

# Martha Bibescu – *Jurnal berlinez '38*: From History to Self

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## Abstract

*Jurnal berlinez '38* [*'38 Berlin Diary*] is a diary sequence which Martha Bibescu, an emblematic and controversial figure of the political and literary circles in Romania at the turn of the twentieth century, did not intend for publication at the time of its writing, and which presents her visit to Berlin where her husband, George Valentin Bibescu, was invited as the president of the Congress of the International Aeronautic Federation. As she was in connection with many diplomats and historical figures, Martha Bibescu wanted to record in writing a few moments of the history of that time, together with some glimpses of her private story. This travel diary impresses by the subtlety of the author's observations, the inventiveness and originality of the logical connections made in the description of some characters, acid irony, but also by the presentation of the Nazi Reich. The identity of the woman who relives the memories of her youth and remarks the changes in her and the others is built from behind the narrated events.

**Keywords:** Martha Bibescu, travel diary, identity, historical figures, Berlin

Martha Bibescu is a controversial feminine figure of the early years of the twentieth century, both at the social and cultural level, thanks to her origin and to her relationships with important political figures of the time, but also to her literary works, written mostly in French. Born in 1898, she was the daughter of Ion Lahovari, a great landlord and politician, former Minister of Agriculture between 1912 and 1913, in Carp's and Maiorescu's governments, and of a descendant of the Mavrocordat family. At the age of 2, she was sent to Paris, where she lived and studied. She married young, and her husband was Prince George Valentin Bibescu, the son of the former Wallachian prince, a worldly man, industrialist and aviator. A daughter, Valentina, was born out of this marriage, which was not a happy one, as the husband used to constantly cheat on her. They separated on their own accord. Martha Bibescu had her debut in 1908, in Paris, with the work in prose *Les nuits paradis*, awarded by the French Academy. She was a worldly figure of Bucharest, ever present at parties, where she amazed the participants with her beauty.

Her noble descent enabled her to travel and get acquainted to many important national and international figures. This is also the reason why her work, also signed with the pen name Lucile Decaux, comprises a series of autobiographical or historical novels, literary portraits of some personalities, travel notes, poems in verse or in prose, essays, letters, and historical biographies. *Jurnal berlinez '38* [*'38 Berlin Diary*] is a diary sequence which the author did not

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intend for publication at the time of its writing, edited and brought to light by Dumitru Hîncu. It presents a visit to Berlin, where her husband, George Valentin Bibescu, is invited as the president of the Congress of the International Aeronautic Federation, after the Nazis' coming to power. It is the year preceding the outbreak of World War II. The author focuses on her impressions of the week June 21-27, 1938, which she spent in Berlin without the slightest idea about the storm of blood that would sweep Europe and then the entire world for the next six years.

On a close reading, the text reveals a constant movement between past and present, the present bringing back to the writer representative images and events of her life and even of the historical moments she witnesses, which she lucidly and somewhat ironically analyses, in terms that betray a sense of superiority at times. She surprises the reader with her ability to assert certain ideas, without fearing repercussions, but also with her mixture of three foreign languages: English, German and French. The text also emphasises the construction of the author's identity as an educated woman, with a good social position, an influential person with noble roots in the Romanian society, which she does not deny but proudly affirms, although she belies some figures, such as Queen Marie, Elena Văcărescu, Nadège Ştirbey.

Her Berlin journey sets out on Tuesday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1938, when her husband picks her up from her apartment in Paris to drive her to Berlin. From the very beginning, the text strikes by its literariness: „*Apele Senei reflectă ca într-o oglindă, casele Parisului. Impresia de vară pe care n-am avut-o niciodată.*” [The Seine waters reflect, like a mirror, the houses of Paris. That leaves me the summer impression I have never had] (Bibescu 2009: 9). She wishes she had some peace before leaving Paris to prepare herself for this journey which she names “Phoenix”, the rebirth of the one she once was, of those memories she thought she had lost for good, but she is disturbed by the presence of a Turk claiming to be an Egyptian. Moreover, she has to listen to his political laments about the Egyptian government - „*trebuie să ascult înşiruirea tuturor erorilor săvârşite de actualul guvern egiptean, de rege, sub influenţa mamei, de consilieri nerozi şi toate astea [...]*” [I must listen to a list of errors made by the present Egyptian government, by the king, under his mother's influence, by the stupid counsellors and all that] (10) - which culminate in his expressing the belief that „*naţionalismul e o ciumă a spiritului*” [nationalism is the plague of the spirit] (10).

She regrets leaving Paris: „*Las îndărătu-mi, la plecarea din scumpul meu Paris, eterna cetate, o dungă lungă, albastruie, de fum târător. Rândunelele m-au însoţit cu un cântec de adio*” [Upon leaving my beloved Paris, the eternal city, I leave behind a long, blue line of crawling smoke. The swallows accompanied me with a farewell song] (11). Yet the flight to Germany means regaining her lost youth, in another historical context: „*De la Paris la Berlin, pe calea aerului, pe nerăsuflăte, către întâlnirea cu cei douăzeci de ani pe care i-ai avut. Ca să regăseşti Imperiul sporit de victoria Aliaţilor*” [From Paris to Berlin, by plane, in no time, towards the encounter with your twenty years that have gone. To find again the Empire enhanced by the Allies' victory] (11). To be more convincing, she recounts the story of the Russian-

German marriage between Kira, the daughter of the Grand Duke Kiril, the “ghost-emperor” of Russia, and the nephew of the “ghost-emperor” of Germany, Ludwig Ferdinand, in view of concluding a political truce.

Martha Bibescu intends to render a private, intimate experience; however, what she actually achieves is to describe a page of history, which she comments on without fear of any repercussions. Arriving at Meusa, on the Rhine, she sees the pile of ore, and hears Enescu announcing: “Cologne”. Then she thinks of Rome, which she associates with the Germans’ desire to turn the Jews into a colony: „Colonia! anunță Enescu în portavocea lui. Și anunțul răsună ca un ecou al Romei. Colonia. Colonia. Germanii cer colonii.” [‘Cologne’, Enescu announces with his speaking trumpet. And his announcement resounds like an echo of Rome. Colonia. Colonia. The Germans claim colonies] (13). Along the same lines, she asserts that the German people loved the Jews, the Benedictines, the Dominicans, all Catholics, „dar în același timp îi și detesta și era gata să-i persecute [...] În Hitler, poporul german a aflat o unealtă și mai perfectă a imbecilității sale” [but at the same time detested them and were ready to persecute them. [...] The German people have found in Hitler the perfect tool of their idiocy] (14). The Jew Heine finds an explanation for this, which Martha Bibescu quotes in English:

Hit a man that hit you back. Precisely what they must not do. Because if they hit the man who can give it back that means war. If they hit who cannot give back they can hit comfortably at home and that means peace (14).

Then, Martha Bibescu mentions the blackmail of the Jews: “Plățiți sau vă gonesc. Și plătesc. După care-i închid, pentru că sunt evrei săraci” [Pay or be gone. And they pay. Then, they are arrested for being poor Jews] (15). As a conclusion to all these, Martha Bibescu ironically accounts for the etymology of the word “German”, invented by the Franks – „cel care nu pricepe, nătărăul. Iar germanul își spune Deutsch, care vrea să însemne: cel care știe” [the one who cannot comprehend, the dupe. And the German calls himself Deutsch, which means: the one who knows] (15-16) – and she voices a philosophy of life: „Dacă aș putea să vă cumpăr la prețul pe care vi-l dau ceilalți și să vă vând la prețul pe care singuri vi-l dați, aș deveni bogat” [If I could buy you for the price the others give you and sell you for the price you put on yourselves, I would be rich] (16).

The flight to Berlin awakens the ghost of her youth, of her twenties, to be more specific, in her memory, a time when many things happened - firstly, World War I, and secondly, the abolishment of monarchy in Germany – bringing about a multitude of changes in history: „N-am mai venit în țara asta din cealaltă lume, cea care se chema înainte de război” [I haven not been to this country since the time of the other world, the one before the war] (Bibescu 2009: 17). The author considers this period one of an absurd history, like “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”, as she puts it quoting from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (V.5.26-28), which means that not even the most intelligent and informed people can predict what the future may have in store for them.

The cultural and identity-related references continue: the turbulence she experiences when the plane flies above Russia is associated with the rebelliousness of the Russian people. Upon her landing on the airport, she is annoyed by a woman pilot who asks for her support in Bucharest, and she calls her „tarantulă românească” [a Romanian tarantula] (18). She assumes an arrogant and detached attitude, even at the declarative level: „Nu sunt prea amabilă” [I’m not too kind] (17), „abia am putut să-i zâmbesc” [I could hardly smile at her] (18).

On the first contact with Berlin, she notes that the city is unchanged, despite the people’s efforts to change it, that her youth comes to her mind involuntarily, and that the roses in the streets ruin the magic of the city: „*Mixtura de trandafiri și tramvaie nu-mi face plăcere. În general, nu-mi plac trandafirii pe drumurile publice [...] Îmi vine să vărs.*” [The mixture of roses and trams is unpleasant. I generally do not like roses on public roads (...) That makes me throw up] (18). She associates this image with the gardens of Romania, designed by Germans, but also with the gardens of Queen Maria, considered by Philippe L. to have „*prea mult roz*” [too much pink] (19). Yet she loves the old, small houses with large roofs and enclosed gardens, as she sees herself in them. This mix makes her compare a large town with a capital city:

*Ceea ce caracterizează o capitală e înfrigurarea, o anume agitație continuuă a oamenilor, care durează toată ziua și toată noaptea. Asta-i Londra, New York-ul și un pic și Parisul; tot restul, oricât de mare ar fi, e provincie sau, oricum, oraș patriarhal. Curtea, reședința stăpânului. Asta-i Viena, Nancy-ul, Berlinul a rămas un oraș patriarhal, în întregime marcat de curte. [What characterises a capital city is the fever, a certain permanent agitation of the people, which lasts all day and night. This is London, this is New York and, to a little extent, this is Paris too; anything else, no matter how big, is a provincial or, anyway, a patriarchal town. It is just the court, the master’s residence. This is Vienna, this is Nancy. Berlin has remained a patriarchal town, completely dominated by the court] (19).*

Martha Bibescu is welcomed by Mister von Gronau, whom she ironically describes in detail: „*Are o mutră caraghioasă de angoulevant, cu un cioc ce se lățește de la o ureche la alta și niște ochi spălăciți, naivi și hotărâți.*” [He has a funny face of an *engoulevant*, with a goatee spreading from one ear to the other and some bleary, naïve and determined eyes] (17). In her hotel room, she finds a lot of flowers sent by the gentlemen present at the meeting, as a sign of appreciation. From this moment on, she starts going to various dinners and meetings, where she takes delight in analysing the menus or the people around her. Thus, during the first dinner, she comments ironically on the way in which the French react to the menu and to the Germans’ custom of not eating bread: „*N-am să uit niciodată fața francezilor la servirea primului fel. Pepene și, pe fiecare felie, o crevetă subțirică*” [I shall never forget the Frenchmen’s faces when they saw the first course. Watermelon and, on each slice, a thin shrimp] (21). After dinner, she changes into a black taffeta tailor-made suit, a Lanvine creation in vogue in Germany; as a matter of

fact, dressing by the fashion of the host country is a rule she constantly abides by, advising her friends to do the same.

The most awaited encounter is that with Wilhelm III, the one who might have been king if the war had not dramatically changed the face of Europe and the rulers of Germany. The meeting, held in Potsdam, in his private residence, takes place after many arrangements and after a phone call she receives during her dinner with the Belgians, ironically, in the same way in which she received an invitation back in 1912 while in a hotel room almost identical with the one she is in now, except that now the invitation is made anonymously. The prince's voice, although warm, seems completely strange to her: „*Era un glas cald, bărbătesc, bien posé.*” [It was a warm, manly, *bien posé* voice] (24). At the Kronprinz's request to come accompanied and dressed in an evening gown, she humorously announces him that she looks like a *Grossmutter* and that she cannot guarantee for Georges. Nevertheless, he compliments her with a poem in German, and she ironically replies, showing familiarity with the one who was once the second man in his state.

*Ernst und stille Gedanken  
Mir durch die Seele ziehen,  
Dann weiss ich dass in Franken  
Meine geliebten Rosen blühen.*  
[Grave and silent thoughts  
Wander through my soul  
And I know that in the land of the French  
My beloved roses are in bloom] (25).

She returns to the table, and continues to talk politics, apparently calm, but her soul vibrates with the emotion of the meeting. She gets involved in the discussions about the election of a Turk as the vice-president of the International Aeronautic Federation, as Kinski, who became the president of a German aero club in Austria, can no longer be the vice-president after Anschluss [Austria's annexation to Nazi Germany in March 1938] (25).

The next day, she starts preparing for the next meeting, taking an almost identical course with the one she took twenty-five years ago. Aware of her age, and reliving the past nostalgically, she feels that every detail is as it was back then: the morning light, the hotel room, the walk through the town. Before the 'big' encounter with the Crown Prince Wilhelm, Martha Bibescu visits the Berlin museums to see Nefertiti, with her long neck, the relics of Babylon and Pergamum, which occasions the mischievous remark „*ca să vedem de ce mor imperiile*” [to see why empires die] (as is the case with the German Empire, shred to pieces by World War I). Then, she admires the paintings by Albert Durer and Holbein. The honour of finding herself in the company of important figures flatters her:

*În toate țările sunt mărimi ale acestei lumi, iar eu resimt puternic și retrospectiv cinstea de a mă plimba cu Mr. Cabot și cu fiica lui, Mrs. Bradley, născută Cabot, prin străzile acestui Berlin în care gloria Hohenzollernilor a apus.* [There are great people of this world in every country, and I strongly and retrospectively feel the honour of walking with Mr Cabot and his daughter, Mrs Bradley, née Cabot, on the streets of this Berlin where the glory of the Hohenzollerns faded] (28).

She has dinner with the Romanian minister plenipotentiary Neagu Djuvara, whom she parodically portrays: „*Nespus de caraghios. Cravata, părul, fanfaronul congenital.*” [Incredibly funny. His tie, his hair, the congenital braggart] (28). His theory of Romania illustrated by dominating women, such as Anna de Noailles, Didina, Elena Văcărescu and herself, is cumbersome for both her and her husband. What saves this meeting is the Romanian caviar, but also the fact that they are treated with deference by the waiters, who call them *Königliche Hoheit* (Royal Highness).

In the evening, Martha Bibescu's main concern is choosing a dress for the next day, which proves a difficult task, as the dress must have certain significance but also match the princess's age and status. The first chromatic choice is black, so as to suggest to the Kronprinz what are her feelings, the suffering gathered during the past years, the injustice and prejudices that targeted at both of them her host and herself:

*Negru pentru doliul monarhiei, pentru îngroparea tinereții? Doliu pentru a fi Electra? Sau, mai bine zis, pentru a fi Casandra? Să-i spun ce s-a întâmplat? Oare să nu-l fac să înțeleagă că pregătirea nu înseamnă nimic, căci zeii nu pun la cale decât întâmplări neprevăzute? Poate că doliul ar fi fost cel mai nimerit pentru toate acestea. Doliu pentru insultele revărsate asupra-mi de bunii mei prieteni din cauza lui și a prieteniei cu el. Doliu pentru înțelepciunea nimicită de ură și prejudecăți? Doliu pentru mândria înfrântă și, mai mult, pentru mândria șocantă a celor victorioși? Doliu pentru că atât de des a fost numit „măcelarul de la Verdun”. [Black for the mourning of monarchy, for the burial of youth? Mourning to become Electra? Or, better said, to be Cassandra? Should I tell him what happened? Should I not make him understand that preparation means nothing, for the gods only conspire to engender unpredictable events? Perhaps mourning would have been the most appropriate for all these. Mourning for the insults poured out on me by my good friends because of him and my friendship with him. Mourning for the wisdom shred to pieces by hatred and prejudice? Mourning for the defeated pride, and moreover, for the shocking pride of the victors? Mourning for him being called so often ‘the butcher of Verdun’] (30).*

She eventually chooses white, a lace dress by Lanvine, the virginal aspect being toned down with emerald jewellery and a dark-red, almost black, rose on the lapel, „*semn că fac parte din trecut*” [a sign that I belong in the past] (30). The car arrives on time, and everything is surrounded by mystery, as no one mentions the prince's name. The road she takes is a road down the memory lane: „*Revedeam periferiile idilice ale tinereții mele, arborii de soc, tufe de liliac ale tinereții mele, parfumul acelei vremi, parfumul tuturor vremurilor.*” [I saw again in my mind's eye the idyllic

outskirts of my youth, the elder shrubs, the lily bushes of my youth, the perfume of those time, the perfume of all times] (31-32). The short sentences betray her emotion of coming near the prince, and, against the background of her concerns with her attire and coiffure, she feels the thrills of youth and coquetry awaking. She compares herself with the other women writers of the time, resorting to the words of her friend, the French Symbolist poet Robert de Montesquiou: „*Tarantula balcanică o înțepa pe Anna, o înțepa pe Vaca, ba până și pe regina Maria. Doar prințesa Bibescu a scăpat de mușcătura iritantei insecte.*” [The Balkan tarantula used to sting Anna, Vaca[rescu] and even Queen Marie. Only Princess Bibescu escaped the bite of the irritating insect] (33). In this understanding, “the Balkan tarantula” signifies the Balkan spirit, construed as inferior to the Western spirit.

Neither does the prince escape her thorough analysis, as Martha Bibescu makes him a detailed portrait:

*[...] iată-l în picioare, îmbrăcat tot în alb, parcă spoit cu var de sus până jos, inclusiv părul; aceeași prelungă siluetă, elegantă, dreaptă, cu gâtul lung, cu micul chip ascuțit, cu ochi albaștri, bridați, atât de aproape de ivirea nasului mic, nasul ascuțit al Marelui Fritz, cu un aer ironic, fine mâini mici, picioare sprintene, statura înaltă și ușoară, același, doar cu douăzeci și cinci de ani mai mult; douăzeci și cinci de ani invizibili, căci părul îi era gri argintat și la tinerețe, iar acum pare să fi fost doar pudrat ca pentru bal mascat. Abia apoi văd și amănuntele, epoleții aurii, steaua ce țâșnește din gâtul drept în loc de cravată, mica claviatură a decorațiilor pe uniforma de pânză, uniforma de vară. Prima impresie e ca o străfulgerare. Un tânăr înalt, alb de sus și până jos. Iar eu îmi repet în străfundurile memoriei: Măcelarul de la Verdun, spaîma lumii, asta a fost bărbatul ăsta în alb, tânărul ăsta, vechiul meu prieten, făgăduială de veșnică amiciție, în ciuda tuturor, făgăduiala de a rămâne puri, de neatins. O planetă de care se va aminti...* [Here he is, standing, dressed in white, as if he were whitewashed from head to toes, including his hair; the same long, elegant, straight figure, with his long neck, his little sharp face, his blue swollen eyes, so close to the small nose, the pointed nose of Great Fritz, with an ironic air, fine small hands, agile legs, tall and light stature, the same, but twenty-five years older; twenty-five invisible years, as his hair was silver-grey when he was young too, and now it seems as if it were powdered for a masked ball. Only afterwards I can see the details, the golden epaulettes, the star that springs from his neck, instead of a tie, the small keyboard of insignia on the fabric uniform, a summer uniform. The first impression strikes me. A tall young man, white from head to toes. And I keep saying to myself, in the depths of my memory: the Butcher of Verdun, the terror of the world, this is what this man in white was, this young man, my old friend, the promise of an eternal friendship in spite of everybody, the promise to remain untouched forever. A planet to remember...] (33-34).

The joy of re-joining a friend is, as one can easily notice, shadowed by the memory of the horrors of war. Mindful of etiquette, she curtsies in front of Wilhelm, as in the good old days, and he, surprised, shows her gesture to his wife, Cecilie, who knows that a German woman is not allowed such a manifestation of politeness. The princess's reaction is prompt, in her natural style: “I am not a German woman. I was born a free woman” (34). To her, the encounter with Wilhelm III is like a descent into the abyss.

The royal family house has been designed by her and the prince together, and the admiration for Englishness, which is obvious from its aspect - „Îmi spun că sălașul lui Alaric trebuie să fi fost croit pe același calapod cu o casă romană” [I always think that Alaric’s abode must have been tailored after a Roman house] (36) - makes her assert with reference to the Germans’ attacks on England that: „Mereu ucizi ce iubești... Nu totdeauna” [One always kills what one loves... Not always] (35). They tease a little bit, the prince gazes at her insatiably, he takes her hand into his, then he gives her his arm. The meeting with Wilhelm’s wife is equally impressive, and she is also portrayed with a glimpse of irony:

*E aceeași femeie, înaltă, brunetă, mult îngrășată dar, ca o compensare a acestei greutate, o prospețime a tenului bine păstrată [...] Pieptănătura i-a rămas aceeași. Pieptănată ca sora mea Jeanne, moartă în 1912. Părul adunat în creștet și o buclă care-i cade pe frunte. Și-a păstrat frumoșii ochi umezi de rusoaică, pomeții înalți, zâmbetul, gropițele, statura-i frumoasă, un pic bărbătească. Îmi place, mi-a plăcut de când o știu.* [She is the same woman, tall, brunette, a lot of extra weight, but as a compensation for her weight, she has a fresh, well-preserved complexion [...] Her combing has remained the same. She is combed like my sister, Jeanne, who died in 1912. The hair up her crown and a small lock of hair falling down her brow. Her wet Russian eyes are still beautiful, and so are her cheekbones, her smile, her dimples, her beautiful figure, a little bit manly. I like her; I have always liked her] (36-37).

She admits whimsically that she is analytical and that she is unable to memorise names: „Ca de obicei, n-aud numele când mi-e prezentat cineva, prea ocupată să văd [...] O economie involuntară. Nu rețin cu plăcere numele figuranților pe care n-am să-i mai revăd niciodată.” [As usual, I do not hear the name when someone is introduced to me; I’m too busy watching. [...] An involuntary economy. I do not joyfully remember the names of the extras that I shall never see again] (37). She enjoys Cecilie’s politeness as she allows her to walk in front of her, while despising Romanian royalty - „grobianele noastre prințese din România” [our boorish Romanian princesses] who would have never done this. She also appreciates the way in which the table is laid, as well as the meals: crabs and ice champagne.

The conversations at table concern the royal family’s lamentations that they do not get the attention they used to get, that they are no longer invited to various events and that Hitler does not ask for their opinion. They speak about Nazism, fascism, Hitler and Mussolini, about their similarities and differences, about their actions, and about the frustrations of a royal heir: „Niciun german nu mai are voie să se incline în fața regalității.” [No German is allowed to bow before royalty any more] (39). The hosts are encouraged to share their opinion about H, as they repeatedly call Hitler, their reaction being disapproving of the fact that he is striving to erase their image from the collective mindset. However, they show their appreciation for Mussolini. The Prince expresses his opinion on both Hitler and Mussolini, but what impresses Martha Bibescu is the speaker himself: „Ce-i mai plictisitor la omul ăsta (aluzie la Hitler) e că n-are simțul umorului. Înghite orice, dacă e laudat. Lauda nu-i e nemicând destulă. Iar Goebbels întrece măsura (aici face un gest). Deci îl detestă”. [What is



the most boring about this man (allusion to Hitler) is that he has no sense of humour. He swallows everything as long as he is praised. He has never enough praise. And Goebbels goes overboard (he gestures). So he detests him] (42). Next, he complains that he is never invited to any public manifestation, although he is a general, and Princess Bibescu tells to herself that:

*excesul de naționalism e totdeauna dovada unei profunde nemulțumiri de sine. Înșii respectivi se afirmă în numele națiunii lor și când își dau seama că nu și-au făcut prieteni, folosindu-se de subterfugii, de cel mai mărunț german, se înfurie și afirmă că sunt cel mai mare popor din univers. [The excess of nationalism is always a proof for a profound discontent with oneself. The respective individuals affirm themselves in the name of their nation, and when they realise that they have not made friends, by using subterfuges or the least important German, they get mad and claim that they are the greatest people in the universe] (57).*

Martha Bibescu seems to try to give solace to her hosts with bitter, ironic comments on Hitler and Mussolini:

*[...] eu le relatez propria mea viziune asupra celor doi, pe care nu demult i-am văzut la Centocello suprapunându-se pe același fond de cer, urmăriți de la cincizeci de metri cu lorneta, vreme de două ore. Le ofer dar concluziile mele. Le spun că, pe moment, i-am conceput, pe M și pe H, ca pe un cuplu. Ca la o înșurătoare, iar îndărătul lor la zece metri, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Starace, Ciano, de Bono etc ca domnișoare de onoare. Soțul era M și mireasa H. Cu trăsături nedefinite, cu spatele îndoit, cu umerii căzuți. Pe când celălalt, cu pumnul în șold, aducea a mascul triumfător. Și spre a completa tabloul, cinci mii de trompeți intonând marșul nupțial din Lohengrin. (...) Există țări masculine și țări femele. Italia este o țară femelă, de unde și adorarea lui Musso. Germania este o țară mascul care cade în transă în fața unei femele. Aceeași poveste ca și în cazul Angliei și al reginelor ei. [I share my own vision of the two, whom I had recently seen in Centocello, against the background of the same sky, from 50 meters, watching them through my lorgnette for two hours. I give them my conclusions. I tell them that, at that moment, I perceived M and H as a couple. As in a wedding, and, ten meters behind them, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Starace, Ciano, de Bono etc., as maids of honour. The groom was M and the bride was H. With undefined features, with his back bent, and his shoulders down. Whereas the other, with his fist on his hip, seemed like a triumphant male. And to complete the picture, five thousand trumpets played the nuptial hymn of Lohengrin. (...) There are male countries and female countries. Italy is a female country, hence their adoration of Musso. Germany is a male country worshipping a female. The same story with England and its queens] (41).*

One may easily notice that political names are avoided: N for Nazism, M for Mussolini, and H for Hitler. Another attempt to give solace to the royal family is a parable of Michel, which in German means 'churl' or 'stooge'. Then she remembers a moment from her youth when she was required by a Frenchman to give information about Wilhelm III, and she provided the portrait of a much more humane emperor than the emperor of Prussia. She also reminds him of the

captivity years. Wilhelm III's admiration for Martha Bibescu has remained unaltered: he tells his guests that he was mesmerised by Martha's huge eyes when he first met her, while she secretly remembers the feminine envy she stirred back then, and the attention she received from the son of the last emperor of Germany, during his visit in Bucharest, before World War I. Queen Maria herself was so jealous that she plotted, telling Cecilie, the heir's wife, that Martha would try to steal her husband from her. She found out about these schemes from Cecilie herself, as the German royal couple have always trusted Martha and have had good relationships with the Bibescu family.

The hosts ask her about the state of monarchy in Romania, as they are informed (being relatives of the Hohenzollerns) of the failure of the relationship between Carol II and Helen of Greece. They side with Helen, whom they see as a victim, neglected by the Romanian heir. However, Martha thinks otherwise, that Carol has been neglected, which led to the dissolution of the relationship: „*Dacă doamna Simpson s-ar fi comportat ca dânsa, n-ar fi existat o abdicare în Anglia.*” [If Lady Simpson had behaved like her, there wouldn't have been an abdication in England] (58).

After such an evening, Martha and Georges reach the hotel having a sensation of joy and fulfilment: „*Odată ajunși în camera noastră, ne-am simțit amândoi obosiți, dar satisfăcuți [...] Ilustrare a vieții mele, singurul lucru pe care-l simțeam este bucuria.*” [Once returned to our room, we both felt tired but content. [...] The story of my life – the only thing I could feel was joy] (64).

The next day, Martha Bibescu is at the airport, anxiously waiting for her friend Lady Londonderry and for her daughter, to stop feeling lonely and to have someone to share thoughts on fashion, fashionable places to visit, and even politics. They go together to some dinners with the people invited to the Congress, until the meeting held on June 24<sup>th</sup>. She supports her husband, listens to his speech and gives him suggestions for his presentation. The Congress hall, House der Flieger, is a garish one. „*Teama de prost gust duce la totală lipsă de gust.*” [The fear of tastelessness leads to complete tastelessness] (67). She is not happy with her attire, with a blue silk tailored-suit and a flat hat. She criticises everybody's speech but praises her husband's: „*Mestecă fier și scuipă pietre. Apoi e rândul lui von Gronau, în franceză [...] vine rândul lui Georges să răspundă. Glasul lui are un efect adorabil după ceilalți doi.*” [He chews iron and spits rocks. Now it is von Gronau's turn, in French [...] it is Georges' turn. His voice has an adorable effect after the previous two] (68). The blue and white attire is compulsory for dinner. Of course, the headliner of the meeting is Hermann Göring, who, as an aviator and the leader of German aviation, is the host of the International Aeronautics Congress. He is „*gras, cu un cap frumos, ochi albaștri adânc înfundați în orbite și căutătură magnetică*” [a fat man with a handsome head, blue eyes deepened in their eye pits and a magnetic look] (70). He welcomes the most important guests with a reception at his castle, Karinhall. Martha's moment of glory is when she opens, together with Göring, the dinner organised by the Third Reich on the occasion of the Aviation Congress of Berlin. During this dinner, she notices many details and gestures made by the

Görings, as well as their satisfaction with the recent birth of their first child. She writes ironically: „... fenomenala fetiță care a căpătat același prenume ca nepoata lui Mussolini, a permis părintelui ei să măsoare adâncimea, lărgimea și înălțimea dragostei pe care i-o poartă poporul german și va fi botezată, la Karinhall, de însuși Fuhrerul” [the phenomenal little girl who got the name of Mussolini’s niece has allowed her father to measure the depth, the width and the height of the love of the German people and will be christened in Karinhall by the Fuhrer himself] (77). They open up to one another and discuss about Carol II, and, whistle a lilt together. When Lady Londonderry proposes to give the little girl a dress with Irish lace, she also proposes to give her a dress with Romanian embroidery.

During the dinner, the Görings display their jewellery, as they seem to treasure the precious gems. This determines a new irony of the princess, who compares their manners and level of civilisation with those of the English, the French or the Italians.

*Această manieră de a face cunoștință arătându-și bijuteriile îmi amintește de haremul din Persia și de obiceiurile verișoarelor austriece și unguroaice de la Buftea. Atunci când copiii vor să stârnească admirație sau invidie își arată jucăriile, după care le iau înapoi. E o scenă care nu s-ar putea petrece în niciun salon franțuzesc, nici într-unul englezesc, nici la italieni. Naivitate și sălbăticie. Și cum asta facilitează mult conversația, sunt hotărâtă ca mâine, la Karinhall, să mă acopăr cu pietre colorate și bijuterii istorice, cu atât mai mult cu cât mi-am dat seama că asta îl distrează și pe Georges. [This manner of getting acquainted to someone by showing your jewellery reminds me of the Persian harem and the habits of the Austrian and Hungarian cousins in Buftea. When children want to stir admiration or envy, they show off their toys, and then they take them back. It is a scene which is impossible to take place in a French or English hall, or even at the Italians. Naiveté and barbarity. And, as this eases the conversation a lot, I am determined to cover myself in coloured gems and historical jewellery, tomorrow, at Karinhall, all the more as I have realised that it is funny for Georges too] (79).*

Martha Bibescu’s note is not triggered by envy, as she owns famous emerald jewellery herself, which she mentions as a small, useful and coquettish detail:

*Diadema de smaragde, pălăria mea verde, care-mi permite să fiu prost coafată. Sau cea puțin neondulată, întrucât duminica nu-i chip să ai parte de un coafor sau de o coafeză. Mă consolez, înfundându-mi pe cap casca mea de smaragde, care ascunde tot și suprimă meșele... [My emerald diadem, my green hat, which allows me to go out with a bad coiffure. Or at least without curls, as on Sundays it is impossible to get a hair dresser. I shall comfort myself by stuffing my emerald helmet on my head, as it hides everything and suppresses the hair pieces...] (79).*

After the display of jewellery, Martha Bibescu, who sits next to Göring at the table, does not miss the opportunity to briefly mention to him of Carol II’s opening towards negotiations, but also of the poisonous influence of Nazism in the Romanian internal affairs. She does not give him a speech, but she only utters three well-targeted sentences, and Göring seems to appreciate her honesty.

The next day, with the Bibescus' visit at Karinhall, Göring's hunting palace, is a perfect continuation of the climax at the ball, especially as the invitation has been made by Göring to impress Martha. A true connoisseur of good taste and art, Martha Bibescu mercilessly and ironically mocks almost everything she sees in Karinhall.

The visit has the opposite effect of what Göring expected, beyond the apparent politeness of the princess, who scrutinises everything with her acute sight hidden by the lorgnette.

The new meeting with Prince Wilhelm is as moving as the previous one. Unlike 1909, when the prince was well-known and worshipped, now the courier who delivers the envelope does not even recognise him. The two talk politics and what would have been if he ended up a king, but she mourns his fate: „*Iar acum iată-l dispărut dintr-o lume care era a lui*” [And now he is gone from a world that used to belong to him] (81). Upon leaving, she offers him a blue-button, Queen Louise's flower. Because of this meeting, she is late for the reception and misses the flight of the first glider plane and is admonished by von Gronau. Then she takes part in a fashion gala which disgusts her, as everything is a cheap, tasteless copy:

*Evantaie din pene în vogă la Paris acum zece ani. Contrafaceri după Worth, Moulineux-uri truate, stângace, imitații ale rochiilor Lanvin, culori oribile, țesături care au grația hârtiei, suplețea cartonului și moliciunea glaspapirului.* [Feather fans en vogue in Paris ten years ago. Counterfeited Worth, heavy-handed fake Moulineux, imitations of Lanvin dresses, horrid colours, fabrics with the grace of a sheet of paper, the gracefulness of a cardboard and the finesse of sand paper] (92).

Her reaction, though not verbalised, is particularly violent: „*Necioplitelor, mocofanelor, înapoiți-vă în caverna voastră!*” [Churlish, gawky women, back to your cave] (92).

After a few more meetings dedicated to the event, on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1938, her husband allows her to leave home alone, as she was not feeling very well. Behind the events, Martha Bibescu builds her identity as one who relives the memories of her youth and notices the changes in her own self and the others. By painting the Nazi Reich, she manages to turn her text into something more than a mere description of her private experiences, producing a 'document' which displays a genuine fresco of Berlin in 1938. “Why do I write? For fear that I might forget life.” (131). As she states, Martha Bibescu is not interested only in presenting certain events which she experienced directly, or in mapping an uproarious age or Germany's situation before World War II, but also in 'engraving in time' important glimpses of her existence, thus reliving them.

## References

Bibescu, M. (2009) *Jurnal berlinez'38* [*'38 Berlin Diary*]. București: Vivaldi