What is it that attracted Alice Voinescu so much to Hermann Cohen's Neo-Kantian philosophical system that she should have remained loyal to it throughout her life? In time, the most outdated must have seemed to her his aesthetics, with its ethicalness rooted in sentiment, with no receptiveness to the beauty or tragic character of life, but mostly (unlike Volkelt, her first professor in Germany) with no propensity for the mystery of the Absolute that Alice Voinescu was constantly concerned with as early as her youth encounter with the Christly ideal.

*Perhaps the footing for Alice Voinescu's trust was this balanced outlook on God (as guarantor of the eternity of nature, necessary for the preservation and attainment of the ideal) that the Marburg philosopher advocated. One of the reasons that makes me think this is the fact that she omitted this subject in the public lecture of 1920 (**Hermann Cohen: A Modern Plato** [6]), unlike the text published in 1937 [3]. An omission that can be explained by her initial predominant scientistic attitude, her bashfulness, but mainly by her tendency to look for the truth contrary to her own inclinations (which she points out as a merit in Montaigne's case). Her tendency was, in this case, to imagine an anthropomorphic God with whom she permanently fought and reconciled, as we can learn from her moving diary. It is a dramatic, very Pascal-like relationship, that we can find in our culture only in Arghezi's **Psalms** and that proves the authenticity of their faith. A faith that coexists, in Alice Voinescu's case, with the faith in science (in Arghezi's case, in technology) and with her distrust of the clergy.*

Another – successful – attempt at overcoming, if not denying, her nature is her monograph on Montaigne. What a difference between this cured skeptic, who had died with the acquired skill of taking royal pleasure in his own person, and the woman writer who confessed with excessive fury, in her last year of life: "I do not love myself. I do not applaud myself, I find no excuse for my lack of courage, and especially for my lack of faith."

This hardly overcome self-doubt might be the reason why she only published her first book at 50; a book that is nevertheless far from being one of popularization, as some of her contemporaries considered it. Against the opinions of most specialists, she argues that Montaigne's skepticism does not have a subjectivistic and absolute orientation. This is because, although he considers as relative the individual's ability to know the truth entirely and definitively, he does nevertheless hope for the continuity of his quest throughout generations of people, who will gradually enlarge its domain. By questioning the methods of knowledge, Montaigne allegedly anticipates Cartesianism and the Kantian criticism.

On the other hand – argues Alice Voinescu –, for Montaigne, the object of science is not yet nature, but life and man; and the one most at hand is his own self, with its two aspects: carnal and spiritual. In exploring his own Ego, Montaigne does not operate in cold blood, like a pathologist, nor egocentrically, like the Renaissance humanists. He is driven by "a passion for truth", and his intuition – of an an artistic nature – reaches farther than anyone else's, as far as the unconscious and nothingness, where man encounters death.

His acute sense of the concrete will lead Montaigne to the discovery and acceptance of his inner contradictions – an image of the entire human condition (placed between angel and beast) –, and further on, to the necessity of a science, not of the being (like in the medieval philosophy and theology), but of the becoming (thus going in my opinion beyond Descartes and even Kant and approaching Hegel). This becoming does however observe a rule, because Montaigne discovers in his and other people's Ego a dominant form (in fact, a structure) that defeats the opposite tendencies, the individual's fate depending on his Ego.

Montaigne, the artist, "discovers a qualitative infinite [of the individual], before the quantitative one" [of nature], discovered by Pascal, and, just like the latter, admits the exis-

tence of a divine reality above man and his understanding. He nevertheless banks on the heroism of a kind of thinking that takes risks, and founds his hope on the social liberation of people through everyone's thinking. He thus surmounts the egotism of individual salvation to be found in Pascal's faith and of the theologians of Port-Royal. If, as revealed by Alice Voinescu, Montaigne is Pascal's equal in terms of tragic approach and sincere faith, he is different in that he considers man's calling to be life and its joys. He was a stoic in the face of suffering and death, but permanently looking for an ideal not in the saints' lives, but in the lives of famous men, narrated by Plutarch.

If Montaigne's version of portrait in ***The History of Modern Philosophy*** *is rather colorless as compared to the distinct colors of the one in the monograph, the metal engraving concision of Pascal's portrait convincingly transmits the deep contradictions within the first modern existentialist in her exegesis. Alice Voinescu contradicts the common opinion, on him too; she contends that the thinker's interest in science did not survive his mystical crisis.*

This founder of the distinction between the spirit of fineness and the spirit of geometry (who is, in my opinion, at the root of the outlook of the two cultures) was at the same time the one who unified them, resorting to mathematics in morals, and to the subtlety of his artist's concrete intuition in science. Because Pascal, an experimental spirit, not an apriorist like Descartes, did not cherish the latter's illusion in the omnipotence of mathematics. On the contrary, he was one of the first who pointed out the impossibility to demonstrate the first geometrical principles, and who thus marked a limit to logical-mathematical reasoning, and based it on intuition.

The boldness of his thinking and the tragic vein of his feeling made Alice Voinescu consider Pascal "the representative type of human thinking", whose prototype she would later find in Aeschylus' Prometheus.

Her monograph on Aeschylus represents an acme not only in Alice Voinescu's creation, but also in the artistic consciousness of the Romanian culture, simultaneously with Camil Petrescu's ***Addenda to the Fake Treatise****.... At a time when he was trying to explain his own dramatic philosophy (embodied, as early as 1926, in* ***Danton****), and to locate the core of the conflict in the conscience knowing the antinomies of the Ego and of reality, Alice Voinescu was discovering the same tendency in the very works of the first Hellenic tragic author.*

Besides the introduction and the conclusions, the book contains 10 chapters, one for each of Aeschylus' plays, plus two on the whole trilogy ***Oresteia*** *and Aeschylus' biography, respectively. Alice Voinescu begins by examining the historical roots of the tragic performance, but she does not fall into the trap of historicism. She sets the preliminary concepts of tragedy and dramatic performance that will guide her, and she then tests and enriches them by making an analysis of Aeschylus' works. She thus solves the apparent vicious circle of the impossibility of the experience without a guiding theory, and of the theory not supported by experience.*

According to her philosophy, the dramatic act is not about the suffering appearing by passive submission to Destiny, but about opposing it and then consciously accepting Justice, which manifests itself as the result of an acknowledged guilt. The testing of the tragic consciousness is carried out on the very border of non-existence, but here it reveals itself not as the struggle between life and death, but between biological and spiritual life.

In the introduction to ***Aspects of Contemporary Theater*** *(1941), the specificity of dramatic art was defined as the creation of the actuality (which is different from the mere present), a temporal mode that achieves the "qualitative" eternity, not the quantitative one (of endless succession). Actuality appears as the union of past and future, manifested in the act of the dramatic hero, who unifies the will rooted in the past and the aspiration towards the future. This outlook seems to link Aristotle's ideas in his treatise* ***On Soul*** *with those in his* ***Poetics****. Fr. Fergusson made a similar attempt in* ***The Idea of a Theater*** *(1949), but he related it to the ritual structure of the tragedy, revealed by the School of Cambridge.*

Alice Voinescu does not seem to have been familiar with the ideas of this school (headed by G. Murray). But, even if she had accepted an alleged structural religious continuity in the case of tragedy, she would have corrected it by pointing out a break in signification, due to the fact that the mythical mentality on Destiny had become anachronistic. In her

opinion, the dramatic work is the privileged place of eternalizing spiritual becoming, seen as the evolution of the real towards the ideal, in the birth of self-consciousness through the intuition of man's spiritual nature. The hero's tragedy is a moment of creative desperation of the social consciousness, which takes the risk of breaking away from the past by self-surpassing.

Analyzing Aeschylus' works one by one, Alice Voinescu builds a true phenomenology of the tragic, which is born in the collective mentality and returns to it, enriching it with the characters' experience. Thus, in ***The Persians****, the first full-fledged tragedy, the tragic act is shown as collective: the historical confrontation of Salamis, between the whole Athenian people and the brutal destiny embodied by the invading Persian army.*

Individual tragedy appears with the character Eteocles of ***The Seven against Thebes****, who assumes the sins of Tantalus and Oedipus, facing death and accepting the necessity of expiation. The tragedy of the genius is discovered in the character of Prometheus (from* ***Prometheus Bound****) and of Cassandra (from* ***Agamemnon****), who transcend their destiny through prediction, thus turning fatality into law. But while the former is the embodiment of the knowing conscience, Cassandra achieves (like Montaigne) the synthesis of vitality and spirituality, which is a characteristic of the poetic genius (a hypostasis of Aeschylus in whom Alice Voinescu seems to recognize herself).*

Lastly, the trilogy ***Oresteia*** *displays all the varieties of tragedy: the tragedy of passion in Clytemnestra, of maturity aware of its guilt, though passive, in Agamemnon, and of the heroic ethical conscience in Orestes. The confrontations between gods and men cover all the stages of morality: passionate-vital in Apollo-Erinyes, judicial in Athena-Erinyes, and social in Athena-Areopagus. The dissemination of the individual set of moral problems in the people's chorus, and the commissioning of Areopagus as judge closes the circle of tragic conscience, that seems to Alice Voinescu the very image of the evolution and of the role of the Aeschylean genius.*

Admitting the continuity in terms of faith between the great Hellenic lyrical poets and Aeschylus, Alice Voinescu points out the novelty of his contribution to the change of the religious mentality and shows that the tragedies are the outcome of the artistic genius (that anticipates the idealistic – i.e. spiritually oriented – tendencies of the Socratic and the Platonic philosophy of the following century), not of the theologian. But even if he temporarily gets ahead of the society, the poet cannot entirely surpass it: as a means of man's emancipation, the Greek tragic sense suggests but thinking, which understands guilt, not love, which cures the sin, like in the case of Christianity.

In depicting Cassandra, Alice Voinescu reconstructs a portrait of the fragile, vulnerable and inspired womanhood, the reverse of the malefic and revengeful Clytemnestra, just as in ***The Danaides*** *she had identified a manifestation of the old war between genders, that can lead to sin and death, from which only one Danaid could save herself and only through love. She will consider that the mission of modern feminism is not just the women's emancipation, but the very salvation of our civilization from the excessive abstract rationality of the masculine spirit, by harmonizing it with the complementary feminine sensitivity (just as Montaigne's disposition became more serene after he met Marie de Gournay).*

By taking this journey into the tragic universe, Alice Voinescu succeeded in purifying herself and healing her own wounds inflicted on her by the relation with her husband and by his death. Fate kept in store for her the experience of the social tragedy of the communist terror, anticipated – but not justified – by the legionary terror. Neither of them was borne passively by Alice Voinescu; she braved them, almost to the point of daring her destiny. In this suffering, like in the first one, she could see her own share of the guilt. She saved herself by pursuing her calling for writing, that calling which she had discovered in the atheist Shaw as a form of transcending the human condition and approaching God, and which she considered in her ethical "letters" a way – specific to each of us – to imitate the Christly suffering.

(L. B.)