brain there's no initiative." (Moldovanu 1917)

Another writer, Alexandru Vlahuță recalled a moment when Nicolae Grigorescu applied Lavaterian theories during a controversy referring to the character of the Bulgarians. As the discussion took place in a moving train, the painter, eager to prove how stubborn the Bulgarians were, he drew a feral and ugly head on the train window "so that to show how certain facial features unfailingly correspond to certain racial sentiments," exclaiming: There you have him, the Bulgarian! (Vlahuță 1936, 56) We will never know how that Bulgarian looked like, but we can make ourselves an idea by looking at one of Grigorescu's paintings, *Bulgarians astride donkeys*, today in the custody of the National Museum of Art of Romania. (Figure 3 left) The central character's head is knob-like and bowed, and has a sloping and narrow forehead, delimited by a round cap – an iterative profile if we compare the character to a couple of Bulgarian typologies developed in the press caricature. (Figure 3 center and right) These last two overemphasized figures are observably constructed to suggest idiocy. The big head of the Bulgarians, and the immediate mental deficiencies were constantly targeted in caricatures and press anecdotes for many decades until the instauration of the Communist regime.

Another nation that had cranial problems, in the eyes of the Romanians, were the Germans who were imagined to have square heads. It was a physical anomaly that also certified, especially beginning with the First World War, that Germans were barbarous and mentally underdeveloped.¹³

of a potato, belts burdened with pistols, baggy trousers and Bulgarian foreheads as narrow as a band." (Arghezi 2003, 1012)

13 The image of the Germans was borrowed from the French media and rapidly diffused. In 1916, the Romanian magazine *Acțiunea* reproduced a French article which discussed the Teutonic physiognomy, with the clear purpose of debunking the purported German racial superiority. "Is there anyone who, when looking at a German forehead, won't notice the badly rounded shape of their calvarium, its obtuse angles and that roughly carved conformation that, along the ages, gave the Germans their denomination of 'square heads'?" A German head "gives the impression of stubbornness, rudeness, intellectual heaviness and brutality." The inferior part of the skull was also meaningful: "The volume and the thickness of the cheeks, the length of the oral cavity show the importance of the digestive function and the lavishness of the interior appetites. And the chin resembling a flat stone and the extruded jaws are the hammer, and the pincers needed for chewing the aliments and unclogging their voraciousness." (Berrillon 1916) Among the local follow-ups, journalist Paul I. Prodan spoke of "Germans with square kettles on their heads, after the very shape

The stereotype was often made use of in art and art criticism, as it easily instrumented ethnic differentiations. Romanian artist D. Stoica's paintings of The Great War depicting *mêlée*, battle scenes were defined by the "characteristic long gaunt Romanian heads and the big-jawed and massive dark heads of the Germans", a critic wrote. (Beldiceanu 1917) In the 1920s, another art critic considered that the Romanian peasants in the paintings of Theodorescu-Sion were ethnically inadequate: due to their "square heads and flat foreheads," they reminded of the German peasants. (Igiroşanu 1925)

For a contemporary viewer an undeniable proof of biased stereotypes is *The prisoners*, a bronze statuary group executed by Cornel Medrea around the end of the First World War, today in the custody of the National Military Museum. (Figure 4) The artist represented a group of German prisoners guided by a Romanian soldier. Constructed as a prototypical winner, the latter is beautiful and serene; his head and body are proportionally built. Meanwhile, the Germans are monstrous, heavy-bodied, square-headed, and underhung. Unmistakably, the artist attempted to intensify their spiritual inferiority, and succeeded.

Red and Black

The color of the hair and skin was also a differentiating marker not only in terms of race or complexion, but also of character. There was a general belief, and not only in Romanian culture, that people with red hair were evil troublemakers. "Beware of the red man, the glabrous man, and the marked man," warns a superstition from Moldavia, "for they are ill omens." (Oişteanu 2009, 60) Red was a natural signal pointing out dangerous beings. Red hair signalizes the thirst for revenge, George Barițiu informs in a concise communication, *Physiognomic observations on Lavater* (Barițiu 1854, 24), and red hair was also an indicator of criminality in Lombrosian analysis. (Hiller 2011, 135–137)

Russians were not uncommonly red haired,¹⁴ a feature that topped up their stereotypical profile in the eyes of Romanians. In his *Memoirs*, writer Demostene

of their heads" (Prodan 1918), and historian Virgil Drăghiceanu mentioned "big-jawed German faces" or, in the case of women, "faces with mandibular prognathism." (Drăghiceanu 1920, 149)

14 Although, anthropologically speaking, red hair was more of a curious rarity than a national characteristic (a fact proven also by the Russian folklore, attesting that ginger men were marginalized) the red hair of the Russians has often been mentioned in European literature. In reality, red hair

Botez gave an account of a “stout sergeant, burnt by the sun, with a thick red beard: the type of a Lipovan Russian.” (Botez 1973, 169). Another writer, Gala Galaction in one of his novels compared Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea, a Romanian socialist theoretician of Ukrainian Jewish origins to a “Russian peasant – a painter of icons,” on account of his “long reddish beard,” namely a “Russian beard.” (Galaction 1997, 24) And Marusea’s hair, a “genuine Russian woman” in Gib Mihăiescu’s homonymous novel *The Russian Woman*, had “orange glows” which, under the artificial lights of the evening, turned into “a strange and wonderful scarlet.” The only element that Marusea was missing, to comply with “the complete Russian woman” in the narrator’s thoughts, were long legs. (Mihăiescu 1934, 7–8)

Such visual observations led to physiognomic deductions. Jewish-Romanian journalist Henric Sanielevici judged the Lipovan Russians by their red hair, which “gives away an old mixture with a brown race – perhaps the very prehistoric European race the Basks represent. And, this is a very curious thing about a northern nation – the Lipovans are of a ferocious sensuality: the women – as I was told – prostitute openly out of pleasure [...] Red hair – sensuality; sensuality – fanaticism; fanaticism – reactionary instincts.” (Sanielevici 1911, 217)

Red was also a humoral touch-up; not only were the Russians red-haired, but also ruddy. The stereotypical Russian seemed to belong to the brevilinear type, due to his bulky body, but also due to his disposition. In 1944, Physician Mircea Athanasiu described this somatic type as follows: “His color is red, he will eat plenty, and drink just as plenty, his shapes will be fully, rounded. He is a man who finds himself satisfied by the most insignificant thing, especially a tasty food or a good drink.” (Athanasiu 1944, 47) In cultural terms, the Russian was indeed perceived as a gourmand and a heavy drinker, and this was by no means an exclusive Romanian insight. And it did not imply any medical or anthropological knowledge to assert that their red blush signalized alcoholism.

was more present in some distinct ethnic groups than throughout all Russia. At least in Romanian consciousness, the stereotypical Red Russian could have been the product of a prejudicially homogenized nation type that simply indicated the foreigner from the northeastern border, no matter the various ethnic types of the Russian Empire. The Cossack, occasionally presented with red hair even in Russian literature, had often been given a similar image in Romanian writings. Lomiliev, the Cossack from *Marele Duce* [*The Grand Duke*] written by Romanian playwright Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea, was red-haired, and one of the characters from *Soimii* [*The Hawks*], a novel by Romanian writer Mihail Sadoveanu, was “a tall Cossack, with red beard.” (Sadoveanu 1993, 178)

Surely, this typical pigmentation has not gone unused in visual arts. A convincing example is a caricature from the beginning of the 1920s. It approached a sensitive subject: the restitution of the Romanian state treasury transported to Russia during the First World War at the time when the two countries were allies.¹⁵ An immense Bolshevik soldier offers a bag to the Romanian sentries over the border. The drawing is dyed in shades of green and red. However, all of the red is mainly affixed to the Bolshevik: his skin, hair, jacket and boots are all red – a beneficial warning coloration, as the Russian is holding a knife behind his back.

The character epitomizes the cultural portrait of Russia: red appearance, red army, and red terror. Communist Russia was the culmination of a monochroic history; even its leader, Lenin, was a redhead. And red remained the dominant color of the charging iconography fabricated around the alleged Judeo-Bolshevism, and with good reason – the conspiracy was believed to be sanguineous and the Jews to be reddish, as well.

Quite a lot of ink has been dedicated to the apparently small issue of the Jewish red hair and freckles, in literature and political journalism.¹⁶ It is little wonder that many even came to argue about a specific Jewish erythrism. At the beginning of 20th century, Jewish-American anthropologist Maurice Fishberg admitted that there was a prevalence of red hair with modern Jews, especially of a red beard. He also considered that red beard was most often encountered in the case of the Galician Jews,¹⁷ and frankly concluded that, as usual, those who have red hair almost always have freckles. (Fishberg 1911, 68)

Jewish-Romanian journalist H. Streitman believed that Nicolae Grigorescu was the one who, in his painting *Candidate for naturalization* (better known as the *The Jew with the Goose*; first time exhibited in 1880, today in the custody of the National Museum of Art, Romania), settled down the features of the stereotypical Jew: “greasy, freckled, red, erratically gesticulating, involuntary comic, with his eyelashes eaten by conjunctivitis, foolish and easily deceived.” (Streitman 1933 (?) 125) Red is the dominant element of a visual typology that, in Streitman’s opinion, also encapsulated psychical attributes. However, it was not only simple-mindedness in the portrait of a Jew set to lobby in the Romanian

15 *Veselia*, 11 May 1922.

16 In *Inventing the Jew: Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romania and Other Central-East European Cultures*, contemporary anthropologist Andrei Oișteanu has expanded, with many examples, on the issue of the ruddy and freckled Jew as a literary and journalistic topic. (Oișteanu 2009, 57–66)

17 Many of the Romanian Jews came from Galicia.

Parliament with a fowl as a cumshaw, but also cupidity. Discussing the same painting, Alexandru Vlahuță pointed out the acquisitive nature of the individual. (Vlahuță 1936, 25–26) And this nature is generally perceptible in Grigorescu's and others' later works depicting red Jews.

Such is the case of Octav Bancilă's *An old Jew*, a painting in the custody of the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum. Red is the dominant color of the canvas applied not only biologically, as skin and hair, but also enveloping the whole scene in a conspicuous atmosphere. The smile and the eye glance complement what seems to be a treacherous character.

As a culmination of evilness, red becomes a connector between the Devil and the Jew. Several Romanian proverbs contain cautions: "Keep away from the red man, for he is the Devil's own," "Better beware of the red man than of the Devil with horns," "The Devil changes himself into a red man," who will then dwell on the Red Hill, at the Red Apple Tree, or in the Red Sea. (Oișteanu 2009, 62) When Romanian caricaturist Ion Bărbulescu B'Arg decided to illustrate a Saxon fairy tale that was also recorded in Transylvania, *Die Drei Rotbärbe* – the three red-bearded men, who at the end of the fairy tale prove to be devils –, he chose to put ethnic markers on the three individuals: the raincoat and the fedora, elements of urban origin, show the cliquish aspect of the group opposed to the rural and simple couple of men on the left – all of which are reminders of a famous Grigorescu painting where three Jews (interestingly, with red shades on their beards) are trying to scam two Romanians. (Figure 5) With regard to this painting, we can now understand that in B'arg's drawing, *die drei Rotbärbe* are not only devils, but also Jews.¹⁸ This particular connection derives from a prejudicial parallelism between Jews and demons present in European and Romanian folklore. The red beard was an attribute of the devil in medieval drama before being transferred to the Jew. (Cohen and Heller 1990, 44)

Although often a synonym for the Devil, the Jew, especially when empowered with red hair, proved capable of outsmarting the Devil in case they confronted each other. "The Jew with the red beard/ With the mail he sends the Devil," say some humorous verses. But there is an alternative rhyme: "The Jew with the black beard, / Sends the Devil out to grassland" ((Oișteanu 2009, 49)). Black

¹⁸ In a similar scenario, the hero in Mihail Sadoveanu's *At the manor* encounters the Devil who is incarnated into an individual that reminds of the stereotypical Jew: he is a red-haired trader, and offers the traveler a flask of brandy. (Oișteanu 2009, 81)

represented also evilness. In folkloric tradition, *Omul Negru* (*the Black Man*) was an epithet applied to an infamous man. The Black Man was also an indefinite bogeyman (hence, the main character of a children's game still played in some regions) and an incarnation of Death.

Christianity came to associate sin and death with black. The Devil was pictorially defined with the help of this color. Medieval iconography consistently produced black executioners, when Christic or hagiographic martyrdoms were represented. This motive was generated by the fact that the present and immediate danger of Christianity, the Arabs, had a dark complexion. Dark skin covered an inhumane cruelty, a belief that was confirmed by certain 19th century medical literature. (Virey 1894, 119; 128–12; 145; 150–156) For Romanians, the executioners had also dark skin, as their roles were fulfilled by Africans, Turks or Gypsies. In Romanian consciousness, but also in Romanian art, the dark-skinned executioner was present in religious scenes, as well as in historic and social ones.

Dark skin referred to a religious and social differentiation, as black meant promiscuity, ungodliness and evilness, features that were disdained in a civilized society. The dark races were irrevocably different and therefore, potentially dangerous for the white race, even through their female subjects: “[Black women] manifest lubricity and extraordinary passions for our climates; they seem to wear, in their hot breast, the whole fire of Africa: this is why they seduce the Whites and enthrall them, to their perdition, with the passions of their libertinism.” (Virey 1894, 153)

Let us elaborate a watercolor by artist Ioan Georgescu. It is from the last decade of the 19th century, today in the collection of the National Museum of Art, Romania. It is a portrait of a Black. With his body oriented to the right of the composition, the character turns his head towards the viewer, staring him/her down; under a turban, one easily discovers a black face with bulgy venous eyes, flat nose, a coaly wiry beard and big lips – on the whole, an irreversible symbol of a wicked alterity for a certain public. Yet, there is a strange kindness (or, the other way around, there is no putative evilness) emanating out of the portrait. And, incredibly, one can see clearly a small crucifix on a chain around the neck of the supposed pagan. The religious artefact is an ethnic and cultural indicator; the character is probably a Copt, an Egyptian Christian whom the artist presumably had met on a Mediterranean journey. But the way the cross is pulled out of the shirt and conspicuously pushed to the left, it makes the viewer wonder if there is

more to this message. Was this image a visual proof that Christianity could soften up the most hard-hearted people? Or perhaps, in an anthropological approach, this was a proof for an invigilating Romanian public that despite their frightful outward appearance, black people were capable of the noblest spirituality.

The face – the mirror of character

The above discussed racial dissimilarity, with its potential behavioral and intellectual insufficiency, was suggested through blackness, but also facial features. It was the face that offered physiognomists the largest amount of psychological insights regarding any given individual.

Theoretically, in the preceding case, the big lips of the character were among the most revealing lineaments. George Barițiu wrote that “a mouth with thick and fleshy lips belongs to the lustful and lazy man; almost always it defines a phlegmatic type.” (Barițiu 1854) And in an 1855 excerpt on physiognomy published at Bucharest, it was specified: “Those lips that are very thick, although equal, indicate almost always a man lacking delicacy, with a dirty graspingness, and sometimes confused and mean.” (Ciocanelli 1855, 149)

In Romanian folklore big lips were regularly among the physical attributes of the *Arap* (idiomatically *Maur*), an ogreish character, uncommonly powerful and violent. Folklore was also the main cultural background where the image of the Gypsy has often been remodelled after that of the African, the latter borrowing the former’s anthropologic attributes, thus becoming “black as tar,” “Maur,” but also “big-lipped.” The transformation implied clear physiognomic meanings when, by targeting historical evidences, the Gypsy were appointed to horrific social roles, such as the already mentioned executioner. Iancu, “the big black thick-lipped Gipsy” in Mihail Sadoveanu’s novel *Neamul Soimăreștilor* [*The Soimarești Family*], commissioned to behead a group of boyars, is an autochthonous version of the Black executioner, by his looks and open cruelty.¹⁹ Two Romanian graphic artists, D. Stoica and Ary Murnu both used the same technical tricks to attain the physical and psychical distinctiveness of the character: linear hachure for the im-

¹⁹ In fact it recalls, for example, the headsman sent to kill Prince Constantin Hangerli at the end of the 18th century: “a huge horribly looking Maur, bold to kill, with a thick-lipped mouth.” (Şăineanu 1900, 22)

perative binary complexion – black skin, black soul – and, beneath a moustache, a protuberant lower lip. (Figure 6)

To an uncertain extent, in Romanian consciousness the Black was not clearly defined as a racial and geographic type, but rather as a general socio-anthropological one. Out of simple-mindedness or willingly detrimental projections, the concept encompassed the dark-skinned anthropological types from a marginal humanity characterized by primitivism, criminality and cruelty. In visual form, the big-lipped Negro seemed to be the simplest result of a process of racialization that homogenized races and social categories into a unique typology. When artist Francisc Șirato in a wartime caricature depicted an Indian sent to the European battlefield, he delivered the portrait of a naked grotesque Negro, with red and outlined big lips more reminiscent of an African bushman. Inquired about his nudity, the Negro explained that it was his war outfit, when he was called to take blood baths. As for the interwar drawings, the cannibals preoccupied with human sacrifices repeated the same image. And when film director Aurel Petrescu denounced, in a comic strip for children, a less critical misdeed – a small Gypsy boy, trying to steal a slice of melon –, the main character was still constructed as an ink-faced pickaninny, with bulgy eyes and large lips. Despite the age, the character, admittedly indebted to the darky iconography of the blackface phenomenon,²⁰ but also alluding to the folkloric association of the Negro and Gypsy, is an active figure of criminality.

However, it was not only the lips that gave off the inner character, it was also the mouth expression. Physiognomically, the mouth and the smile seem to be among the most efficient indicators of a mental disorder. Titu Maiorescu, a 19th century cultural personality and theoretician aware of Lavaterian physiognomy, however reluctant to accept its presumed scientific nature, still summarized some of its observations: “the individuals whose mouth, hand or walk are aslant, have something false, conflicting, malicious in their character;” “if on the cheeks of a smiling person appear three circular and parallel lines one can conclude there is a considerable dose of insanity in his or her character;” “any disproportion between the upper lip and the inferior one is a clue to insanity and viciousness;” “when observing that an individual, although spirited and active, has an opening near the center of the middle line of his or her mouth, that never closes and al-

20 Theatrical makeup which was very popular in 19th-century America later imposed a stereotypical image of Afro-Americans in film, animation movies and graphic art.

lows a tooth to be seen even when the mouth is closed, one must conclude a cold severity, a pleasure in insulting others and doing harm;” “he or she who smiles without reason and with a lip askew, often stops and stays apart from others, with no direction or drive whatsoever, must be insane.” (Maiorescu 2005, 428)

In light of such warnings, it is understandable that anything else than a perfect and sincere smile could have been easily perceived as the manifestation of a sociopathic personality. And there was nothing perfect or sincere in the stereotypical smile of the Jews so often individualized in art. Their visually overrepresented lower lip, curved towards the exterior, which already is a physiognomic indicator of a troubled character, became distressingly prominent when animated by smile. Expressive of immorality and evilness, the grimace was repeatedly presented as a typological attribute of the Jews.

In 1904, when Nicolae Mantu was assigned to produce the illustrations for George Cair’s *Urmașii Romei* [*The descendants of Rome*], he was faced with a challenge: to represent a smiling ticket seller in accordance with the written text: “a Jewish physiognomy, with that smile of greed characteristic to their race, manifested at the sight of the money of the art lovers that want to walk in.” (Cair 1904, 262) The artist accomplished his task: on a frontally seen face, he rendered the mouth’s expression as a horizontally elongated “V.” A centered brush stroke, suggesting a protruding down lip, substantiates the gesture. Even if a good part of the mouth is shaded and undetermined, the viewer can easily decipher and mentally complete the expression, tracing both the line of the lips and the intimate craving for money.

Let us evaluate another example. Ițic Zodaru, the main character of a Mihail Sadoveanu short story, is a poor Jew, hard-working and dedicated to helping the Jewish community. Although not malicious, he is manifestly cunning when interacting with the Romanian community, especially at the market, where his negotiations are full of trickeries. And he tries to cover up his oncoming pilferage bargaining with a smile. Romanian artist Jean Al. Steriadi captured this very moment in an illustration. The droopy lower lip, unveiling the teeth, delineates an ill-affected smile, tell-tale of a devious nature. (Figure 7)

But there is more to the above characters denoting cunningness and moneygrubbing predisposition: the small eyes and especially the big nose. In Ițic’s case, the nose was part of the literary portrait created by Sadoveanu: the Jew had “a goat beard and a long moustache hanging underneath a large nose.” Steriadi particularized this nose highlighting the crooked profile with strokes of chalk.

Although slightly caricatural, the portrait is half as incisive as the anti-Semitic cartoons, where the Jews' countenance is virtually reshaped into a Silenus face; in this case, the over-bulgy lower lip and the exaggerated beak nose are undeniable psychical testimonies.

Indeed, the size, the form, and the curvature of the nose revealed more than simple facial particularities. In the last centuries of the first millennium, in both Western and Eastern Christian iconography, the crooked nose was applied to the religious otherness. Jews and Arabs had crooked noses, which is an important factor in the process of demonization which tried to give details to the satanic nature of the other. (Amishai-Maisels 1999, 50–51)

For Bartolomeo Della Roca and Alessandro Achelini, the authors of *Chyromantie ac physiognomie anastatis*, Bologna, 1503, an individual with an aquiline nose was as cruel and rapacious as a vulture. In *De Humana Physiognomia*, Naples, 1586, Giambattista Della Porta considered that beak-shaped noses denoted shamelessness and lechery. (Oișteanu 2009, 41–42) With the support of the physiognomy, the crooked nose was more and more associated with niggardliness and commercialism, so much that some 19th-century anthropologists started talking of a specific anatomic feature: the Jewish nose, which is traceable not only to Jews, but even other nations.²¹

In Romanian caricatures, the Greeks were also portrayed with big noses. On the one hand, this graphic feature was barely a technical increment of an anthropologically admitted feature – the aquiline nasal shape of the Mediterranean people. On the other hand, in the eyes of a judgmental Romanian nation it substantiated the difficult character and professional dispositions profoundly similar to that of the Jews. Both Greeks and Jews were first and foremost grasping individuals, dishonest money-makers and, when at an upper social level, economic oppressors. (Pădurean 2010, 129–131)

In an 1821 anonymous letter, the author, in demand of national unity, discussed at one point the physiognomic disparities between the Greeks and the Romanians: “[...] for the most eloquent proof and for the admonishment of the Greeks, the famous Lavater, Swiss by nation and Lutheran by religion, should have still been alive today, to inspect the faces of the present Greeks and those

21 Fishberg ascertains that only 12 to 14 percent of the Ashkenazi Jews (the Jews present in Romania) possess an aquiline nose. He considers that thick lips and large mouth, traits already mentioned in this paper, are more characteristic, and provide a “heavy expression to the countenance.” (Fishberg 1911, 112 –113)

of the Dacians,²² and then to give us for the record, to mark out and establish in writing the nature and diathesis of the Greeks, and that of the Romanians.” (Vîrtosu 1932, 194) Decades later, such a physiognomic differentiation would be indeed established – not in writing, but in drawing, when Constantin Jiquidy outlined a Romanian peasant and a Greek innkeeper side by side in an 1896 illustration of a Romanian legend. (Figure 8) Although the supporting text does not offer clear guidelines for their outward aspect, that would suggest only the pure-heartedness of the peasant and the cunningness of the taverne who is trying to sell the house of the former to recover some of his money gone on tick viands, the artist succeeded in putting together a complete and explicit portrayal: a well-favored slender Romanian against a chunky ugly Greek. Coincidentally or not, the former highly resembles the iconographic Dacian (the hat, the beard and the clothing); on the other hand, the latter has nothing that reminds of the ancient Greeks. It seems that the classical Greek beauty has been in fact appropriated by the Romanian peasant. This evidence is especially supported by the fact that the innkeeper has lost the renowned Greek nose, with the perfectly straight profile to his opponent, being left with a crooked oriental nose instead – the final indicator of a degenerated personality.

For many critics, the Modern Greek physiognomy as a sum-up of oriental features was a proof that they no longer possessed the looks, or the virtues of their ancient ancestors; their countenance expressed a different character. When Mihai Eminescu summarized their portrait in an iconic rhyme which incriminated the ethnic mismatch of the 19th-century politicians from Romania with the Romanian spirit and nationality, the nose was essential: “Then meeting in the Senate each others praises speak / This heavy-throated Bulgar, that long and hook-nosed Greek. / Each claims to be Romanian, whatever mask he wears, / These Bulgo-Greeks pretending that they are Trajan’s heirs.” (Eminescu 1989, 165) But what was idiomatically translated as “long and hook-nosed Greek” had literally been written by Eminescu as “thin-nosed Greek,” an expression that laid focus not only on their facial particularities, but also on a difficult and fastidious character. This relation between the form and size of their nose and their special personality can be observed in an anecdote illustrated by the same Constantin Jiquidi. A Greek faints in the middle of a discussion, due to the most bizarre

22 Dacians were ancient people, forerunners of the Romanians. In the opinion of the author of the letter, the nature of the former had been profoundly inherited by the latter.

cause: he has just found out that a sterlet fish was going to be improperly cooked. He is brought to senses after one of the locals, being familiar with the gastronomic habits of the Greeks, starts describing a sterlet stew so that the fainted man can hear it. His big nose, graphically spotlighted as a bulgy shape, is now also a testimony of his pretentious nature. “The Greek is a dirt, / Let him go to blazes, / With big nose and big skirt, / Yet exquisite tastes,” concludes his first-aid giver. (Speranția 1928, 60)

Conclusion

Although not unconsidered, there are many issues – physical/psychical attributes and nations – that remained undiscussed. However, at no time was this paper intended to be an exhaustive taxonomy, but rather a delineation of a comprehensive phenomenon and its most relevant paradigms. And, for a fair understanding, there are some final annotations that have to be made.

The portrait of the Other did not echo his or her spirit, but what society and hereby artists believed about his or her spirit. Art responded to social prejudices and, in its turn, consolidated them.

National physiognomy (the outward appearance of a nation, and believed to be the most common and representative for that nation) was a prejudicial oversimplification that did not necessarily rely on physiognomy (the pseudo-scientific discipline) in order to communicate, literarily or pictorially, mental intricacies particular to different nations. For the general public, physiognomy and (pseudo)anthropology offered only the supportive details for an observational mind-set that operated by default. There was no need of theoretical argumentation to understand that the ethnical antagonism transmitted by numerous works of art was not merely physical, but also psychical.²³

23 A perfect example is *The Torture of Horea* whose protagonist is an 18th-century Transylvanian insurgent, subsequently a Romanian national hero. The painting is by Gheorghe Popovici, analyzed by art historian Oscar Tafrali. Although he does not present a physiognomical exposition, relying rather on self-evident meanings, Tafrali offers physionomical conclusions: “The Hungarians, some of the lower class, others belonging to the nobility, dressed in costumes typical of the time and their rank, have different attitudes. Their physiognomies indicate cruelty, bestiality, cuningness and perkyness. Those are the characteristic traits of their race, contrasting with those of the martyr.” (Tafrali O. 1933, 70)

Moreover, literate population was force-fed by a selective theoretical speech, when they were confronted with more or less serious issues regarding national superiority. Some conclusions of the European racial anthropology, for example that Romanians were brachycephalic and therefore inferior, were consistently dismissed. While local anthropologists produced scientific reproofs debunking troubling racial beliefs, there was an alternative vernacular speech which relied on Lavaterian residues and folkloric beliefs, and which applied anthropological discrimination on ethnic subjects.

This particular type of conveyance also benefited from a revival of physiognomic theories during the interwar period. Characterology, a new method of studying the character, combined revised principles of physiognomy, phrenology and pathognomy. It was developed in the 1920s and was soon popularized in Romanian media. Physiognomy was simultaneously reviewed in medical treatises and ordinary newspapers. Magazines started popularizing utility advice on the correspondence between traits and physics, building on the sensational pseudo-medical – but also socially helpful – content of the discipline. A 1936 Romanian magazine ended an article on physiognomy with a legitimization of utility as follows: “This [physiognomic classification] will help and guide [our readers] to study their fellow people, and let us not forget that, in the harsh struggle of modern existence, this understanding of those around us, is among the most valuable ones.” (*Citirea...* 1934)

Although its effects are immeasurable, physiognomy secured to a certain extent the representation of the social and ethnic Other in the Romanian consciousness, and, one step further, in the national imagery. It was part of a prejudicial instruction that trained individuals to discover the inner nature of real ethnic subjects when the images were no longer close-at-hand. Some prejudices survived up to these days, and, although they are no longer associated with physiognomy (now an obscure notion circulated only by scholars), they are still active. They dwell in the public mind, and sometimes pop-up as public statements, not rarely as xenophobic remarks. In 2008, just before a tensed football match between Romania and Bulgaria, an important shareholder of an important Romanian sport club declared: “Bulgarians have a big head, but God didn't put anything inside it.”²⁴ National physiognomy: 1 – political correctness: 0.

²⁴ *Jurnalul național*, V, no. 4476, 18 October 2007.

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