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CORNEL REGMAN – THE CRITICAL CONCEPT

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Abstract: *Cornel Regman is a critical spirit with a tendency towards finding faults, both at a general level (regarding the mentality or literary morals), or at individual level. His critical concept is founded on Maiorescu's criticism, with suggestions from Eugen Lovinescu and from the first 'Lovinescian' critics. The new criticism has no effect on him, as the autochthonous exegesis is seen as strong enough to ensure the organic evolution of the genre. His critical vision is similar to Şerban Cioculescu's conception by his refusal of the 'impressionism' of the 'creative criticism' and by the support for the objective and axiological perspective on literature, from the point of view of the Cartesian rationalism.*

Keywords: *post war literary criticism, "the New Criticism", literary review, objectivity, axiological perspective, polemic, colloquial style.*

1. Introduction

Cornel Regman's vast critical activity, from the endorsement of *The Manifesto of the Literary Circle from Sibiu* and untill the perhaps too enthousiastic wellcoming of the generation of the nineties, covers all the important moments of our post war criticism and can be seen as having a certain paradigmatic value for the avatars of the autochthonous discourse upon literature in the second half of the XXth century. The eternal enemy of the "paper scribblers" makes his debut with The Literary Circle from Sibiu and, between 1942-1947, C. Regman can be found on Lovinescu's list with the potential representatives of the fourth post-Maiorescian generation, one who pledged itself to defend the autonomy of the aesthetic and the chances of Romanian literature's advancement towards modernity. The syncope of the socialist-realism brutally cut off the natural evolution of everybody's creative path, including that of C. Regman, who, after having barely made his first steps as an aesthete, found himself thrown into an a world of ideological delirium on given themes. He would regret, latter on, the tribute he paid to this world, in writings profoundly impregnated with the toxins of the dialectic materialist doctrine (some of them to be found in the volume *Literary Crossroads/Confluențe literare*), more so because, whenever the critic expressed an irreverent opinion about one of his fellow writers caught red-handed, his own "proletkultist compromise" was immediately pointed out in order to silence him. It is possible that, in fact, his perseverance in his later careful watch over the professional deontology, his consistency in the denouncement of the axiological forgery or the half-measures of the critical attempts of his fellow critics should not be completely unrelated with his quasi-propagandistic stray of youth,

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and it was paid off in constant vigil for the soundness of literature (and especially of literary criticism). Starting with his volume C*ărți, autori, tendințe* (*Books, Authors, Trends*) (1967), which, together with the following three volumes (*Cică nişte cronicari... – It's Said about Some Chroniclers...*, 1970, *Colocvial – Colloquial*, 1976 and *Explorări în actualitatea imediată – Explorations of immediate actuality*, 1978) mark the peak of C. Regman's activity as a literary chronicler, he (re)gains his true self, which is that of "the toiler with a magnifying glass and scoop" (Regman, 1978, 159), or, in N. Manolescu's opinion – "a chronicler with a gift for words" (Manolescu 109), who needs vast spaces to unfold his malice (his favorite genres are criticism and epic) or just to sit and chat. The propensity for words of this "Creangă, accustomed to commentary" (Grigurcu 284) is accompanied by a critical eye, especially practiced to see the faults, the manufacturing or finishing defects, the power cuts happening on the background of rarefied substance or manneristic conception. The critic himself is the first to recognize his passion for building his analysis around a gap, a loose end of the text, probing, "sometimes beyond necessity, to discover the error" (Regman, 1987, 254). In time, the number one rebuker of the post war exegeses would temperate his impetus to find faults and would even recommend to his younger disciples "a more vivid feeling of the hierarchy of values, the distinction between important and unimportant and a vertical glimpse of the literary present, necessary to any critical evaluation" (Regman, 1987, 254). In his case, though, it must have been more than the whim of a rock-crusher, given his sense for finding faults, be it on the general level (of mentality and literary morals) or on a strictly individual one. C. Regman is not a dull, grumpy critic, and, even less so, a boring one. On the contrary, his small cavils or his grand litigations against the writers are based on a state of good-will, of trust in normality, in the possibility to achieve normality. Apart from Gh. Grigurcu, for instance, also a vigilante, but one who usually throws thunder bolts against the cases of artistic indiscipline and fraud, the author of *Colloquial* preserves his humor together with his wits and firmness, so it is not a coincidence that he built a reputation as a "humorist of criticism, heartily laughing at everything and everybody, and still preserving his quality of a serious and respected annotator" (Manolescu 111). This humorous vein, doted with irony or even sarcasm here and there, pairs with the pedagogic-moralizing inclination of the critic and constitute their necessary correlative, revealing his writing formula, which is fundamentally conservative. I. Negoițescu notices that, in the seventies, C. Regman appears as a figure of Junimea, due to his 'pedagogical' view on criticism: in the literary work, "he constantly seeks for the 'order' of life and its durability, because he sees it as an organism, a structure'" (Negoițescu 267) where improvisation, incongruity and contradiction have no place. The exegete of literature has to guide, to direct (as in Maiorescu's conception) the reader, this is why the he must posses the "ability to discern the idea contained within the literary work" (Negoițescu 267) rooting in his reason, culture and experience, and not in the least in mere "impressions".

2. Critical Models

To define more clearly the coordinates of C. Regman's criticism, to trace more accurately the models which influenced him, we need to reveal its Maiorescian foundation (which is, in fact, common, to

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each of the representatives of the aesthetic criticism), and the suggestions which came from Lovinescu's criticism, especially from the first generation of Lovinescian critics (among the favorites are G. Călinescu, P. Constantinescu and Șb. Cioculescu). Under those circumstances, the impact of the 'new criticism' on this member of the Literary Circle is minimal; he is convinced that the fast recovery of the critical discourse, after the "obsessive decade" was, first of all, possible due to the vigor of the interwar critical models which were recovered rapidly. The interpretative methods borrowed from outside are looked at as merely decorative (and, perhaps, refreshing for the critical vocabulary, but they are suspected of ambiguity and hollowness in the context), they are rather contested than seen as necessary and, finally, explicitly rejected. The autochthonous critical tradition is considered solid enough to ensure the organic evolution of the genre.

The one to reveal the depths of this tradition, for C. Regman as for the majority of the Romanian critics, is, in the beginning, G. Călinescu: "discovering Călinescu, I had the revelation of what criticism means and the delight one can find in reading a good critical text" (Regman, 1987, 245). The contact with Călinescu's criticism was "the decisive event of my youth, the one which channeled my preferences, and even my strength" (Regman, 1987, 245), to such an extent that "in my difficult years, he was my model even in error" (Regman, 1987, 260). In one of his texts from 1962, Călinescu's critical portrait is presented without abstention; his eloquent style, the poignant commentary and the impeccable choice of the excerpts, the precision of his analyses and the ability to liven the narration, the sumptuous comparativism and the classification "according to the idea of progress and social, moral and spiritual liberation" (Regman, 1967, 85) are the elements he identifies in the repertoire of Călinescu's formula. Even if he understands the fascination of the "divine critic" for the young generation and thinks that the continuation of the interwar tradition is naturally made through G. Călinescu's works, due to the fact that he "is, or has been, until recently, the self-consciousness of the Romanian literature, condensed in a name" (Regman, 1970, 292), C. Regman places himself on the other side of the barricade in the dispute between "Călinescians" and "anti-Călinescians". What he contests is not the model itself, but the excess of focus on the model, the tendency to turn it into a myth, to make it into cult. He does not approve the attitude of those literary critics and historians "who see G. Călinescu as the only literary authority which is worth to be associated with or, if it is the case, from which to dissociate" (Regman, 1970, 297); the pretentions to exclusivity of Călinescu's fanatics are incriminated, the critic aiming especially at N. Manolescu, in his first year of literary chronicle and at his debut with *Lecturi infidele* (*Unfaithful Readings*): "In Manolescu's case, what bothers me is precisely to come across the particularities of the Călinescian discourse, and, even more, to find the maestro's opinions uttered in a barely modified formula, daring points of view equally daringly appropriated, long-known interpretations bearing all the prestige of the forerunner's authority" (Regman, 1970 296-297). The stagnation of the "young" criticism in a mimetic phase, the glorification of the big figure of the Romanian criticism in detriment of other models is contested again in 1973, in a further analysis regarding the evolution of the domain.

C. Regman would be, for a long time, in the avant-garde of the post war recuperation of "the P. Constantinescu's

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model", through the agency of whom he asserts, in 1957 (in *La reeditarea lui P. Constantinescu – At a New Edition of P. Constantinescu's Works*), his plea for the return to normality, for the rehabilitation of the "aesthetic taste" which was so much condemned in the regulations of the propagandistic criticism. From the two (for the moment) possible models of criticism – "*the attitude criticism*" (of welcoming and axiological placement) and "the cognition criticism" (Regman, 1966, 290) (of thoroughgoing study, from various perspectives, of the literary work) – the first variant is characteristic to P. Constantinescu, a practician of the "*expertise-chronicle*" (Regman, 1966, 293), where the precise diagnostic, founded on "a wide-comprehensive rationalism" (Regman, 1966, 294) has the purpose to correctly direct both the writer as well as the reader. The accent of the critical verdict on "the criterion of conformity to the truth of life" and on "the organic (…) way in which the writer organizes the artistic synthesis of his intentions and means" (Regman, 1996, 296) are the critical proceedings used by Regman himself as a literary chronicler. Not only was the inter war critic preoccupied with the "«pharmaceutical recipe»", the standard-formula of creation of a particular writer, with the mechanism of the literary work and its possible "starting flaw" (Regman, 1972, 387), but so was his follower from The Literary Circle, equally interested in the counterfeit, in the vices of the artistic conscience. Both of them write, for their own contemporaneity, "the minute of offense, addressed to the writers, some of them well-known and very successful" (Regman, 1990, 98). They were both reproached with the absence of the integrative historical perspective on literature, but they were both considered to be diagnosticians, having a valid knowledge of prose and criticism. In his attempt to appropriate the "P. Constantinescu model", C. Regman insisted (in a somewhat interested manner) on the polemic, pedagogical-corrective and moralist dimension of practice of his antecessor, who would always have "a fight to carry on, an idea to clarify, a prejudice or incorrect practice to dismiss, an error against good-taste to correct, a prejudicial tendency to unveil or, on the contrary, an exemplary writing to impose, a success to recommend" (Regman, 1966, 291). P. Constantinescu didn't fight quite all these battles, but somebody else did: Şerban Cioculescu..

3. The Affinity for Cioculescu's Formula

Şb. Cioculescu is a Cartesian as well, but one of attitude, polemic, talkative and inconvenient, exactly what C. Regman proved to be later on. "Şerban the harsh", seen as "the last chronicler from Tara Românească" (Regman, 1967, 88), built his fame and critical authority around his 'attitude criticism', pugnacious in nature, atypical for one of the first of Lovinescu's followers, from whom he delimits himself, first of all trough his refusal to see the "creative criticism" as a self-standing literary genre. Angry with the supremacy of "talent", the critic rejected the "ineffable", the "epic synthesis", the omnipotence of "the impression" and defended only the objective and axiological perspective in the interpretation of literature. No matter how much "intuition" an exegete might bee capable of, he should not underestimate the importance of culture and experience, the same as he should not forget that, regardless of how much "creative" he could get, he is not the writer of literature, but merely a commentator. To the belletristic frivolousness of the criticism is opposed "the verification of the

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impressions trough judgment control" (Cioculescu 692) and the obligation to give a critical verdict: "the purpose of criticism is to pursue the truth and dissipate the confusion" (Cioculescu 578), with the problem of values placed at the core of the critical act. The authority, in this domain, derives from the capacity "to direct the writers attention on their differential structure, stimulating their creativity, which means to create/produce according to their organic, structural nature" (Cioculescu 580). Thus, the responsibility of criticism towards writers enhances in a high degree, as any error in the correlation of the individual creative formula with the personal data of the writers has catastrophic effects on their evolution. The critical conception of C. Regman meets Cioculescu's not only in this point, of the critic's responsibility to the writers, but also in the refusal of the "impressionism", of the "creative criticism", in the repeated defense of the axiological perspective on literature (having an ally in polemic, for this purpose) from the standpoint of Voltaire's rationalism. He admires "the ardor and intransigence, proper only to the engaged natures, the faith, virtue, even… the harshness of a guardian of the Cause" (Regman, 1976, 270), while Cioculescu's interpretations gain Regman's favors due to the argumentative scenario developed with colloquial volubility and made to serve the truth, to promote a creditable hierarchy and to denounce the imposture: "Șb. Cioculescu practices the type of criticism which is the most similar to the colloquial debate, with surplus of words and arguments, often with microscopic details, but always in the service of the discovery of truth, which means (…) above all else, to place an unforgiving spotlight on hasty judgment and conventions of all sorts (…), of everything that nourishes, after all, «the sacred monsters» of literary demagogy", a criticism focused on "the advertisement more than on exultation" (Regman, 1976, 276).

4. Conclusions

Cioculescu's type of critical formula, a laborious one, combining the taste for small talk and colloquial expression with the biting denouncement of any barter for literary glory (this explaining the appreciable length of his texts) can be found, in the smallest details, in the "chronicle of the literary chronicle" written by C. Regman between 1967-1969 for *Tomis* magazine.

In his role as "the critic of the next day", the critic from "The Literary Circle" prefers to be in the rear guard of the literary phenomena, position from where he intervenes promptly to nuance, grade and place correctly the literary actuality. His diagnostic is always precise, whether it is about the disease of the metaliterary or about the threats of the literary fashion.

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