

## **Jean Bart and his Specific Danubian Writings**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at investigating the work of a Romanian writer fascinated by travels on water, by the Danube whose waves he sailed on; then he put down his impressions in a travel memorial (The Book of the Danube), whose posthumous publication took away some of his merits of the pioneering theme, but not the value of the text itself that time passing makes more challenging for those who are fond of a quick reading, a quasi-journalistic one.

**Keywords:** adventure; imagery; language; travel memorial

### **1. The Danubian Biography of the Author**

Eugeniu Botez, known under the pseudonym of Jean Bart, was born in Burdujeni - Suceava on 28.XI.1874, in a family of scholars. His father, Panaite, captain of infantry, made himself noted in the War of Independence and advanced to the rank of brigadier general. His mother Smaranda was a graduate of the French Boarding School. As a child Jean Bart was registered in August 1869 in the School for Military Children, and in September 1894 he attended The Officer School in Bucharest, graduating in the summer of 1896 as a second lieutenant. For six months, he follows The Galati Application School of Royal Navy and 1897 he begins his officer career in the Marine, performing various functions including those of Commissioner of the Sea Ports detached to Calarasi, Sulina, Constanta, and reaching the level of Commander. He is considered one of the initiators of the social assistance program, the first Director General of Social Assistance of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (1921). Elected correspondent member of the Romanian Academy in 1922, he participated in numerous congresses, visiting on such occasion cities such as Paris, Warsaw, and Genoa and making a tour through Egypt, Palestine, Turkey.

“With solid friendships and mutual appreciation” in the world of naval officers, promoter of the cultural and literary life - as much as his job duties allowed - looked by writers, especially from Iasi, locally respected, Eugene Botez intended to

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settle in Constanta as the Maritime Commissioner. But he returned to Sulina, in the same post.

Eugen Botez's affinity with the cultural and literary life of Constanta continued after his final settling in Bucharest 1921. In Galati, he undertook the difficult task of raising the first statue of Eminescu, inaugurated in 1911, being elected over the years, honorary member of "Pro Eminescu" Committee in Constanta, which aimed to build up a monument on the seashore, in memory of the poet who sang the sea so vibrantly in his poems (DGLR, 2004, pp. 388-390).

Staying connected with the marine navigation even after his exit from active Navy, Jean Bart did his utmost to serve the knowledge and propaganda of the sea and marine waters. Ardently supports the establishment of an aquarium and a maritime museum in Constanta, showing that the Department of the Navy Military Museum at that time, in Carol Park, was only "a weak beginning of a maritime museum."

As a member of the European Danube Commission, Jean Bart helped modernizing the port of Sulina and the surrounding region. He is the one who immortalized the name of this town in the "Europolis" novel and who, in a study of 1899, defined for the first time the city cemetery as a "living cemetery". This nomination is an important legacy of the cosmopolitan Sulina during the European Danube Committee, especially because in this area are found the distinct graves of three communities (Christian, Muslim and Hebrew).

In a comment on distance, the writer makes an observation about the maritime institution that he actually served: "EDC did a work of civilization, fulfilling its mission to the needs of the times, playing an important role in the history of navigation and politics of the Orient. Danube harbors have developed rapidly, reaching a flourishing, as they are the gate for wheat export and the gold import of the Romanian countries" (Jean Bart, 1933, p.55).

## **2. The Author the Sailor**

His first writings are published in the "The Literary and Scientific New World" (1896), the author using the signature Tr, short from Trotuș pseudonym. As Jean Bart he appeared for the first time in "The Thursday Truth" (1898). Eugeniu Botez had many readers of his literature, being republished in many newspapers, magazines, calendars and almanacs: "Maritime Magazine" (Braila), founded by him in 1900, "The New Current", "Romanian Life," "The Truth", "Morning", "The Literary and Artistic Truth", "Romania sea and river" (1931-1933). Translations from his writings were done in French, Italian, Spanish, German, Russian, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Portuguese and even in Esperanto.

His first book, "The Logbook", consisting of "marine and military sketches" appears in 1901 with "Forgotten Debts" (1916) and "Princess Bibita" (1923) is

awarded by the Romanian Academy. "The Book of Danube" (1933) is a monograph documentary, while in "The logbook" the author communicates a state of euphoria and "wonder" that embounds him after making his first trip on the Black Sea. The voyage to North America, as described in the "Overseas" (1926) causes the narrator to look with more understanding and even admiration a lifestyle that appreciates promptitude and efficiency. Here, the narrative gets the stamp of truth, the facts being staged by recollections. Although, initially, he had high hopes for the time that will remain him by being posted in a steady job as commissioner to Sulina and later port captain in Constanta, his literary works decreased continuously after the first year (1910 - 1911) when comes down from the ship and embraces a "sedentary" work on land (...).

1916 is the richest year in the editorial writer's work – he is present in bookstores with three volumes: "The Lion Cage", a small volume, only 32 pages, published in the collection "Romanian Writers" under the direction of Al. Vlahuță; "Forgotten debts", "Human Documents", "Short Stories", "The Logbook", edition enlarged and completed with illustrations by painters Voinescu and Verona. Many of his writings appear in fragments, in the issues of "Romanian Life", "The New stream" or "Semănătorismul".

In "Romanian Life" mainly, C.Stere and Garabet Ibrăileanu theorized and supported populism advocating the fight against illiteracy and ignorance of the rural class through the committed involvement of the intellectuals in the enlightenment of the villages. Literature was advocating for promoting a realistic vision of the village life, valuing the historical past and the role of the peasantry and the sympathy for this class. Such themes are found in the literary writings of Jean Bart, Spiridon Popescu, Paul Paun, O.Goga, M.Sadoveanu, Gala Galaction.

The writer fully tastes his new editorial success and the prestige he had in the world of the marine officers, added to the completely justified esteem and appreciation of the fellow authors. By entering of Romania in the war with the Triple Entente powers for the liberation of Transylvania, the hardships that the Romanian army had to endure, will keep him again from the literature up to the years 1919-1920 (Mohanu, 2001, p. 150).

The Commander Eugeniu Botez - known in literature under the name Jean Bart - is among the few soldiers received by the Romanian Academy as active or correspondent members (Mohanu, 2001, p. 170). In the Romanian Writers' Society or PEN Club, Jean Bart had a sustained activity as a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy and he enthusiastically participated in sections meetings and prepared reports on various given topics, as well as for books suggested for an Academy Award. In 1930 he represented the Romanian Writers' Society at the General Meeting of Astra, and in the second series of "Sibiu Conferences" in 1927-1928, dedicated to the Danube and Dobrogea, he lectures in front of a full audience

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about “*The Romanian Danube and its importance in the history of our people*” (Mohanu, 2001, p. 177).

Embracing almost all forms of cultural activity, the writer could not omit the youngest of them, the radio, which, early in its affirmation in our country, he dedicates praised and popular articles. In 1929 Jean Bart is among the radio guest writers to read from their work together with Nicolae Iorga, Arghezi, Liviu Rebreanu, Camil Petrescu, Ion Alexandru Brătescu – Voinești, Mihai Codreanu, Gheorghe Brăescu, George Topârceanu (Mohanu, 2001, p. 178). The concern for the Danube and the sea has become a constant of Jean Bart’s writings. But to the Danube - “the River King”, as it was called by Dacians – the writer dedicated and special works, including “The Book of Danube”, published shortly after the writer's death. His writings devoted to the Danube Delta - therefore Dobrogea - have been the subject of a special radio program, having as author one of the most savvy connoisseurs of the literature and the beauty of our homeland Emanoil Bucuti (Mohanu, 2001, p. 179).

“The Logbook” of Jean Bart should be – according to the classic patterns of the genre - an “every day” diary. And yet it is not. It is not important the daily recording, or the registration of what happened during the water voyage, but the “impressions” of a naval officer, embarked for the first time in a long voyage, impressions reported, indeed, shortly after the undertaken passage, but far from being a journal, even if the title is “The Logbook”.

Literary criticism, many reviews dedicated to the first edition and the subsequent novel “Europolis”, qualified unanimously the novel as the Sulina novel, where the author has spent nearly ten years as maritime commissioner and port captain. In the author's intention, Europolis - brilliant metaphor to name the City of maritime crossroads - should define Sulina at the beginning of our century, with its mosaic of nationalities, that special gate of Europe which penetrated to the heart of the continent's inland navigation (Mohanu, 2001 p. 281).

*Europolis* impresses by the social novel qualities: the city - port at the border of the country, isolated and yet so cosmopolitan as Sulina is shown at the time. It is, however, perhaps at a greater length, a novel of *love* and even of *family* in some of its chapters. From the angle of this triad we must regard Europolis – the complete maturity artistic work of Jean Bart. One can say the *city novel* starts right with the motto that opens the novel: “... where the old DANUBIU loses its water and great name into the sea...” (Mohanu, 2001, p. 282)

### **3. The Book of the Danube - a Travel Memorial**

Like "Romania scenic" by Al. Vlahuță "The Book of the Danube" by Jean Bart (Eugeniu Botez by his real name) has, even after so long from its writing, something of the paintings of some of our traditional painters (Grigorescu one the one usually associated with Semanatorism) full of charm and poetry; it is also an exalted hymn to God and the nature created by Him, exalting the human values He created, of the entire country, with the heritage of beauty and wealth, with its millenary history and civilization. The passage on the Danube, "this huge mass of liquid, flowing continuously for thousands of years to the sea" is described always and equally with the eye of a historian, a traveler, a painter and a geographer at the same time.

Jean Bart begins with the beliefs and legends of the old, the Danube "had the power to wash away sins", being held in vessels of gold, in thesaurus, at the royal courts of the East ".He stresses the importance of this river for the Romanians "the old ties of the people and this water are so enduring that even today it is kept in the folk songs, stories and carols of the Romanian" (Bart, 1933, p. 9). The journey on the Danube, the water symbolizes "movement, action, life, " the author is convinced that the rivers "have their own personality and temperament, " just like people. Extrapolating, it was said that "the Rhine is romantic and the Danube is classic, eternal".

Painted in unique images on the globe, the beauties that accompany the Danube landscape on its way, are backed by historical and architectural descriptions. Galati, Tulcea, and Sulina, as well as Cernavodă, like other "beads" in the string of the Danube, mark time, people, history. And above all this, nothing is accidental:

*"...only through a scientific discipline - in space and time - we can guide ourselves through the chaos of the past. By setting the Danube in a historical time we find the connections and the causal relationship between the location situation, which does not change, and human masses eternal transformation"* (Bart, 1933, p. 46).

The rapid development of the Danube harbors, which "bring gold and ship wheat in the Romanian countries", hence the development of settlements, now free ports (Galati, Sulina) is proudly punctuated by the author in his work. Like Al. Vlahuță, he is proud of "the Romanians historical testament", of the inherited landscape in which "the great book of nature stays open for us to follow the steps of the animals, the flying birds and all the moving creatures that surround us", and where "the water forms an area almost forbidden to men." (Bart, 1933, p.65)

But he, strong against everybody who tried to steal his rich land, strong against the hardships of life and nature, found here, on the bank of the river the beauty of the act of being a fisherman. "A specialist who can not improvise, respecting the traditions his ancestors left for him and cultivating what he will say and show to his grandchildren the local fisherman take care "not to spoil the natural balance

established by the struggle of the elements “. He loves the fish that feeds his family know “from father to son the habits of each fish species, the proper specific fishing period, the fishing locations and the right tools”, surprising with the accuracy of the explanations and observations, even professional naturalists " ( Bart, 1933, pp. 72-73 ). About Danube trade, Eugene Botez mentions saying that it was present since antiquity, when the “Danube becomes a large artery of a vast international exchange” ( Bart, 1933, p.75 ).

#### 4. Maritime Language in “The Book of the Danube” and other Texts

Important name for Romanian prose, Eugeniu P. Botez, widely known as Jean Bart, remains an authentic and original writer who “worships” for the first time in Romanian literature the logbook and marine sketches. The Romanian prose author brings in our literature “the candid vessel with a loose belly”, along with the terminology of seamanship, first used in a literary work. He brought for the first time in our literature the tradition of the marine life, of the river ports and the wide sea. The journey of Jean Bart’s creation is from the newspaper article and report to sketch and short story to novel, ending with the novel *Europolis*.

Documented monography, *The Book of the Danube* (1933) is dominated by a sober lyricism. Sailor by profession, the author is overwhelmed by the language characteristic of his work and presents the moral and poetic values by an “irradiation of naval theme”. A series of evocations appear as “stray glimpses “that sometimes a pious tear to an old serious seaman, but bring a smile, too. Sequences from the past embraced by fiction tend to transform in literary sketches. In his writings memory is presented as a fiction territory, and the story, in turn, is wrapped in recollections described in the narrative discourse. The novel *Europolis* remains the leading opera by which Jean Bart passed into the literary history. Who better than he, who lived the real life of a sailor, can describe in a precise classification the local atmosphere, countless figures of captains, ships, porters and Romanian officers? In “The Logbook” the marine terminology is used in full: sylph, ship, winches, bow, port, starboard etc....

In a pleasant reading, the specific language blends easily with the narrative descriptions of the landscapes. Dominated by the beauty, traditions and occupations of his ancestors, Eugene Baptism manages to “send” the today reader in an atmosphere belonging to another century, a world in which life had another meaning, bordered by the water. Danube, then, as now, had its destiny flowing to the sea. Only people are living in their own dimension.

## **5. Conclusions**

Jean Bart (Commander Eugeniu Botez) gathered in a lifetime a very rich material about the Danube, intended to serve him for a complete work that he had started, presenting all the matters: documentary historical, geographical, political, economic, legal and literary concerning this river. His death lay to rest his plans, allowing him only the writing of “The Book of Danube”, which is only a summary of the intended design, written for “The water day”, explained for everyone understands, without going into detail.

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