THE MODERN & POSTMODERN CANON

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Abstract: *The Romanian modernism is, one may say, the fruit of the synthesis between experience (tradition) and experiment (novelty). The modern canon is characterised by novelty, desire to synchronise to the Western sensitivity and literature, to the spirit of the time, to the synthesis as an argument of cohesion and aesthetic organic structure. The postmodernist canon stands, for a change, a contradictory character. On the one hand, postmodernism is entirely reluctant to any canon, to any intention of canonisation, of unity of the literary, voting for a relativist, multicultural and centrifugal perspective.*

Key-words: *modernism, tradition, experiment, postmodernism, relativism.*

Modernity is an aesthetic concept that sets, first of all, the correspondence between the work of art and the epoch in which it is created, a very close, yet very subtle bond, between the artistic creation and the social environment that generates it. The main feature is the authenticity, the concordance between feeling and literature, between the literary text and aesthetic emotion. Obviously, the unprecedented element stands in the novelty, which is the fundamental principle of modernism, although its connection to the tradition ought to be maintained, meaning that modernism is expressing itself in opposition to a stiff, dull and unenlightening tradition. Modernism is, thus, the form of certain radicalism in expression and in content, covering literary directions such as symbolism, expressionism, imagism etc.

In the Romanian literature, E. Lovinescu postulates the Modernism in his work: *Istoria literaturii române contemporane (The history of the Contemporary Romanian Literature)*. The critic from the "Sburătorul" fundaments his ideas starting from the temporal factor that "intervenes with an action whose strength increases throughout history."

Critically considering the theory of Maiorescu regarding the "forms without gist" and embracing a sociological concept belonging to Gabriel Tarde, Lovinescu believes that the law of imitation activates in a cultural space, that the imitated forms sooner or later find a creative assimilation in a particular cultural-artistic context. This is the well-known theory of the synchronism. Yet, what does Lovinescu understand by synchronism?

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The critic considers that all the cultural manifestations of an epoch develop from the perspective of a "spirit of the century", that they are modelled by a synchronous tendency that confers certain similar features to certain literary works, authors, themes or procedures from different cultural spaces. Lovinescu regards the synchronism as the "unifying action of the time upon the elaborations of the human spirit."

In other words, synchronism expresses a unifying and integrative, centripetal and not centrifugal tendency, that kind of tendency that makes the general artistic, literary, cultural manifestations of a certain period be consonant: "Synchronism implies, as stated before, the unifying action of time upon social and cultural life of different peoples among themselves by means of a material and moral interdependence. In other word, there is that spirit of the century or, as Tacit used to call it, that *saeculum*, i.e. a sum of configurative conditions of the human life." Lovinescu continues: "The spirit of the Medieval Age manifests itself under two forms: the religious belief that determines the entire activity of the soul (literature, philosophy, art etc.) and that generates the crusades on the political level, meaning the expansion of the Occident to the Orient, and on the other hand, on the social level, the specific form of feudalism, of German origin or not, in any case, a form of social individualism, just as the Gothic style is an expression of the mysticism."

Nevertheless, Lovinescu operates a distinction between the "theoretic modernism" postulated and practiced by himself at the "Sburătorul" journal, under the form of "a fundamental compliance towards all the phenomena of literary differentiation" and "an avant-garde and experimental modernism" of certain radical avant-garde journals as "Punct", "Integral", "Contimporanul", "unu" etc.

The fundamental idea sustained by the synchronism of Lovinescu is that according to which, due to much evolved means of communication, the culture of a people is being developed by imitation and adaptation, in a strong interdependence towards the culture of other people. Partly opposing the theory of Maiorescu regarding the "forms without gist" Lovinescu also believes that in the development of a culture, the synchrony tendency with the spirit of the time is more important than the national spirit. The Romanian modernism is, one may say, the fruit of the synthesis between experience (tradition) and experiment (novelty). The modern canon is characterised by novelty, desire to synchronise to

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the Western sensitivity and literature, to the spirit of the time, to the synthesis as an argument of cohesion and aesthetic organic structure.

The postmodernist canon

The postmodernist canon stands, for a change, a contradictory character. On the one hand, postmodernism is entirely reluctant to any canon, to any intention of canonisation, of unity of the literary, voting for a relativist, multicultural and centrifugal perspective. On the other hand, certain recent values express the need of being included in the canon, thing noticed, among others, by Ion Simuţ in an article in *Familia* ("Postmodernism predictably and naturally presses the present and recent values to be canonised.")

One may state that beginning with the '80s there has been major changing in the Romanian literature, in the literary paradigm, with lots of consequences in writing. From the ingenuous writing, that used to see world in a very detached way and without any consciousness of ones own condition, it turned to the dialogued, plural writing, aiming both towards reflecting the real structures and the proper identity. In the literary texts of the writers of the 80's and their followers, the word seems to have lost initial purity, it is endowed with a heavily significant transparency that confers the drama of not being able to utter the world without rest. There is an ironic and parody conscience in between the word and world, as well as a dilated view of cultural references, of livresque allusions.

The critic Ion Bogdan Lefter believes in finding many important postmodern features in the literature of the 80's and 90's: "In smaller or greater proportions, the page appears like a stylistic obliged eclectism, reversed from the free and <<decadent>> Alexandrine subtleties - to contribute to the expression of directness intended by the new sensitivity and thought. In the same time, there is that <<jubilation>> of escaping the constraints of modernism, a joy of <<relaxation>> of the creation, compatible to the smile, free humour and -lastly- to any procedure aiming to capture the reader (…). Symptoms of the post-modern attitude that appear in the Romanian literature of the 80's and 90's: the return of the author in the text, re-biographisation of the grammatical persons in a new existential engagement, more implication in the daily, here and now reality, avoiding the traps of confessive naivety by unveiling the textual mechanisms and thus, reaching a profounder pathetism."

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The Romanian Postmodernism is, therefore, ironic and parodic, quite fanciful and cynic, fairly subjective and unbiased. Reality is, according to Ioan Groşan, the only aspect regarded by the post-modern writers. The Romanian Postmodernism reconsiders the theme of authenticity, becoming a mobile and active mirror of reality.

On the other hand, there are times when the post-modern writers regard the same works of art, works characterised by diversity and mobility, they explore different discourse types, they casually de-mystify and parodically live their own biographies, exalting the text as a way of living, as a means to live through literature.

Making use of a rather oxymoron, one might say that ostentation is the natural feature of the post-modern writer, but an ostentation tempered by irony and prolonged in the intertextual space. The normality and elaboration, the quotidian and the transcendent elevation, the hidden gravity and unreliability, appeal to tradition and temptation of experiment, the playful instinct and unconcessive expression towards any type of common works – al these are differently proportioned ingredients of the Romanian Postmodernism.

According to Ştefan Borbely, the post-modern writers see normality as an adventure, they take the inheritance of modernity and offer a new dimension to reality and literature. There is only an approximate evaluation regarding the novelty of this vision, regarding its chances of aesthetic success. Nevertheless, it is a different level than that of the modern vision; it is, as they say, a change in paradigm. The myths of the post-modern writers, in fact anti-myths, are truly undertaken by them, not only in the livresque aspect, but also in the aspect of spontaneous living.

The experiment, as form of life, is the fundamental option of the post-modern writers. There is no fatal separation between life and text. The text is being lived with clear ardour, while life is turned into fiction, re-written by the post-modern consciousness, a consciousness of an extremely available lucidity, but in the same time, relative lucidity due to irony and parodic impulse.

We notice that the last two decades show how there are enough writers who deliberately place their works under the post-modern sign, while there are others who more or less theoretise the postmodernism; or, there are those writers who do not explicitly assume the concept but may be placed in this literary paradigm. There is a clarifying and easy to follow

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path, that starts from the literature of the 80's and reaches the 90's. There are also, filiations, correspondences, analogies harmonies or disharmonies between the two periods of the contemporary literature, since we believe that there are no such things as gaps but communication paths between ages, much more subtle and stale than one might consider.

We ask ourselves how efficient and methodologically pertinent is the concept of literary generation today, in an age of fractures and flagrant deconstruction of cultural paradigms. We believe that today, more than ever, the concept of literary generation stands a whole relative meaning, a signification that cannot be made absolute, in spite of the fact that there are writers who embrace the same ideatic sense, the same programmatic norms, the same manner of understanding world and literature.

The concept of generation, regardless the precautions we choose to consider, is applied to a *de facto* reality in the case of the literature of the 80's, which derives from an undoubtful communion of aesthetic ideals and ethic exigency of certain writers, who, besides an honourable feeling of intellectual solidarity, have kept their unique expressive profile. As for the generation of the 90's, it is less homogenous, it is somehow dis-centered, meaning that there are more polarity centres (Bucharest, Iaşi, Cluj, Timişoara etc.), centres that, in spite of self-sufficient velleity, have varied visions upon the concept of generation, let alone upon the programmes, criteria and artistic norms proposed/imposed by the creative act.

On the other hand, there are obvious distinctions between the writers of the 80's and those of the 90's, both regarding the aesthetic options and the writing style. In the same time, one has to admit that the literary strategies are also different because of the circumstances in which the two generations wrote/write: i. e. if the writers of the 80's wrote in an epoch governed by dogmatism and totalitarism, forced to make us of hidden, allusive, subversive writing techniques, in order to survive spiritually and also to become the model of an exemplary solidarity, the writers of the 90's performed after 1989 (even if they wrote before that date), under a total freedom of expression, freedom which is also felt in the aesthetic modalities, the writing strategies and possibility of assuming the reality and individual condition.

In his volume of poetry, *Despre poezie* (*On poetry*), Nicolae Manolescu underlines the distinctive and common features of the Modernism and

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Postmodernism: "The modern poetry is the first one to reject the past entirely. There is an exact opposite phenomenon going on in postmodernism: it is not just that it does not turn its back to the modern poetry whom it somehow revives, but it does not turn its back to the older poetry. It is as if postmodernism would redefine itself in a desire to comprise the past and would refer to the entire poetry written before (…). The modern poet is usually <<innocent>> regarding tradition: it gets rid of it as if it were a useless burden. He wants to make something different that his predecessors. His feeling of freedom is pushed to anarchism. To him, tradition is a burden gracefully carried, critically and ironically assumed. "

In short one might say that the Romanian Postmodernism implies a growth in the self consciousness of the Romanian literature, its way under the sign of complete lucidity.

The debate about the canon and its mutations in the Romanian literature is surely much more ample than we tried to imply here. We did nothing but state the facts, eliminate certain perspectives regarding this concept, and set a certain horizon of understanding. It is an open discussion, after all.

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