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## **“The Last Nastratin”: An Interethnic Novel of *Fin De-siècle* Dobroudja**

### **Abstract**

Starting from Mihail Sadoveanu’s (1880–1961) novel *Ostrovul lupilor* [Wolves’ Island/Wolves’ Nest] from 1941, with a Turkish Dobrujan setting, the aim of the paper is to reveal how the imaginary of a specific Oriental spirituality is constructed around the figure of the popular sage Nastratin. The multi-ethnic image of pre-World War I Dobruja, with its interethnic tensions, thus becomes the vehicle for a humanist message of tolerance within a convoluted, complex narrative.

### **Keywords**

multiculturalism, Oriental, mirage, Dobruja, Nastratin

### **The Turkish Tatars in the writings of Mihail Sadoveanu**

Mihail Sadoveanu’s particular sympathy for the Turkish Tatar ethnicity<sup>1</sup> might seem intriguing, since his historical novels are set against

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1 Ottoman citizens until 1878, Romanian citizens afterwards, the Tatars of Dobruja are a Turkic population of Sunni (Hanafi) Islamic religion and Turkic

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the backdrop of the periodic invasions by the Ottoman Empire or Tatar hordes. One might see in the attitude of the writer, who was known between the two World Wars for his ecumenical tolerance, his reverence for the heritage of the ancient wisdom of a defunct empire at a time when, in the heart of modern Europe, Nazi-fascist barbarity was thriving. In essence, Nastratin (Nasreddin Hoca/Hodja), on account of the pedagogy of his “classic” anecdotes, is a vehicle of the mentality (morality) of a large part of the East acculturated by Persian, Arab, Ottoman or Mongol domination: from the Mediterranean basin to the Indian Ocean and from the Balkan Peninsula to the Maghreb and Central Asia. The anecdotes attributed to him have been circulating in folklore over the centuries, and his figure appears in specific adaptations (including onomastic ones) in Arab, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Albanian, Bulgarian, Bosnian, Croatian, Chinese, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Kurdish, Mongolian, Persian, Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Uyghur or Uzbek traditions, processed in folklore or literary narratives; he is also found among the Spanish Jews and the Urdu population, in Western apocryphal literature and, of course, in the *Halima / One Thousand and One Nights* (Başgöz, 1978) and circulated predominantly within the sphere of influence of the former Ottoman Empire. Even its origin is disputed: according to some authors, Nasr ed-Din was Persian, while according to others a Seljuk Turk or Arab. His metamorphoses and avatars have been traced and studied within several cultures. It can be posited that, quite possibly, the inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance epitomised by Hoca is an “anchor” that Sadoveanu proposes to Europe as it was going adrift in the late 1930s. The first Turkish edition of the stories of the sage of Akşehir – “the Turkish Aesop” as Dimitrie Cantemir dubbed him (Constantin, 1973, p. 212) – appeared in 1838 in Istanbul under the title *Lta`if-i Nasr ed-Din Khodja*.

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language, settled in the region since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. According to the 1878 census, the majority of Dobruja’s population at the time were Tatars – 71,000 and Turks – around 49,000; in 1918 there were about 177,000 Turks-Tatars, whose number fell to 119,500 in 1930s, then abruptly to about 28,800 in 1948 (cf. Andrei Tudorel, Vasile Gheţău, *Serii istorice de date. Populaţia României. 1860–2021* (Historical series of data. Romanian Population. 1860–2021), National Institute for Statistics, Bucharest, 2021).

The collection *Nezdrăvăniile lui Nastratin Hoge*a [Nastratin Hoca's Mischiefs, or Witticisms], published by the Bulgarian-Wallachian Anton Pann in 1853, according to G. I. Constantin (1967, p. 109), is the first translation of the series into a Balkan language, tapping into apocryphal Greek, Turkish and Bulgarian sources. Before Sadoveanu, Romanian modern literature mythologised Nasr ed-Din Hoca through the abstractionist/hermetic poet Ion Barbu's lyrical utopia of Isarlîk in the “Balkan cycle” of the volume *Joc secund* [Mirrored Play] from 1930 (see especially the poem *Nastratin Hoge la Isarlîk* [Nastratin Hoca at Isarlîk], with different implications of political identity than those of the Sadovenian text, depicting Nastratin as an abstracted, sapiential, contemplative avatar of the Ottoman imperial heritage – and the epitome of a “Balkan” identity affiliation that is a distinguishing quality of the Romanian national character).

One of the writer's diary entries, dating from 1919, seems to have provided the inspiration for the Turkish-Dobrujan novel *Ostrovul lupilor*, written and published two decades later<sup>2</sup>: “A Turkish man from Dobruja – sentenced to 20 years' hard labour for murder – is released from prison, comes before the judge and declares that he was innocent” (Sadoveanu, 2005, p. 124). On several occasions, Sadoveanu avows that the gestation of his novels preceded their drafting by several years; this is confirmed by titles such as *Venea o moară pe Siret* [A Mill Was Floating Down the Siret] (1924), inspired by the flooding in 1908, *Hanu-Ancuței* [Ancuța's Inn] (1928), whose first draft dates from 1921, or the historical novel *Nunta domnița Ruxanda* [Lady Ruxanda's Wedding] (1932), with research work recorded in his personal diary of 1927.

*Ostrovul lupilor* likely draws on the author's experiences prior to the First World War, from a different historical context; in July 1907, Sadoveanu had already made his first hunting expeditions to the Danube Delta; the series of reports he published in *Privești dobrogene* [Dobruja's Views] between 1909 and 1914 (when they were also collected in a volume) gives an account of his discovery of the territory between the Danube and the Sea, augmented and recalibrated in the 1920s by his travel notes on the Quadrilateral, his reconstruction of the Ottoman Byzantium in the novel *Zodia Cancerului sau vremea*

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2 All quotes from the novel are taken from Sadoveanu, 2010.

*Ducăi-Vodă* [The Cancer Sign, or the Times of Duca Voivode] (1929) and, after 1945, several “Turkish” short stories in the volume *Fantasii răsăritene* [Eastern Fantasies] (*Vama de la Eyub, Huzur and Roxelana*), whose title appears to echo Marguerite Yourcenar’s 1938 *Oriental Tales*.

Before *Ostrovul lupilor*,<sup>3</sup> Sadoveanu had described the region only in travelogues or hunting and fishing stories. Contact with Dobruja occasioned his first direct relationship with the Orient – an “Orient within Romania”,<sup>4</sup> as the area was perceived in the interwar period – due to affinities with the Turkish Tatar communities abiding from the time of the Ottoman Empire (in 1878, following the Russian–Romanian–Turkish war, the territory of Dobruja was annexed by Romania); these affinities are addressed in the subjective chronicle of the Second Balkan War in the volume *44 de zile în Bulgaria* [44 Days in Bulgaria] (Sadoveanu, 1914a)<sup>5</sup> – more precisely, the “pacifying”

3 In 1969 Petre Luscaltov, author of children’s books born in Chişinău, published an eponymous book which became a best seller of Romanian children’s literature.

4 For representations of this space see Romanița Constantinescu, *Pași pe graniță. Studii despre imaginarul românesc al frontierei*, Polirom, Iași, 2009.

5 It is worth noting, in the chapter “The Turks of Ghighen,” how the former Ottoman occupiers view the different attitudes of the Bulgarians and Romanians towards them. The Bulgarians (the new dominant nation) are blamed for the cruelty of their revenge on the common Turks, while the Romanian soldiers are praised for the nonviolence of their intervention, but reprimanded for not understanding this law of violence. The Romanians’ host in Ghighen, an elderly Turk, even expresses his community’s desire to take refuge in Dobruja, seen as an ideal multi-ethnic safe haven (“they have no law now... Good that you have come; they are now afraid; then we must ask your government to allow us to settle in Dobruja”). In reply, the commander of the Romanian military company explains the different treatment by the fact that the Romanian army pursues peace, while the historical revenge of the Bulgarians is motivated by the similar cruelty of the “Bashi-bazouk” during the Ottoman occupation: “...We are a regular army... Besides, between you and the Bulgarians there was something else. The Bashibazouks once cut and hanged many Bulgarians./- That’s right... said the old man. So it was in times past”. “Peaceful and melancholic” in appearance, the Turks of Ghighen still nurture nostalgia for the glorious days of the Ottoman Empire (when they were “feared” and respected), seeing in its demise a “punishment from Allah” for the decadence of the leaders. “The empire is ruled today by weak men who fight over money coffers. They have forsaken the law, play cards, drink wine... Now the people who used to fear us are driving us away and putting us to the sword”). To Sadoveanu, the Turkish dwellings in the area appear as a camouflage of identity: humble in appearance, their “spotlessly clean” interiors hide imperial luxury: adorned with lace and kilim rugs, sofas on carpets and old weapons with mother-of-pearl inlays displayed on the walls.

military campaign of the Romanian army in Bulgaria in 1913, in which the writer participated as a second lieutenant.<sup>6</sup> Here, sympathy for the Turkish community in the young Bulgarian state is tantamount to fraternising with the dignified decline of those "defeated by history." In his historical novels as well – particularly *Neamul Șoimăreștilor* (1915) and the *Frații Jderi* trilogy (1935, 1936 and 1942)<sup>7</sup> – the writer systematically avoids confusing the Tatar invasions or Ottoman expansionism with the peoples in question, as the Moldovan protagonists of the respective stories forge close bonds with ethnic Tatars or Turks.

### **An intercultural novel with a Dobrujan setting**

In Sadoveanu's case, contact with the social life of the Turks in Dobruja, the Quadrilateral and Bulgaria enhanced the authenticity of his representations of the Muslim East.<sup>8</sup> There is little or none of the post-romantic, sentimental/pictorial, orientalist exoticism of Pierre Loti, so widely emulated in the literature of his time. In *Privești dobrogene* (Sadoveanu, 1914b), the Danube Delta and northern Dobruja, especially

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By comparison, Bulgarian homes are "beautiful and grand on the outside," but their interiors are underwhelming.

- 6 The First Balkan War was a military conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan League (Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece), with the occupation of Macedonia (liberated from the Turks) at stake. Ended by the intervention of the Great Western Powers, the conflict was reopened by a surprise military attack by Bulgaria, unhappy with the outcome, on its fellow League members, followed by attacks on Bulgaria by the Ottoman Empire and Montenegro. On 10 July 1913, the Romanian army intervened in the conflict without engaging in fight (as the Bulgarian army waged several simultaneous battles) and reached Sofia with losses caused solely by the cholera epidemic, and on 31 July Bulgaria called for a truce. Following the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty on 10 August 1913 (the Great Powers withdrew from the arbitration), Romania took possession of the Quadrilateral – two counties of southern Dobruja with an area of 6,960 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 286,000 inhabitants, most of them Turks and Tatars.
- 7 In the historical novel *Neamul Șoimăreștilor*, strongly influenced by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the Moldovan-Bessarabian hero Tudor Șoimaru has the Tatar Cantemir-bey as his "blood brother" and travelling companion, and in *Frații Jderi*, Ionuț Jder travels south of the Danube accompanied by a faithful servant named Gheorghe Botezatu, a Christianized Tatar; both Cantemir and Botezatu are associated with the ethno-stereotype of "wisdom" and "common sense."
- 8 On the political-literary etiology of the representations of the relationship between East and West in Romania, see Monica Spiridon, *Les dilemmes de l'identité aux confins de l'Europe: le cas roumain*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004.

the Tulcea and Babadag areas, are scrutinised with quasi-anthropological interest in their multi-ethnic mosaic; the Sadovean travel notes, some of them close in literary value to short stories, contain numerous observations of “imagological” relevance, though they focus mainly on the Lipovans and Romanian shepherds settled in the area, while the Turkish or Tatar element is still secondary. The Muslim populations would receive the writer’s attention a little later. *Ostrovul lupilor*, a novel on Turkish identity in Dobrogea, no longer focusses on the fabulous landscape of the Delta (also evoked in the accounts of fishing adventures in *Împărăția apelor* [Kingdom of the Waters] from 1928), nor on the dreamlike Quadrilateral (depicted in the travel accounts in *Depărtări* [Faraway Lands] from 1930), but on the geographical area bordering the hills of Niculițel to the north and Constanța (the former Küstenge) to the south; an area centred around Babadag,<sup>9</sup> the ancient Histria (known as Caranasuf until 1914)<sup>10</sup> and the great Lake Sinoe (formerly Casapchioii). The “Oriental” atmosphere, the “flowery” style and the ceremonious narrative protocol have led some commentators to place the volume alongside sapiential literary masterpieces as *Divanul persian* [The Persian Divan] (1940) or *Poveștile de la Bradu Strîmb* [The Tales of Bradu Strîmb] (1943), on a par with Hermann Hesse’s writings. *Ostrovul lupilor* has also been regarded as a Dobrujan replica of the pastoral novel *Baltagul* [The Hatchet], along a transhumance route linking mountainous Moldova to the Danube marshes (after 1878, when Dobruja joined the new Romanian national state, the Bucharest administration colonised/Romanianised the province by bringing in Transylvanian shepherds from the Austro-Hungarian Empire [Iordachi, 2002]). Both novels

9 Sadoveanu attributes a questionable Turkic etymology to the town: according to him Babadag means “father of the [Hercynian] mountains” in the area, however Turkish historians are of the opinion that the name comes from the der-vish Sari Saltuk Dede (real name Sherif Hizir), the leader (“Baba”) of the Tatars settled in the area since 1263 – see Sabahat Akşirai, *Sari Saltuk Baba, Renkler*, Bucharest: Kriterion Yainevi, 1995, p. 189.

10 The ruins of Histria, founded by Greek settlers from Miletus around 650 BC and destroyed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD by the Avaro-Slav invasions, were identified by the French archaeologist Ernest Desjardins (1868); archaeological excavations were started only in 1914 by teams led by the historian Vasile Pârvan (roughly around the time of the “hunting trip” in Sadoveanu’s novel).

are "pastoral" narratives constructed around a murder, a problematic investigation and a labyrinthine criminal trial, and in both novels the murderer is exposed by a woman Zebila or Vitoria Lipan, respectively. In *Baltagul*, Nechifor Lipan's murderer is maimed to death by the herding dog Lupu (Wolf), and in *Ostrovul lupilor* the death of Iovan the Serb – the murderer of his cousin Marcu – is foreshadowed by a pack of wolves decimating his flocks during the winter, on an island on Lake Sinoe. Admittedly, "in their purely external aspect, the episodes with judges, lawyers, jurors and so on lack the density of similar ones in *Baltagul*" (Ciopraga, 1981, p. LXXXIX); the focus of the narrative no longer falls on the facts recounted, but on his musings on them. Rather than a realist novel, *Ostrovul lupilor* is a "*conte philosophique*."

This is, however, completely different territory; *Ostrovul lupilor* is, in the first and last instance, an interethnic narrative about a Dobruja where the peaceful coexistence of the "nations" has always been subject to the political pressures from the various administrations. The political context in which the novel was written is not without significance: on 7 September 1940, under pressure from Hitler's Germany, the Quadrilateral (the southern Dobrujan counties of Durostor and Caliacra) were returned by the Treaty of Craiova to Bulgaria, from which Romania had taken it over in August 1913; the population exchanges also affected the Turkish community, whose members had long since begun to expatriate to Mustafa Kemal's Turkey. Most of the Turks in Histria (Caranasuf) were replaced by Bulgarians.

A 1938 article by Geo Bogza (1968), whose social reports on the provinces newly annexed by Romania after 1918 very tellingly describe the exodus of the Turks from Dobruja, which was making the headlines in the press:

Again you are leaving, Turks from the lands by the sea, and again the newspapers have started to write about you. With melancholy. Apparently, the Romanians feel sorry to see you go. Now so many of your good qualities are revealed: you were nice, you were loyal. And you wore fez. You were thus a picturesque touch adding to the charm of the Romanian landscape. But above all, you descended from ancestors who had inspired an endless number of Romanian proverbs. For

instance: "Like Turk, like shotgun." It's true that besides the Browning or the machine gun, the shotgun is now obsolete. Or that strange saying: "Let the Turk pay!" I know that for a long time it was us who paid to the Turk. But perhaps it was then that we took to this this manner of speaking, in which so many of us now say that Germany is watching over the peace. Your departure from the lands by the sea has caused not a little sorrow and there are people who sigh: "The Turks are leaving..." A belated reply to the cry that terrified our grandparents for so long: "The Turks are coming!" Over centuries, in the rhythm of Eminescu's gloss, one might say of course: "The Turks are coming, the Turks are going..." But there's nothing poetic about your departure: on the deck of ships, bags on your backs, huddled together like a herd. By day you thirst, and by night you shiver with cold. And how long have you been hungry? *Aman, bre!* Woe is you! Don't I know it. (pp. 345-346)

Although the identity of the narrator/hunter is not disclosed, the novel's prologue develops a very "Sadovenian" view on the history of Dobruja, also expounded in his older travel writings; his inventory of the ethnic groups (Turks, Tatars, Bulgarians, Germans, etc.) also includes the Italians in the village of Cataloi, stating that they were first brought to Cornești, in Moldova, by "a landowner from the vicinity of Iași, father of the poet Dimitrie Anghel" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 194) (after 1870, many of the urban construction projects in Romania employed Italian architects and workers). A "land of antiquity," Dobruja is at the same time a "land of change", a territory where the historical rights of ethnic groups are as uncertain as possible – in fact, non-existent. The novel's sumptuous *incipit* melancholically unfolds a relativising perspective on history (in a very broad perspective), in a *vanitas vanitatum* key:

The spring deposits of the Danube are rich enough to gradually push the Sea's boundary further east. Chilia was a seaport in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in the reign of the righteous voivode Stephen of Moldavia. And seven hundred years before Stephen-Voievode, the pagan Slavs from Kyiv, eager to prey on the trade routes of the Byzantine kingdom, had set up a fortress and hanging gardens at Prislav. From those gardens Tzar Sviatoslav watched the sea, sipping sweet wine from the gold-encrusted



skull of a Bulgarian prince. Now Prislav sits far away from the view it once had, on one of the three arms of the river. Also, from Babadag to Siutghiol, all the lakes within reach of the shore were the dominion of the Euxine Sea. Now the Lipovan fishermen catch carp in the big pond of Razelm; in Taşaul, Duingi and Caranasuf the mullets come to spend the summer in shallow waters; and on the seabed of yore, at Histria, the shepherds lead their flocks and the peasants plough the necropolises of times long gone. Seven or eight hundred years before the hordes of bearded Slavs arrived here, the Greek cities were flourishing. At Histria mosaic *thermae* and marble inscriptions are unearthed. The graves of the refined Milesian settlers mingled with the older burial mounds of the Scyths. On these superimposed, overlapping layers of bones, our Dacian ancestors also lit their fires, along their routes carrying wool and grain for the peoples of the south. Then the Romans took over. Later, Mongolian hordes left a trail of fire and blood, as their hunger drove them westwards. The *autokrators* of Byzantium brought the peace again, until the Tatars invaded once more from one side and the Turks from the other. Graveyard over graveyard, and hearth on top of hearth. The last human waves left the residue of descendants still standing face to face. Malorusians and Lipovans, Gagauz and Bulgarians, Turks and Tatars. Romanians too, filling all vacant places like water, slowly sweeping away the past. (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 194)

Two things should be pointed out here: first, the lack of historical memory among the inhabitants, after "catastrophes that shattered everything;" as "a passage from the wilderness to the Empire's heaven," Dobruja is a land of forgotten antiquity, of impermanence and ephemerality: "Dobruja, you are 'antiquity' itself; but the transient Dobrujans, as soon as they set foot here, discard this word as well as any other in connection with permanence" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 197). In such circumstances, toponymy becomes incomprehensible to the locals, and "philologists can find only a funereal use for their knowledge" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 197). Secondly, we note how recent are the Romanian administration and population: the only "autochthonous" Romanians are the shepherds settled here from Transylvania (*mocani*). One symbolic detail – defining the local identity – is striking: beyond the ruins of the Histria fortress, where the lake seems to "send dark

blue waves” towards the sea, there is no water, but only the dry bottom of the valley – a mirage, a *Fata Morgana* known as “the water of the dead,” reaching into the depths of “that mystery where the past lies, locked away” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 196).<sup>11</sup>

This abyss over which cranes soar (Sadoveanu’s symbolic bird) is the only element in the novel with an esoteric (“mystical”) significance, but nevertheless a key element: this is a realm where illusion takes precedence over reality. The mirage spanning the space between Caranasuf and Ostrovul Lupilor (Wolves’ Island) is guarded by a mill abandoned and burnt down not long ago, but vaguely persisting in people’s memory like a name “to which nothing answers”: Moara

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11 The mirage occurring between Caranasuf and Sinoe also appears in a tale of nature and hunting included in the volume *Vechime: Histria (Ancient Times: Histria, 1939)*, where Vasile Pârvan’s archaeological site appears as a palimpsest of submerged civilizations. Here the “land of antiquity” is (also) a “land of solitude,” where millenia before the ancient Dacians had forged links with old and great civilisations: “Solitude seems to be the name of the whole land, where for more than two thousand years the tireless Greeks established a sumptuous and civilised life. First the entire island was occupied by the city of Histria. As testifies one of the marble slabs that have come to light, the earliest Histrians, in union with other Greek settlements of the Sea and the Danube, entered a covenant of alliance, defence and trade with an ancient Dacian king who predated the great Boerebista. His name was Remaxius and he reigned between the Danube, the Tisza and the Dniester. I salute this ancestor whose name slumbers in the solitude of Sinoe.” Historical musings on the ruins leads to a decadent eulogy of civilizations swallowed by waters, yet present through the evidence of the grandeur of their remains: “From the 6th century BC to the 3rd century AD, the Histrians traded with Dacia and sailed across the Euxine Sea to the Greek islands and the land of Asia Minor. In the latter period, greatly afflicted by the invasion, the ravages and the plunder of the Goths, they built a city on top of the ruins. It is a strong fortress; its outer walls are of hewn stone. The defensive towers of the gate, the width of buttresses, the public buildings, the marble and mosaic termæ fully justify the observation of our Lipovan boatman from Jurilovca: – Hm! He exclaims in awe, those people of yore were wise. Says one of the unkempt, uncouth boorish men smelling of oil and booze, who pass by and over the noble graves. For the unrelenting waves, from Goths to Huns, Slavs and Tatars, have crushed and defiled the edifices of a dazzling civilization.” This piece of prose can be considered to “branch out” in the 1941 novel, starting from its very *incipit* (“I found myself, with two companions, on the mounds near Caranasuf”). The excavations of Pârvan’s archaeological teams resulted, after the identification of the Roman town in 1914, in the renaming of the village of Caranasuf (apparently named after its founder Nasuf) as Histria; the new Orthodox church built for the Romanian and Bulgarian believers in the locality incorporated remains of the excavated ruins.

lui Ali (Ali's Mill), although it never belonged to Ali, but to the man who had killed Ali; the names themselves thus become a kind of macabre mirage, announced in the opening of chapter two of the book: "I count on my fingers and find that twenty-five years ago this August, I first took the road I speak about, to Wolves' Island" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 198).

### **The new Nastratin and "Mad Ali" – A *sui generis* anti-Halima**

Monica Spiridon (1982, p. 77) pays particular attention to the narratological solutions of the text. The (meta)narrator has an uncertain status and does not necessarily share the identity of the author on the book's cover; the name given to him by the shepherd Dănilă of Caranasuf ("Master Ioniță") is not the real one (of which we know nothing!). We are also informed that the "storyteller" has ancestors "in Byzantium" and "a neatly-trimmed beard," which again rules out any identification with the real author, or rather conceals it (the tone is jocular enough to be unreliable). The uncertainty surrounding the name is ironically pointed at in the title of the second chapter ("The storyteller is allegedly one called 'Master Ioniță'"), while the title of the next chapter refutes it just as facetiously, through the name used by Dănilă *baci* (chief shepherd): "The storyteller arrives at a shepherds' settlement, in the wilderness, and does not even care to greet 'Mr. Panaite...'" Therefore, the very name of the storyteller is a "mirage" to the local people.

The "story within a story", a characteristic trait of Sadovenian literary maturity, holds a relatively minor place in *Ostrovul lupilor*, occupying little more than half of the novel; instead, the narrative "frame" – a hunt for great bustards in the "Bărăgan" plain of Histria – is significantly expanded. This hunting trip, if we subtract 25 from the year when the book was written (1940), would likely be set in the summer of 1915, and its evocation spans the whole of chapters II through VI. The participants, along with the storyteller, are the lawyer Panaite Cîmpanu from Constanța, his trusted servant Neagu Leușcan and their hosts at a sheepfold near Ostrovul Lupilor (The Wolves' Island): the septuagenarian shepherd Dănilă and the "philosopher" Mehmet Caimacam, head of the shepherds and former client

of Panaite, nicknamed Nastratin Hoca after the legendary sage; his faithful assistants, the Tatars Gulfi and Şaban, are also present. Spectacular in itself, the narrative establishes a Dobrujan literary geography and a specific atmosphere, as well as a moral typology of the characters, contentiously engaged in hunting confrontations that reveal their mentality. In its turn, the sheepfold is portrayed as an archaic corporation, described “anthropologically.”

A particular element of local atmosphere is represented by the specific dishes (to Sadoveanu, gastronomy is the quintessence of a community’s identity). In particular, the kebab is the hunters’ delight; a frequent occurrence in Sadoveanu’s later writings, it also features at the court of the Crimean khan in the novel *Nunta domniței Ruxanda* [Lady Ruxanda’s Wedding] and in the third volume of *Frații Jderi* [The Jderi Brothers] it “bewitches” the young hero on his journey to Mount Athos via Ottoman Bulgaria. The seduction of Turkish cuisine – an element of imperial soft power, eventually assimilated by Wallachians – makes Ionuț Jder “forget” his own ancestry (“You eat yourself into oblivion”) and momentarily “suspends” his aversion towards the invaders (Sadoveanu, 1966, p. 222).

Resulting in a modest success – the narrator effortlessly shoots a bustard, and the envious and passionate Panaite, after great struggle, kills another – this “atmosphere hunt”, as Paul Georgescu (1967) termed it, is followed, during a rainstorm that forces the protagonists to take refuge in the valley’s sheepfold, by the telling of an old story (in Sadoveanu’s prose, such rains usually have an initiatory role, opening a passage into another reality). The lawyer’s account, a retrospective plea, is (as stated elsewhere), “rather convoluted, with repetitions and belaboured points, but also with details that no longer linger in my memory” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 360); we are therefore offered an essentialised account, with a retelling of a reality to which there is no direct access. The “mishap” of 50-year-old Mehmet, a close friend of shepherd Dănilă and host to the group of hunters, thus becomes the main subject of the story – and of the novel that contains it at its core – a story introduced by the lawyer as a “true *Halima*, complicated and rather lengthy”, even before the narrator meets the new Nastratin. When the long-awaited man

appears, he does not disappoint, and the nickname by which he is identified with the sage of the 1400s<sup>12</sup> is justified by the moral stories he tells – first of all, in order to make the coffee ceremony more pleasant: “caave saade caimacli,” a blend “of one variety of Mocha and two of Hindustan” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 226). Then Mehmet serves his audience the parables of Nastratin Hoca, portrayed, in turn, as a “man of peace” in the confrontation with the cruel Timur Lenk and as a skilled coffee maker initiated into the craft at Istanbul and Balchik, where he ends up seeking refuge “for fear of his wife.” Beside their particular sense of humour, the anecdotes are intended to “match tastes” very much to the listener’s liking (“Coffee, beyim, is a pleasant beverage, but at the same time it’s a drug. Any drug is also poison”). Like Mehmet, he does not enjoy the Bulgarian coffee, because it is “excessively watered down” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 228). What he finds fascinating about the new Nastratin is in fact the ceremonious delicacy of witty speech, melted into the *optimal dosage* that defines coffee and its symbolic correlative, the story.

Here Sadoveanu employs the “Oriental” technique of postponement and obliqueness/disclosure by degrees, which makes the main hero first appear to be the narrator, then the brigand Deli-Ali and finally revealed as Mehmet himself. The aforementioned mirage – the so-called “water of the dead”, a Fata Morgana between Histria and Sinoe – becomes a *mise en abyme* of the story of the new Nastratin. The tales told by the two hunting companions over several rainy days blend together to the point of indistinguishability, merging into a unique “paste”: the voice of our unknown narrator.

Mehmet and Ali’s unfortunate story takes place before the turn of the century, in a Dobruja newly colonised by the Romanians (who hold the state authority bodies of administration and justice). Henceforth, the novel takes a Turkish “foundation” with Romanian “superstructure”; enter Ali, the nephew of Mehmet’s wife (Zebila) from her cousin’s side and son of his friend Iusuf. Poor and humble, the child Ali feels wiser than others (by way of psychological compensation); later, he listens to some “wonderful stories” read

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12 Sadoveanu’s poetic license; the popular philosopher and pedagogue Nasreddin Hodja actually lived in the 12th century AD.

out from the *Halima* by a hoca in Küstengè (Constanța), and they spontaneously fill his mind like a mirage. The conversation with his mother, the lowly “handmaid” Eitùn, intertwines life and literature, with a moral full of psychological astuteness:

I think of so many things, *anne*, for I’ve inherited from father a wisdom that other boys of my age don’t have. While I was living at Küstengè, I didn’t waste my time playing childish games in the slums or fishing for goby on the sea shore. I used to go quite often to a hoca who taught me how to listen to wonderful stories. He would read them from a thick book and in my mind I could picture every word he read. I especially liked a story about Aladdin, a wizard and an enchanted lamp. Aladdin was a poor little boy like me, and had a wise mother like you. Whatever troubles he may have caused his mother, as I do you, they all ended well because of the enchanted lamp he found in a cellar, so strangely, when he least expected it. As soon as he rubbed that lamp, a mighty genie appeared right away to grant his every wish .... So I seek to find a lamp like that, and then we’ll lack nothing, we’ll live in luxury and have it all; and I can send you to the emperor, to ask for his daughter as my wife, as Aladdin did in the kingdom where he was living. Eitùn ... did not believe in any of the Halima’s wondrous tales, for life had taught her the bitter truths. Such lies as those in the Halima were invented by the lazy and spread in the world by poets, who also belong to the same lot. But Ali obstinately kept to his philosophical reckonings. (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 261)

In one of his seminal studies on Sadoveanu’s work, Nicolae Manolescu (1976) noted that to Mehmet the model assumed, imitated and emulated is Nastratin, with his pragmatic wisdom – a “man of peace” and of witty words, also having learnt at the “the school of life” – whereas Ali’s literary ideal is the story of Aladdin in the *Halima*. Like Don Quixote or Emma Bovary, the “obstinate” Turk – marked by a distorted paternal role model – becomes a victim of the confusion between literature and life, more precisely, between the stories of those “up high” (who sell comfortable illusions to the many) and the real-life world of “the lowly” (those who work). Life, in its turn, seems to confirm his upside-down mode of thinking. As if in an

anti-story, the teenager finds a (not enchanted) lamp, with which he accidentally sets fire to an old straw mattress and discovers in the ashes the four Turkish *mahmudiye* coins his mother had painstakingly saved: the narrator sneers, "This is how books' lies turn out to be truths" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 262). Ali steals them and flees to Babadag, followed by the curses of the poor woman who, overwhelmed with remorse, later forgives him; however, (such an extraordinary literary device!) her forgiveness never catches up with him: mocked by the hoca of Babadag (a figure opposed to the one in Constanța), beaten and robbed of three of his four coins by a Romanian policeman because he had dared to defend his rights, the young man learns that Eitùn has died, leaving him alone in the world. Taking up his mother's way of life, he toils profitlessly at shepherds' folds, including Dănilă's, or at the fishers' storehouses; he then falls ill with black pox brought by the wind from a wolf carcass, but survives it; he spends a while at Niculițel, guarding the Hafızlı vineyards of landowner Năstase Blîndu, even defending them in an armed fight against thieves (and as a reward earning a nomination for a medal); he finally serves as a soldier in the cavalry corps led by Sergeant Murad of Constanța, before abandoning observance of the Prophet's Law in favour of the "free life" of the brigand.

From now on, the man will be known as the feared Deli-Ali ("Mad Ali", a nickname whose pronunciation will be voluptuously practised, decades later, by the narrator and Panaite) and will act as a Turkish outlaw who avenges his humiliations a hundredfold. He who had mistaken the "lie" of literature for real life now rebels against the injustice which, in another typical confusion, he equates with the Law, announcing to his fellow countrymen that he has gone out into the wilderness to live according to his heart's desire and to bring about an "order" only he understands "among the Turkish clergy, the police and the Romanian shepherds."

The individual against the laws of the community: this is a *hybris* specific to Sadoveanu's prose. Declared public enemy number one in the region, a wanted man hunted by the authorities but hidden by loyal supporters, the rebellious "loner" avenges his humiliations one by one, mutilates the hoca, takes back his *mahmudiye* coins and kills the policeman Negură, then goes on to collect from the wealthy

men of all Dobruja the riches he and his father had always coveted; the “madness” of rebellion is his understanding of justice. While hiding in the windmill of Marcu the Serb, Ali ends up a victim of Marcu and his cousin Iovan, lured by the price placed on the head of the robber. Taking advantage of the Turk’s trust, Marcu kills him, aided by Iovan, who suspects him of keeping for himself the secret of Ali’s most important fortune: his hidden treasure trove.

### **A forensic storyline with ethnic implications**

After a meeting with the shepherd Dănilă, Mehmet finds Marcu (who had left them only an hour and a half earlier) murdered in his own mill, while Iovan is searching for him at the foot of the hill. An astute thinker, Mehmet correctly anticipates that, as the only witness, he will also become a suspect – though none of the villagers and shepherds believe that the murder could have been committed by this fair man, almost saint-like in his righteousness and kindness, revered by his much younger wife. From this point on, the story – hitherto adventurous, quasi-picaresque – takes a “forensic” turn.

Although all evidence points to the innocence of the witness, the reconstruction of the incident, carried out with suspicious “haste,” is unfavourable to him. Suspicion is first voiced by Judge Radu V., the judge sent from Bucharest, unhappy about his “exile to Dobruja” and eager to build a successful career in Bucharest through over-zealous convictions handed down after scant investigation (we learn that he later becomes Minister of Justice). The narrator justifies, in retrospect, the secrecy over the magistrate’s surname (a “nice guy” who ensures Mehmet’s safe transport to Constanța prison) by his easily recognisable notoriety (“our readers of yesteryear will easily connect the dots”). As a man with the fear of Allah, who “was not guided by proverbs but by his own mind” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 317), Mehmet realises the danger early on; he therefore advises Zebila on how to run the household after he is arrested. In the meantime, he reflects on Nastratin’s teachings on justice and injustice, and performs the ritual ablutions.

Despite finding a suitable lawyer – Panaite Câmpanu, whose preliminary investigations he “likes” – the accused becomes the victim of



magistrates who discriminate against him as a Turk on the basis of real or imagined interethnic conflicts. He is, in fact, viewed (suspected and, in the end, discriminated against) not as a Romanian citizen of Turkish ethnicity, but as a Turk fostering imperial nostalgia, hostile to Romanians by virtue of the old military/religious conflict between "Christians" and "Muslims". The judge Iancu Diamandi starts from the premise of the "enmity between Christians and Muslims", to which Mehmet wittily replies that in Caranasuf there is no other enmity but "against the she-wolves who birth too many cubs, while we don't want to let them have the lamb meat" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 336). The one who "nails" the Caimacam, however, is prosecutor Gara Bairactarian ("dubbed Gara Bara"). As an ethnic Armenian, he applies the presumption of guilt on behalf of the Ottomans and Kurds who, during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, massacred the Armenians of Sasun, accused of refusing to pay taxes:<sup>13</sup>

In his indictment, the prosecutor made a poignant digression about the slaughters in Asia by Muslims against Christians. He alluded to the recent acts of the Kurds in a certain province of the Ottoman Empire, which all the newspaper issues of that month wrote about in horror. He quoted these instances to prove to the Honourable Court how fierce religious hatred still persists among certain populations of the East. (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 341)

Ethnic bias, collective stigma and moral "Oriental" labelling are therefore the prosecution's favourite tools, to which are added the taking out of context of some words spoken by Mehmet – "Me today, you tomorrow" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 339) – in which the prosecutor finds proof of his guilt. On the other hand, as a witness and a man with first-hand knowledge of the community, the Romanian mayor

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13 The massacres of 1894–1896 were condemned by the major European powers; Great Britain threatened military intervention and Russia sent troops to end the pogrom. The French government, however, refrained from any condemnation, sparking outrage from the socialist opposition (Jean Jaurès) and writers such as Anatole France. According to the Sadovenian narrator, the murder investigation "took place at Caranasuf, within sight of Lake Sinoe and the buried fortress of Histria, on 20 September 1900," just a few years after the Hamidian massacres, which stirred strong emotions in Romania as well.

of Caranasuf, Ștefan Chiriloiu, defends him admiringly: “he is an honest and God-believing Turk; besides, he is more learned than their Tatar priest; and he has his own thoughts and insights that amaze us” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 339). Free from any inter-ethnic prejudice, he makes the necessary distinction before the prosecutor between “Turk” (common man) and “Ottoman” (imperial official), but to no avail. Sentenced to seven years in the prison of Küstenge (the old Turkish name of the port city of Constanta), the “innocent culprit” refuses any appeal against the conviction, to which he is entitled: “If there is no guilt, there can be no forgiveness” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 358). During his imprisonment, this “good believer, who at the same time has the special outlook of the old Hoca of 1400” (pardoned by Timur for a non-existent crime), and who, in the time of King Carol I (who will eventually exonerate him), re-enacts the case of the Hoca of Timur’s time, and peacefully assesses his own moral condition, in the perspective of a divine judgment to which ephemeral men have no access:

His honour has been brushed aside as a mere trifle. His wealth is left in the care of a weak creature, such as a woman, however worthy she may be. His physical freedom has been taken away. He does not feel ashamed, for he is conscious of his innocence before God. But, because God has graciously granted him the trial he is going through, he isolates himself from us men and seeks refuge in the very One who tries him or punishes him for some unknown fault.... Time, which is so important to men, does not exist for God. It may be that the oil of his righteousness will not rise above the water any time soon; he might be proven innocent in an age, when other generations of men will have forgotten all that is past; and this justice may be done after another age in another form than that which the common people expect. (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 345)

Mehmet Caimacam nevertheless enjoys the respect of the authorities who, suspecting a miscarriage of justice, strive to make his life comfortable in anticipation of an increasingly likely pardon, first by allowing weekly visits to Zebila, then through rewards from the prison governor delivered by the warden, a veteran of the War of Independence. As a skilled jeweller and clock repairman, he then

works for a fee, making "belt buckles and bracelets for those who like such finery" and every week he mends the governor's wife's "horologes", which she passionately treasures in a "personal museum of her own" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 348). Legal reparations – also obtained through Gara Bara and Radu V., who in the meantime had achieved his dream of becoming a high-ranking official in Bucharest, freed from his "exile" to Dobruja – finally arrive thanks to the obedient Zebila, who discovers in Iovan the Serb's house a blue mug that had belonged to Ali's mother, which the son had taken after her death and where, hidden close to the mill, Iovan kept "part of his thieving gains" as a private fetish (Marcu, we infer, had found the mug and Iovan had taken it from him after killing him).

Like Nechifor Lipan's robbers in the novel *Baltagul*, Iovan becomes rich in a suspiciously short time, which is strange. As always with Sadoveanu, however, immanent justice is decisive and intervenes before human justice: one winter, the Serb's flocks are decimated by wolves on Wolves' Island. Terrified both by the threat of "positive law" (as a suspect) and by the "signs" that have appeared – his murder is "exposed by God", according to the mayor and Dănilă – the Serb attempts to evade justice, first through "donations to a holy monastery," then by confessing to the Turk's innocence and eventually choosing to hang himself in the attic of his own house. Finally, Mehmet is pardoned and released almost by force: the only reason he agrees to leave the prison is Zebila-*hanym*'s arrival in a carriage, with servants Gulfi and Shaban, to take him home to Caranasuf.

The story ends in the same setting of the sheepfold: Panaite remembers Mehmet's release and the death of his wife, five years later, from a heart disease caused by the waiting. The Turk's experience prompts the anti-Schopenhauerian reflections of the lawyer – who suddenly became a wiseman – on the sublimated purity of love for Zebila. As the "jeweller" fashioning his own feelings, Mehmet crafts his own "golden branch":

Both we and the women we loved were deceived by the genius of the species .... For such simple physiology a whole etiquette was created. I also know the ancient and Asian view of women. From Scheherazade and Helen of Menelaus to the present day, the woman appears to them

only as an object of desire. I am not talking about my Turk's temperament, nor about the 'contact between two epidermises', but a human creation that was born as a pinnacle of emotions and that stands next to physiology, ennobling it. Our man polishes it, like a jeweller. (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 364)

Much has been said in Romanian literary criticism about Nastratin Hoca's "sadness" (melancholy) in the Sadovenian novel – a sadness certified by his spiritual "heir," Mehmet Caimacam:

Our Nastratin Hoca was neither a jester nor a stubborn mule, Master Panaite, but a sage greater than all sages. My people dare not openly call me by his name, because they have no understanding of Hoca's parables. They laugh at the stories that Hoca would tell in the evening by the fire, but Hoca did not laugh. Five hundred years have passed since our Nasredin died, but Nasredin is still alive when they make fun, and when I am sorrowful. (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 222)

We can see in Mehmet's "Nastratin" figure more than an idealising ethno-cultural stereotype; it is an ethno-image meant to configure a common ethnotype. In the 1970s, the French researcher Guy Michaud (1978, pp. 19–34) outlined a sampling method, according to the criteria of literary imagology and based on a variable number of authors and texts on the characteristics of peoples. The resulting "typical portraits" were called ethnograms. By gathering and comparing – using the same criteria – a sufficient number of writings (including those of Romanian culture) centred around the figure of Nastratin, we obtain relevant data for an ethnogram of the "wise jester", defining a spiritual type. In the Sadovenian text, he also acquires the role of an ethical model.<sup>14</sup>

14 Sadoveanu's affinity for "Nastratinesque" wisdom resurfaces in a short story (*Huzur*) in *Fantasil răsăritene* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1946). It is centred around an elderly Turkish-Tatar couple living in Balchik (Hasan efendi, a former "guardian of the türbè of the unknown saint of Batova Valley", and his wife

### The figure of the "wise jester"

Nicolae Manolescu (1976) correctly noted that to Mehmet, "Nastratin is not a clown, but a philosopher," whose "sadness," misunderstood by Timur Lenk, is brought to the foreground (p. 226). But he is not right in stating that this "sad reading" of the Hoca (or of his parables, which he retells centuries later) is a "betrayal" of the Nastratinesque spirit, except insofar as "identification involves the risk of underhanded betrayal, while betrayal can be tantamount to a superior kind of fidelity." It is, in fact, a betrayal of buffoonish appearances, aimed at saving one's own interiority. A specific melancholy filters through Sadoveanu's image of the wise jester. Monica Spiridon

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Mariam-hanyum) who had hosted the writer during his hunting wanderings across the Quadrilateral, in the spring of 1937 – at the beginning of the far-right Iron Guard campaign against him. The guest is treated to the traditional Turkish coffee and fig jam, in the aroma of unleavened bread and kebab baking in the oven, and touched by the "oriental idleness" of the scene, he puts down in a notebook the words he finds witty, amused by their faulty Romanian pronunciation. Watching him closely, his friend Hasan is delighted when his words arouse interest and are transcribed: "he wishes his wise words could enter into the world of newspapers and books". He agrees that "good things are rare", and when the moral stories he tells stir interest ("When Hasan's turn come, that God think of him, then Hasan speak a good word. But that is rare, now and then") he begins to hope: "if like it, you write it to book". He is saddened, however, when what he wants to convey is not deemed worthy of being put on paper ("Word not good, then?"). Other "lucky" sayings are delivered in the form of an injunction by the sage Nasr-ed-din, whom Hasan believes died at Balchik ("left Anadol and Timur and all and come to Balchik, to rest from the wickedness of emperors; no other truth there is"); he is in fact simply acting like other communities and peoples who claim the sage for themselves. More politically "incorrect" is the "parable" – allegedly Nastratinesque – that Hasan invokes to prophetically vex the Bulgarian claims to the Quadrilateral: "You, Christians of Balchik, know they will come to your place, to famous city call'd Balchik, come they will – nations of hard working and angry men and will not forgive you for living here... This you not wrote?". Hasan is disappointed with his interlocutor's reserve: "I was in doubt, for I am not an enemy of the Bulgarians, as I am not an enemy of any nation; and seeing that I was in doubt, Hasan efendi was saddened: «This write not? This not good. That the prophet prophesied, good; but not good that what he said was fulfilled. The best prophet – he who not tell the truth. If you write this to booklet, I die happy, beyim. If come to us hard working and angry man, then is over, we lie down our head; we die». It is only this resigned and peaceful acceptance of victimhood that reconciles them under the ennobling sign of the written word: "I wrote this in my notebook and Hasan-efendi sighed in gratitude."

(1982, p. 79), in turn, sees Mehmet – a “Nastratin of solitude” – as an exemplary “Smileless Păcală” (a prankster figure in Romanian folklore, from a *păcăli* – to dupe), thus diverting the witty buffoonery of the Romanian folklore character towards seriousness. Mircea Muthu (2002) also calls attention to the “tragic undertones and philosophical emphasis” that, beyond the “universality of the anecdotes”, the Romanian reworkings add to Hoca’s figure, revealing “the mutation from *picaresque* to *sophos*, from *activism* to *contemplativism*”: “The plus that the Romanian version brings is undoubtedly the tear of sorrow, the existential projection” (Muthu, 2002, p. 210).<sup>15</sup> The Balkan hypostases of the “wise wanderer” illustrate the character’s picaresque chameleonism, adapted with versatility to the ethnicity of the respective region. It is amusing that the same Mircea Muthu, contradicting the linguist and folklorist Lazăr Șăineanu’s idea that “the legendary type of the Oriental spirit” is a mixture of “naivety and stupidity”, commits a significant error: quoting I. L. Caragiale’s assessment of Nastratin (“a type of naivety and cunning, of wit and foolishness, of logic and absurdity, of trickster and gullible man”), the Cluj-based comparatist states that the playwright’s text containing the aforementioned opinion is entitled *Din isprăvile lui Nastratin Hoge*a [Nastratin Hoca’s Antics] and appeared in the newspaper *Epoca*, 1897, no. 497. In fact, the real title is *Cilibi Moise. Cîteva rînduri alese* [Cilibi Moise: Selected lines], published in *Epoca literară*, I, no. 5 of 13 May 1896, p. 3. Caragiale’s connection between *Năzdrăvăniile lui Nastratin Hoge*a [Nastratin Hoca’s Mischiefs] and the brochures of “moral stories, maxims and aphorisms” by the Jew Cilibi Moise (Froim Moses Schwarz, 1812–1870), published between 1858 and 1870 and edited by the folklorist Moses Schwarzfild (1857–1943), is important insofar as the two itinerant sages illustrate the same oriental moralism, beyond and across ethnic/religious barriers; “with the same classic oriental geniality as the legendary Nastratin Hoca, he speaks of himself, of his bad luck, which never quite overcomes his wise patience.... there are his fine pearls of wisdom where, with a superior sense of humour,

15 With the following *coda* regarding the analogies with the local hero Păcală: “naive and resourceful, wise and tolerant, illustrating a form of social pedagogy, the Romanian version of the type adds one of the most nuanced representations of popular South-Eastern European humanism.”

he prevails over his ill-starred fate; where he mocks the troubles of his own life as of another's (Muthu, 2002, p. 75).

It is not cunning, nor versatile resourcefulness, but the ability to survive and defend his inward being in adverse circumstances that Sadoveanu chose in the historical conditions of 1940. Mehmet's lonely sadness comes from an awareness of modern decadence: the new people no longer understand the spirit of Hoca, retaining only the hilarious appearance. While Kesarion Breb, in the esoteric novel *Creanga de aur* [The Golden Bough] (1933), after his initiation in Egypt and Byzantium, becomes the last high priest of the free Dacians of Mount Om, Mehmet Caimacam can be regarded as the "last Nastratin" of the land between the Danube and the Sea. However, his "Nastratinism" also serves as camouflage for an inaccessible interiority: "and Nastratin confined himself only to those manifestations and parables which he put on like a foreign garment and a mask" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 361). Out of gratitude, the liberated Turk turned shepherd invites the hunter-guest (a hunter of stories and souls, not only of birds) to "the great autumn passage of the wild geese" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 367). But the latter's trips to Dobruja come to an abrupt halt; the story fast-forwards to the time of the First World War, "during the long winter of 1917" (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 367), to a Dobrujan territory occupied by German, Bulgarian and Turkish troops.

The "storyteller" will learn about the circumstances of Mehmet's death, from his friend Panaite; the Caimacam and his "fellow shepherds" successfully defended themselves against the wolves' attacks, but not against the "bands of *comitagii*" [Bulgarian revolutionaries] coming from the Balkans, from Batova Valley. Although "in that battle he managed to defend part of his possessions", Mehmet is shot twice and admitted to a makeshift hospital in Constanța thanks to the lawyer, where he dies exhausted from the journey and haemorrhaging – but not before putting everything in order. After "arranging worldly things," he "takes counsel" with "the priest of his law" about "more lasting things", then bids farewell to the lawyer from Constanța and, through him, to his newer absent friend: "He remembered me too: he left me a Nasredin-style farewell: – I'm leaving: flowers will still bloom without Mehmet. Güle-güle – to

the bey! This ‘güle-güle’ – an Ottoman ‘adieu’ – literally translates as: ‘smiling-smiling’” (Sadoveanu, 2010, p. 368). It’s a characteristic ending for a novel under the banner of interethnic tolerance.

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