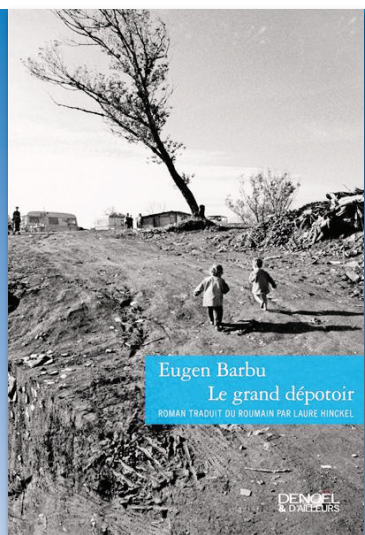




A Masterpiece at the Age of 33



EUGEN BARBU

Le Grand Depotoir/ The Pit
Denoel Publishing House, Paris 2012

The book features an entire underworld from Bucharest; it was published in Romania in 1957, in the heyday of proletkult. Despite this, the novel *The Pit* avoided the clichés of socialist realism. Eugen Barbu was thirty-three years old

when he published this book. The second edition appeared in 1963, and the definitive edition in 1983.

The novel sends us in the interwar period in a neighborhood in Bucharest, Cuțarida, built at the outskirts of the town. The protagonists are poor losers who dwell in the former landfill sites of the town. It is a cursed space, inhabited by cursed people: garbage men, delinquents, loafers, and hooligans.

Grigore, the chief of the garbage men and his wife Aglaia were the first to build a hut near the pit of Cuțarida. He monitors the work of the garbage men, keeps track of the garbage trucks, and organizes the activity of the gypsies who gather rags or bottles. Gradually, the area is taken over by clay huts and needy people with many children. Grigore is rough and taciturn, while Aglaia turns the activity of helping the others into a genuine creed. The pit becomes a neighborhood. Stere Dragănoiu opens a tavern, which shelters thieves such

as Paraschiv or Marin Pisciă the Butcher, Gheorghe the Bandit, as well as some honest men, lost in this degraded world in which the author looks for a some trace of humanity.

The translation into the French language is signed by Laure Hinckel. The volume was published with the help of the National Center of the Book within the Romanian Cultural Institute, by means of the program for the financing of foreign editors for the translation of Romanian authors' works in 2012. This novel is one of the most important works of Romanian literature.

EUGEN BARBU (1924-1993) was a Romanian prose writer, playwright, essay writer, and poet. He made his literary debut in cultural periodicals where he signed with the pseudonyms Eugen Rabe and Eugen Baraba. He wrote many articles, in the field of sports, in literature, he published

political articles, reportages, travel notes and fragments of novels, sketches, and short stories. He made his debut with the short stories volume *Blue Collar Work*. Two pieces of writing featuring football followed: *The Ball is Round* and *Eleven*, and in 1957 the first novel, *The Pit*, appears. The writer's work is completed by the short stories: *Oaie and His Next of Kin*, *Four People on the Death Row*, *Sunday Lunch*, by various volumes of reportages, travel notes, journals, verses: *The Punishment of the Sun*, essays: *Goethe's Masks*, and especially novels: *The Highway of the North*, *The Madmen's Week*, *The Prince*, *Ianus* (published after his death).

He wrote several screenplays for feature films and TV series and he translated some works of Dostoyevsky, Thomas Mann, Faulkner, Priestley, etc. He was awarded the Writer's Union Prize in 1975 and the International Herder Prize in 1977.

The American Dream of an East-European Woman

The series of American adventures in *Dream Junkies*, a book written by Romanian Alexandra Ares, has something of the European inter-war perfume and mystery described by Anglo-Saxon writers of the time — Ezra Pound, Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein — suggesting that they were broadcasting live a report about the boredom of being rich, for ever being unhappily in love, and living among artists as if to learn sadness even more deeply. Except this time the roles have been reversed: an East-European writer discovers America.

The Kitty-Matthew couple wring out the entire sap of their love lust in the big house in Malibu in an enchanting landscape by the ocean or in the sumptuous Bel Air house belonging to the media mogul, oscillating permanently, obsessively, and strenuously between being the hunter and the hunted, but, at the same time, they arduously grub in meticulousness, dread, and despair the initiatory trajectory of the meaning of love. On the other hand, the third character, Desert Rose, ascribes an almost tragic dimension to her own letdowns, disillusionments, and failures offering us the black-

and-white movie of her own love dream.

Alexandra Ares has broken completely with everything that fiction authors in Romania have conceptualized, theorized, and taken up in the past three decades under the sign (and shield) of post-modernism. She is a sensitive, romantic writer, sometimes cynical, but certainly very courageous, facing and confronting the "American Dream" from the viewpoint of an East European, who got away from the claws of communism but is periodically haunted by its ideological ghost. She has chosen the most direct path to tell her own story, running the risk of walking on stage without any makeup. She abandoned clichés. She seems to hate the intricate, bombastic, and intellectually highbrow stylistics used in today's literature. Reading *Dream Junkies* the reader realizes that the fairy-tale land across the ocean is populated by ordinary human beings, who suffer because of love as much as people anywhere else in this world. And this suffering caused by love become catharsis (through the heroine's amazing American experience).

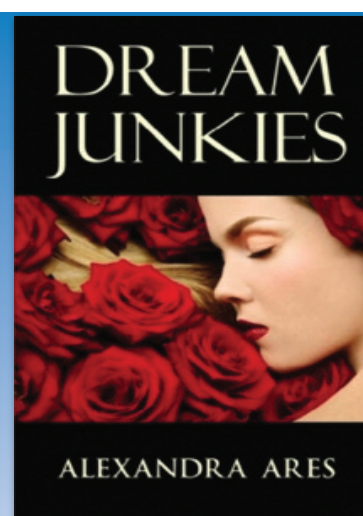
The novel *Dream Junkies* by Alexandra Ares firmly opens another gate in the

contemporary Romanian literature, and we will certainly hear good things about the author and her books in the future. (Mihai Ioan Cochinescu)

A graduate of the UNACT Theatrology Faculty, Bucharest, **ALEXANDRA ARES** (daughter of playwright Dinu Grigorescu) worked as an editor and producer for the Theater Department of the TVR Romanian public television in 1992-1997. In Romania, apart from the novel *Dream Junkies*, she has also published *Exiled to the Past*, *Sam Shepard*, *A Rebel of Mortal Rigor*, and the bilingual play *Waking Beauty* which was produced years later as a reading-show off Broadway.

In 1998 she immigrated to the United States, going to New York, where she worked for several U.S. television stations, production companies, and news syndicates, for the UN General Assembly, and for the UNDP.

Polirom Publishing House published her novel *My Life on Craigslist*, a Best Books Award Finalist by USA Books, 2011.



ALEXANDRA ARES

Dream Junkies
Publisher Ingenius Books,
Smart Media New York, 2012

Last year, her latest book, *The Other Girl*, still not published in Romania, was the winner in the novella category of the 2012 Next Generation Indie Book Awards, a book equivalent of the Sundance awards.

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