

MARTOR



Title: "Through the cigarette smoke"

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How to cite this article: Moțoc, Victoria. 2005. "Through the cigarette smoke". *Martor* 10: 84-85.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-10-2005/>

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Through the cigarette smoke

Victoria Moțoc



Now I smoke *Virginia Slims*. Some long, toothpick-like cigarettes, with a minimum quantity of tobacco, which grants me (does it?) perfect health till an old age. Actually, this is the little trick of a chain smoker who wants to, but cannot quit them anymore.

The history of my more than 15 years of smoking is part of my life.

In 1990 I used to smoke *Carpați* and *Bucegi* with the innocence of my twenty years of life. I was a connoisseur. I knew that those produced at Sfântu Gheorghe were the best and I used to generously offer them to my smoking brethren. I would offer them with the elegance with which the loaded people of today offer cigars. I was thirstily draining them till burning my fingers down the University halls or during the parties in the student hostel. I was elegantly spitting the wires or the wood I found while smoking and I didn't care a bit for the deep yellow stains that the vice had imprinted on my fingers. Well, those were revolutionary times! And in jeans, T-Shirts and with loose hair, we wanted to change the world. And the cigarettes.

The transition fulfilled our wish, at least the second part. I don't know about changing the world, but we definitely changed the cigarettes. We went for others which were better, more refined, more Occidental. But equally deadly.

At the beginning and only for a while, the

cigarettes from the neighbouring and friend countries entered my life: *VEK*, *Vikend*, *B.T*, *D.S.*, *Apollonia*. All smuggled. Bought at a corner of a street from some kind of slick who was showing you a bit of a package popping out of his pocket. Or, in the middle of the night, from a student hostel room, from a foreign student or from his girlfriend. What a life! Sealed packages, filter cigarettes. Balkan spicy-smoked taste on its way to the Occident. I liked them then. But not for long. That is because the Romanian commodity market hybrid surprised us. The almost legal *Bastos* and *Assos* popped up. Without any type of warning they entered the Romanian shops and the little trade shops at the first floor of the blocks. I was quite reluctant to them at the beginning. Meaning? How could I smoke without fear, without previously trading with the smugglers, without the killing looks of the neighbouring shop assistants I used to wake up whenever I felt like smoking? I knew it was the beginning of the end. I didn't grow fond of these two 'traitors', *Bastos* and *Assos*. „The Cigarette” 1 and 2 scandals proved me I hadn't been wrong.

There were other attempts. A non-filter *Lucky Strike*, a *Kent*, a *Marlboro*, a *Rothmans*. But they yet pertained to a world I didn't have access to. If you want, they represented the classy people you bump into while being at a

party you take part in by mistake.

Towards 1994, I spent a long time around *Monte Carlo*. Varying it with *Winchester*, when, financially speaking, *Monte Carlo* wasn't accessible. *Monte Carlo* was sweeter, fuller, more refined. *Winchester* harsher, spicier. Well, a real Saxon! *Viceroy*, together with blue *Gauloise* had been my biggest passions. I loved the French more. Stylish, elegant, sombre. With no stamp, because it couldn't fool around with formalities. It seduced me due to its cleverness and ability and I decided to stick with it without minding the consequences. It was Latin, as I was. I thought I understood it, knew it, and that it had been wandering through the world only to find me. I had the faith of any other trustful woman who was ardently in love. I was seduced and abandoned. Because, one day, *Gauloise* disappeared from the Romanian market. I only thank it for doing it elegantly, feeding me with the illusion of staying for a little longer. The last time I saw it was in Carrefour, on its own territory. Ever since, I received no letter from it. *Viceroy* gave me comfort for almost a year. Till one day when I decided that I had to give a chance to a Romanian as well. And I found *Record*. Simple but honest. It wasn't pouring in your ear its ideas of being some kind of prince, but it fulfilled my needs, why lying? But one cannot live without poetry and *Record* couldn't offer me that. It was prosaic and kind of bland even if helping me to survive my first job as editor at Rompres. And, believe me, that hadn't been easy. For any of us.

More mature, free from preconceived ideas, more experienced and with more intensity I launched myself in a quest for new cigarettes. I had money and I could test the rich ones as well: *Kent*, *Marlboro*, *Dunhill*, *Rothmans*, *Camel*. There was no point, they didn't match my first love. Or maybe I wasn't the same either. I perversely tried the feminine ones, even if now I feel ashamed: *Kim*, menthol *Pall Mall*, *More*. I burnt all the experiences till the end. And thus, from cigarette to cigarette, I ended up totally confused. There was a time when I used to win over them. But that was when I still knew their names, when *Kent* was only of one type, not of eight, as I used to see them, stuck in the mouths of some brawly men. But now, when the majority of them are made in Romania, how could I make any difference and name them? Who should I hate, who should I love?

I had, due to a natural evolution of things, my own riot. I will not smoke! At all. Ever. I managed to keep away from the vice for two years, displaying a sort of kingly superiority. Worthy of better causes. I found reasons, set goals, militated in vain. Bloody weed! How stupid! I came back to them, repenting for my deeds. Using the back door. And here I am now! Through the coffee vapours, in this September day, I have the courage of sharing with you the history of my sad cigarettes.

Translated by Raluca Vîjîac