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LITERARY CRITICISM AND GLOBALIZATION: MIRCEA MARTIN AND THE NEED FOR SYNCHRONIZATION

Abstract: The premise of this paper is that literary criticism should play an important part in the globalization of literature. Understood mainly as a social phenomenon with great economic impact, globalization affects literature thematically and stylistically, but mainly by transforming reading, from an aesthetic experience, into a form of entertainment. In this context, we are trying to outline some of the major functions that literary criticism should have today in order to maintain the aesthetic autonomy of global literature. The starting point of our approach is Mircea Martin's essays from Singura critică, in which the critic proves an outstanding foresight, anticipating since 1983 the global trend of literature.

Keywords: globalization, literature, literary criticism, Mircea Martin.

In 1983, in America, Eduard Said writes *The World, the Text and the Critic*, where he posits an engagement of the critic regarding the decoding of the social and historical context which exists enclosed in the literary work. In the same year, Benedict Anderson asserts the overcoming of national references in the construction of the literary discourse through the concept of *Imagined Comunities.* The common point of these works is that they outline a new perspective upon literature which marks the overcoming of self reflexivity and self sufficiency claimed by poststructuralism. It projects literature in the wider space of the global, and redefines the national. On a social and economic stand, Theodore Levitt uses the term "globalization" in relation to the new economic realities of the time in the May-June issue of the same year of *Harvard Business Review*. Although similar terms have already been used (Mcluhan's global village dates since 1964), this article imposes its extensive use, through the fact that it draws a very clear boundary between the multinational and the global[1] companies. All these outline a new outlook upon the world, which conditions a new place for the individual and generates the need for redefinition for key concepts as *home, nation, identity, uprooting,* etc.

In relation to this international context, Romanian literature still finds itself under the auspices of the Communism, although through the young ,'80s generation, there is a blast of change, of turning towards the West (an orientation that is strongly sensed on the cultural level, nowise on the economic or social plan; outside culture, there is no visible acceptance of an occidental set of values). This is the context in which the critic Mircea Martin publishes, in 1983, in the 4th number of the *Revista de istorie şi teorie literară* (article included in the *Singura critică* retrospective), his *Utopian projects* through which Romanian literature would become, in the critic's words, „universal"[2]. Denouncing the assumed difficulties (impediments in translation, the marginal positioning, the construction of the writers' message

1 "The globalization of markets is at hand. With that, the multinational commercial world nears its end, and so does the multinational corporation." Theodore Levitt "The Globalization of Markets" in *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1983, available at http://hbr.org/1983/05/the-globalization-of-markets/ar/1, 20th of June 2014, 12:50

2 Mircea Martine, "Proiecte utopice" in *Singura critică*, ed. a II-a, Cartea Românească, București, 2006, p. 44

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in a national exclusiveness), the critic positions himself at the border between spaces, between a *here* with a national specific and an international *there*, proposing a comprehensive method for selecting the works which can bear abroad the name of Romanian literature: "a creative confrontation, says the critic, firstly takes place within a national culture, but it can and must be extended in the frame of an international contest of values"[3]. As can be noticed, this algorithm centers on the criterion of value, always of critical importance for Mircea Martin. In fact, his statement from *Funcţiile criticii* from 1972, "a *bona fide* critic cannot be sensible to mediocre works, even though they come in welcome to his program"[4] functions as an axiom for his entire work. The reason is a matter-of-course: the critic defines himself through the works, values, and ideas he advocates, and, Martin continues, these "cannot compensate the absence of vocation"[5]. Thus, regardless of how much does the work serve in the process of construction and promotion of a culture, in this case, its positioning in the global context of literature must not set aside the criterion of value, especially taking into account the fact that these works are subjected to a double process of selection, designed on opposed criteria. In this selection process, the work must circumscribe itself within a national system of values (encompassing a certain specific context), so as to step abroad (in equally enveloping those values that exist on the international level).

The preoccupation for this incorporation of Romanian literature (and culture, in general) in a generic context that surpasses the national is a constant of Mircea Martin's work, the critic always being aware of the fact that he is part of a space much larger and different than that in which history compels him to live. But at the same time, he feels alienated from this global context, as the alignment to the occidental space is rather of a more intuitive nature. Here is what the critic asserts in the same article, a pooving thus this distance from the rest of the world that the Communist regime imposes on Romaian culture:

"The situation cannot be, of course, essentially different in other European countries with languages of restricted circulation. I don't know to what extent such a problem stirs the spirits out there, but it is certain that some of them have had long ago the chance to break the circle of ignorance through the force of a few figures"[6].

Without having an explicit attitude in the orientation of the critical discourse, Mircea Martin lets the subtext envision at least one alignment to the contemporary tendencies and preoccupations of literary criticism, proving what the author himself asserts in the opening of the 2006 edition of *Singura critică*: "Neither literature nor criticism live by reference to the present and therefore are not destined to an immediate consume"[7]. To this extent, literary criticism raises above its time, displaces itself from the immediate, though without neglecting it, because, the author says, "literature is summoned to serve the epoch's imperatives; the criticism recommends major themes and suggests solutions for adequacy and accessibility"[8]. Here is, in short, the scheme of a critical system, which, nowadays, would have an important role in the process of the *globalization* of literature. Its function would be that of constructing an international context that is favorable to promoting values which carry within themselves a veritable cultural inheritance.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 47 (t.n.)
4 *Mircea Martin*, "Funcția criticii" în *op. cit.* 2006, p. 20 (t.n.)
5 *Ibidem (t.n.)*
6 Mircea Martin, "Proiecte utopice" in op. cit., 2006, p. 45 (t.n.)
7 Mircea Martin, "Argument pentru ediția a II-a", in *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 5 (t.n.)
8 Mircea Martin, "Funcția criticii", in *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 19 (t.n.)

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After more than thirty years from the moment that we took as a landmark, globalization, through the assessment of some innovations on a scientific level[9] which lead to the remapping of the world, transforms the anxieties, thematically exploited by postmodernism (the dissolution of borders and exact landmarks, plurality, hyper-reality, folding of time and space), into immediate realities. All these are felt more and more acutely by the individual who, placed at the crossroads between worlds, needs an identity adjustment in order to function comfortably in this new space of simultaneities. Compelled to an unprecedented mobility through which the connection to a single cultural dimension spawns isolation and etno-centrism, individuals looks upon the world as a global-scaled cultural supermarket[10] in which the products intended for immediate needs are mixed with cultural products, or even bear a cultural mark.

Moreover, the whole process of the globalization of literature is understood in the terms mentioned by Imre Szeman, who affirms that globalization, as a social and economical phenomenon, transforms culture in a form of entertainment, used a commercialization-subordinated reality[11]. Without naming a unitary literary phenomenon, or at least one with some major characteristics, global literature circumscribes to this paradigm of large-consumer goods, and therefore is subject to thematic, and stylistic adjustments in order to respond to the consumer's needs. Thus, in this context, culture is confiscated by the economic determinants, functioning more like a product which only tangentially envelops the mode in which the individual reports himself to the surrounding world. Literature fits here, too – ironically, *ad literam* transformed in a supermarket product.

Books are written according to recipes of success, dictated by market numbers, and the differences between second-hand literature and that which is indeed valuable are annulled, because the instances which guarantee the separation of values, according to clear-cut criteria, become useless in relation with the instantaneous option for cliché. Moreover, the place of critics-generated literary chronicles is taken by literature blogs in which every reader imparts his reading experience, in a decisive way for the success of the book. Readers, transformed in consumers of literature as a form of *entertainment*, mediate, through their large number, the (financial) survival of the writer, who is bound to (thematic, stylistic, and last but not least, value) compromises. The book thus has to answer to some very clear criteria which should transform it into a salable product. Moreover, it must address to a wide public, thus overcoming local criteria.

In this new *global* dimension of literature, the two essential functions of criticism that are identified in Mircea Martin's works (the role in the coagulation of culture and the function of the promoting value) seem to be thwarted. Otherwise, sensible as always to the symptoms of the present, the literary critic draws attention, in the article from the 2013 issue of the *Euresis* magazine, on the anti-aesthetic attitude that is promoted in mass culture, identifying a "recanonization" process of literature. This process does not found itself anymore on aesthetic grounds, precisely because it functions in a social-cultural context are different, that of mass culture which annuls the differences between aesthetic and intellectual order and the social one[12]. In this context, criticism wouldn't have a role in building the consciousness of

9 Theodore Levitt, *op. cit*

10 Gordon Mathews, *Global Culture/ Individual Identity. Searching for home in the cultural supermarket*, Routledge, Londra, 2000, p. 4

11 Imre Szeman, "Globalization. Postmodernisn and (Autonomous) Criticism", in Will Coleman. Petra Rethmann, Imre Szeman (ed.), *Cultural Autonomy: Frictions and Connections*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2010, p. 71

12 "[…] we are witnessing a canonization of mass culture. This trend relies on the argument of democratization, it advocates extending the democratic principles into cultural and artistic territory, imposing

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literature, which becomes, apparently, self-sufficient. Despite all these, and despite the general impression of uselessness, by no means new[13], Mircea Martin affirms once again the essential and indispensable role of criticism in "the concretization of culture and society" through the assumption of some more complex tasks which coerce to a redefinition of its own condition[14]. Here is what the critic asserts in the article *Critica – Conştiinţa literaturii?*, initially published in *Viaţa Românească* in 1978:

"The artistic consciousness cannot replace the critical consciousness and because the latter must target not only a particular work or its place in a certain era, but the ensemble of literature in its historical context and in its synchronous connections"[15].

This assertion, made more that 35 years ago, distances itself from the immediate social and political context and functions as an axiom of criticism, completely available in the present. A question of methodology, however, arises. Through what methods can the literary criticism still fulfill its role in the context of globalization in which literature, as a mass-product, seems to be self-sufficient.

An initial aspect would be that which, in order to preserve its legitimacy, criticism must itself become global. The reason is that the critical discourse is compelled to function in a much larger context (marked by the unprecedented movement of human being, overlapping of time, migration, acculturation), but without losing from sight the specific context from which it was generated and which, ultimately, it must represent. Through this, the critic must connect his sensibilities to the new immediate realities and promote them, through his writings, in a system of values that is constructed from the awareness and comprehension of the new realities.

We identify the solution for this *globalization* of criticism, in two spaces simultaneously. On one hand, we find it in Mircea Martin's aforementioned articles, through that positioning at the borders of *here* and *there* which the critic spoke about since 1983. On the other hand, we return to Eduard Said who, in his 1994 article entitled *Intellectual Exile: Repatriats and Marginals* expresses approximately the same idea, only that he does it in a more explicit way. The theoretician transforms the attributes of exile in the strengths of a privileged existence of the one who accepts his non-allegiance to specific spaces. This positioning between spaces leads to a different understanding of reality, through its permanent comparison relation in which the exile engages[16]. However, contemporary situation proves these exact positing, precisely this through the incapacity of autonomous functioning in strictly national landmarks. The limitation of the act of criticism to a national context promotes a value-system which would only work in the enclosed context to which the critic belongs to and, therefore, it would be useless outside of it. In the end, if the critical discourse (and not only) targets that new type of individual, himself a product of globalization, it cannot be something else than global itself. The reason is that this large target-audience conceals a following role: the ensuring of the value – precisely the constant care, recurrently mentioned in Mircea Martin's work.

political correctness as a aesthetic correctness." Mircea Martin, "For an Axiological Perspective on Literature" in *Euresis*, 2013, Institutul cultural român, ISSN 1223-1193, p. 27

13 "This anti-aesthetic attitude is not of recent vintage. Almost all avant-garde "isms" proclaimed "the death of art" or urged its "killing." *Ibid*. p. 26

14 Mircea Martin, "Singura critică", in *op. cit*. 2006, p. 66 (t.n.)

15 Mircea Martin, "Critica – conştiinţa literaturii?" in *op. cit*. 2006, p. 38 (t.n.)

16 Edward Said, "Intellectual Exile: Expatriats and Marginals" in *Grand Street*, nr. 47/1994, p. 117

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In an article from 2005, Anis Shivani[17] affirms that in this global frame of mass culture, criticism has the role of revitalizing literature, precisely through this preoccupation for the promotion of values. Shivani's justification is that without a critic that addresses an audience as large as possible, literature cannot regain in central place in culture, because the huge amount of manifold cultural products thwarts its importance[18]. Through this, criticism returns to its primary function, that of educating the large public. Yet, we will not stop here in discussing the algorithm which guarantees the judgment of value. We think that this aspect pertains to the sensibility of every critic, because, ultimately, as Mircea Martin says in his 1972 article, a critic's vocation is required for the rediscovery of literary vocation[19].

In exchange, an adaptation to the new realities and a use of new ways of propagating information is needed in the fulfillment of this value-promoting function. This aspect sends to the first condition that was mentioned above, that of implicit and necessary globalization of criticism itself. Still, the downside here is that criticism can be contaminated by the illusion of popularity and, under the auspices of this function of education the public, lose from sight exactly its main aim; instead of promoting values, certain concessions at the level of discourse are made, in the name of a large addressability. The phenomenon is by no means deprived of importance, because the literary criticism itself becomes the product of a mass-culture, betraying through this its very own object.

Another aspect of this essential role turns towards the past, the critic being situated obliquely, not only between cultures, but also between the literary periods. Thus, in this market of literature, in which immediate products fight for supremacy, only the critic is able to bring the attention of the reader on those texts of an incontestable value (he is responsible for promoting what David Damrosch calls *shadow canon*[20]*)*, texts which, through their universal character, embody the sensibilities of the contemporary world. This strategy, too, is anticipated by Mircea Martin in his 1983 article, *De-clasicizarea clasicilor*, through what the critic labels as a process of "becoming contemporary". This is what Martin says: "The modernization of the classics implies, in a way or another, in a plan or another, their submission to the exigencies or our epoch."[21] – but not from a position of power, of incontestable authority but through their critical revaluation in the present-day context.

A last aspect takes into account criticism, situated, this time, within *globalization* seen as a hegemonic discourse which mediates a certain perspective on the real. Once again a return to Mircea Martin's intuition, who, in the 1972 article mentions:

"criticism is effective through the fact that, through various modes, hastens the self-conscience of the authors, interpreting the central obsessions of a literature as symptoms of an epoch; by the fact that, imposing a certain type of exigency, determines important slips of literary sensibility and receptivity."[22]

From this point of view, we turn to Imre Szeman's opinion, who proposes, in relation to the hegemonic discourse of globalization, an interdisciplinary perspective of criticism as an

17 Anis Shivani, "What Should be the Function of Criticism Today?" in *Subtropics*, nr. 17/2005, The University of Florida, available at http://www.english.ufl.edu/subtropics/Shivani_essay.html, 27 June, 2014, 12:20

18 *Ibidem*, "Without outspoken criticism reaching the vast potential audience, writing itself cannot be returned to a central position in culture, since the output is immense in volume and drowns out any thought process about its relevance or importance or meaning"

19 Mircea Martin, "Funcția criticii" in *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 20

20 David Damrosch, "Framed for World Literature" in Simone Winko, Fotis, Jannidis, Gerhard Lauder (ed) *Grenzen der Literatur*, Walter de Gruyter Press, Berling, 2009, p. 511

21 Mircea Martin, "Proiecte utopice" in *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 42 (t.n.)

22 Mircea Martin, "Funcția criticii", in *op. cit.,* 2006, p. 21 (t.n.)

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expression of the mobility of literature: criticism, thus, should, first of all, lure the attention on the artificial character of what it represents, Szeman say, the public face of globalization[23].

As a social and economical phenomenon, globalization imposes itself, says the critic, through the promotion of a fiction that has rhetorical and ideological valences which conditions the functionality of social systems. Again, we deal with a utopia constructed by a dominant narrative (a kind of servitude to literary discourse, only that now, the ideological considerations have been replaced with economical ones). What criticism should do, says Szeman, is to draw attention precisely to the fictional character of this narrative by the exhibition of rhetorical mechanisms and confiscation of significations in discourse-construction; globalization is, according to the critic, that hegemonic discourse in report with which all the other types of discourses redefine themselves (the literary discourse at the same extent). This would mean an inclination of literary criticism towards its larger version of cultural criticism[24].

However, its functions are not restricted, in this context, only to the deconstruction of the dominant discourse, because criticism has the role of proposing new concepts[25], through which the fact that reality can be viewed differently can be proved. In brief, the purpose is that of making possible the coexistence of multiple perspectives on the real. Without sharing Szeman's extreme vision, we agree with the role of literary criticism in promoting multiple visions on reality, because, ultimately, criticism has the fundamental role of de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing: the circumscribing in the global paradigm of valuable literary works that are produced in national context.

Through all these functions, which we can be easily summarized in three keywords, *interculturalization, intertextuality* and *interdisciplinarity*, the critic becomes a giant[26], an Argus with many eyes, we would add, who includes all the valences of the literary work with the aim of integrating it in the much larger context of the hegemonic discourse of globalization. And last but not least, to seduce, through personal force, that large public, equally subject to consumerism. This can be the portrait of that "critic-promoter of a distinct direction through the very authority of his person and the seduction of his writing"[27], as Mircea Martin announced him since 1972.

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23 Imre Szeman, *op. cit.*, p. 77
24 *Ibidem*
25 *Ibid.*, p. 75
26 Anis Shivani, *op. cit.*
27 Mircea Martin, "Funcția criticii", in *op. cit*., 2006, p. 22 (t.n.)

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