CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON ENGLISH CANADIAN FICTION IN COMMUNIST PERIODICALS. THE CASE OF HUGH MACLENNAN AND MORLEY CALLAGHAN

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Abstract: This paper is an illustration of the communist criticism in one of the most important periodicals in our country, namely România literară (Literary Romania), for two major English Canadian novelists, Hugh MacLennan and Morley Callaghan. Drawing on Reader-Response Criticism and Translation Studies for our analysis, we will account for the critical approach(es) used when discussing the two authors and see whether the critical discourse was marked by Marxist grids to serve ideological purposes.

Keywords: *Canadian novel, Romanian periodicals, impressionistic criticism, horizon of expectations, rewriting*

Introduction

Taking interest in Reader-Response Criticism and Reception Studies, in general and Canadian Literature as received in Romania, in particular, I was able to note that the reception phenomenon during the communist period is particularly difficult to account for due to the lack of centralised (on-line) databases or useful resources such as Lupu and Ştefănescu's *Bibliography of Romanian Literature and Its Relations with Foreign Literatures in Periodicals* (1997) for the interwar period. Another seminal work in the field, Burlacu and Sasu's *Chronological Dictionary of the Translated Novel in Romania from Origins to 1989* (2005) mentions only part of the translated works and critical studies devoted to Canadian authors. Personal investigations revealed more translations from Canadian novels than the ones included in the *Dictionary* (e.g. some of Mazo de la Roche's novels from the *Jalna* series translated during the Inter-War years and Hémon Louis's *Marie Chapdelaine* translated in 1968) and Romanian criticism on the authors. In this respect, the canonical author Hugh MacLennan is only mentioned with the translation of his *Barometer Rising* (2005: 548); no articles are listed as critical references although *România literară (Literary Romania)* had published the translation of a fragment from one of his novel *Two Solitudes* with a short presentation by the translator Georgeta Pădureleanu in 1981 (*ibidem*).

Critical Discourse on Canadian Fiction during the Communist Period

As a general remark, during the communist years Romanian periodicals dealing with foreign literature (*România literară/ Literary Romania, Secolul XX/ The 20th Century*) focused on: canonical novelists that enjoyed book-length treatment in the 1970s and 1980s (Hugh MacLennnan, Morley Callaghan), English and French Canadian poets, either commented upon or not and special attention was given to the publication of poetry anthologies, Canada and the arts.

România literară (*Literary Romania)* is the periodical which published most of the translated fragments of Canadian literature and criticism and was particularly renowned for its

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non-conformism. Its content was different from the one of other periodicals such as *Săptămâna (The Week)* and *Luceafărul (The Morning Star)* which revealed the articles that denied the directives of the Communist Party and accused their authors of betraying our country (Troncotă, 2006: 194). This could explain the presence of Irving Layton's erotic poems in the pages of *România literară* (*Literary Romania)*, a Canadian author born in Romania that other periodicals which had a more defined ideological position such as the two mentioned above would probably not have published.

The only articles in periodicals dealing with translations from prose are to be found in *România literară* (*Literary Romania)*. "Cronica traducerilor" ("The Translation Chronicle") made a short mention of the anthology *Blind MacNair* in 1970. Moreover, it devoted larger sections to Hugh MacLennan (and a fragment of his *Two Solitudes*) in 1981, and Morley Callaghan (present with a fragment from the novel *They Shall Inherit the Earth* that accompanies critical considerations on the author and his work) in 1985.

The short note on *Blind MacNair* is signed by Petronela Negoşanu, the translator of the anthology who argues (1970: 21), in an impressionistic stance, that the twelve short stories employed various literary techniques from satire to comic features to the modern forms of prose defined by lyricism. This selection is said to comprise the best Canadian prose and is meant to introduce us in a world of Canadian writers that are almost unknown to the Romanian reader: F.W. Thomson, Stephen Leacock, Ringuet, Thomas H. Raddall, Morley Callaghan, Leo Kennedy, Sinclair Ross, Hugh Garner, Anne Hebert, Roger Lemelin, Alice Munro, and Mordecai Richler. By including Stephen Leacock among the Canadian authors 'almost unknown' to the Romanian readership, the rewriter does not seem to be familiar with the translations from the humorist's fiction that circulated during the inter-war and WWII years. Thus, she manipulated the Romanian readers of the communist period into believing that Leacock was virtually unknown in our country and that it was no part of the horizon of expectations[1] of readers in previous historical periods.

Hugh MacLennan

Although writings of reputed novelists came out in Canada from the late 1920s on (Morley Callaghan's short stories in 1928 and *They Shall Inherit the Earth* in 1935), it is with Hugh MacLennan (and his *Barometer Rising* published in 1941) that a Canadian tradition started to take shape. In her course on Canadian fiction in English, the Romanian rewriter[2] Monica Bottez (2004: 59-60) argues that MacLennan's name is associated with the rise of a Canadian national consciousness as he found inspiration in dramatic Canadian events which he used effectively as the framework for his fiction. He was the first novelist to articulate a Canadian tradition by making his readers aware of themselves as Canadians; in his novels, MacLennan examined "the clashes and values" (between the colonial mentality and the new faith in a national destiny). Moreover, for his *Barometer Rising*, he chose the first event in Canadian history which was on international news: the tremendous explosion that almost

[1] We use the concept as enriched by Hans Robert Jauss in *Rezeptionäesthetik* to refer to the expectations of common readers and critics during a certain historical period.
[2] The term is used in the sense coined by the Translation Studies scholar Andre Lefevere who refers to the agents that manipulate a text (be they translators, critics, commentators or annotators).

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destroyed Halifax on December 1917, when two foreign ammunition ships collided in the harbour. The author himself confessed he had written his novel in an era when Canadian letters were still under construction, to put it in rough terms:

> "When I first thought of writing this novel [*Barometer Rising*, published in 1941] Canada was virtually an uncharacterized country. It seemed to me then that if our literature was to be anything but purely regional, it must be directed to at least two audiences. One was the Canadian public, which took the Canadian scene for granted but never defined its particular essence. The other was the international public, which had never thought about Canada at all, and knew nothing whatever about us." (2004: 60)

Furthermore, he is the only English Canadian author translated into Romanian during the communist period that was included on the B list of the Calgary Conference in 1978, an important moment in Canadian letters and the definition of a national canon (with his novel, *The Watch That Ends the Night*) (Petruţ, 2005: 73).

The Romanian translation to *Barometer Rising* (*Barometru în urcare* by Livia Deac) came out in the early 70's at 'Univers' Publishing House. The importance of the work is also underlined in the Romanian 'Note on the volume', the anonymous preface to the communist translation. Here, the tone is marked by a Marxist grid, especially in the image of Canada (and its involvement in the war just for the sake of British purposes) it creates for the Romanian readers:

> "The publishing of the novel in 1941 is a landmark in the cultural history of Canada, i.e. the beginning of a modern national literature, freed from the calques of English models, a literature that aimed at acquainting the entire world with the existence of Canadians as a nation having its own traditions, and was not just a mere hybrid between England and the United States (…). Halifax, the natural setting of the book is a traditional colonial town which is very sensible to the cliché of Great Britain, the mother from which it was separated too long ago to remember. In the author's vision, the life in Halifax becomes the microcosm of the entire Canada, with its harsh conflicts between the arrogant descendants of the former English colonists and the followers of the American natives; MacLennan also makes reference to the absurdity of dragging Canada into a war that was destined to serve England's interests and did not concern Canada at all." (1971: 5-6)[3]

The article on MacLennan in *România literară* (*Literary Romania)* introduces a translated fragment from *Două însingurări (Two Solitudes)*, his second novel from 1945, a work that has remained untranslated into Romanian to this day. The Romanian rewriter Petronela Negoşanu (1981: 22) makes considerations on present-day Canada which she views as an ethnic, linguistic, social and cultural mosaic, an expression of the two Founding Nations, the English and the French. Moreover, she lays emphasis on the multicultural dimension of the country and its millions of immigrants of different origins that make its specificity and on the effort to find its national unity after three centuries of history. Further

[3] All translations mine, unless stated otherwise.

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on, the motivated pioneers and engineers that succeeded in valorising the rich natural resources of Canadian soil which brought the country's acknowledgement on the world markets, are opposed to Canadian writers that had to face a regionalist mentality, the lack of a national tradition and bilingual constraints. However, writers such as the English Canadians Mazo de la Roche, Hugh MacLennan, Morley Callaghan and the French Canadians Antonine Maillet or Marie-Claire Blais – writers known to the Romanian public by means of their translations that came out during the communist years – managed to achieve international fame.

The reviewer argues that MacLennan's work is essential for the knowledge of contemporary Canadian literature. The Romanian reader is said to be familiar with his prose due to the translation from *Barometer Rising*, "one of the author's first novels" (this is actually MacLennan's first novel as post-communist professors such as M. Bottez (2004) or M. Petruț (2005, 2006) correctly assert). Biographical data on the novelist is also provided, Negoşanu insisting on his Nova Scotian descendance. In fact, international critics argue that he is "a Scotsman, a Presbyterian and a Nova Scotian" who appears to have inherited through his Celtic ancestors, "the romantic imagination, the melancholy streak, and the humour characteristic of the race" (Buitenhuis, 1974: 9). According to Negoşanu, in the beginning, his literary creation was centred on the major theme of seeking a Canadian national 'personality'. In this sense, he is compared to James Joyce regarding the uncreated conscience of his race. The allusion is made to Joyce's autobiographical work, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (probably familiar to the Romanian communist readers by means of the translation by Frida Papadache that has circulated since 1969). Interestingly enough, the same consideration is made in the anonymous 'Note on the volume' to the Romanian version of *Barometer Rising* in 1971. MacLennan is said to have been on a mission similar to that of Joyce's hero, Stephen Dedalus, for Ireland, so as to forge in the uncreated conscience of his race.

In her article, Petronela Negoşanu also refers to the issue of Canadian identity which is viewed as the reason to be of this 'ambitious' and 'hardworking' nation, insufficiently defined in the context of its cultural and linguistic duality. MacLennan seems to be concerned not only with 'Who am I?', but also with 'Where is here?' in Canada, as one of his commentators argues (and here the reviewer probably alluded to Frye's allegations on (the lack of) Canadian identity). Furthermore, Negoşanu assesses, in an impressionistic stance, that MacLennan's characters were shaped with 'humbleness' and 'human understanding', on the one hand, and 'analytic spirit' and 'lucidity', on the other hand. In his prose, he approaches themes such as the duality of the Canadian Founding Nations from *Two Solitudes/ Două solitudini* (1945) to *The Return of the Sphinx/ Întoarcerea sfinxului* (1967), after having tried to distinguish a specific Canadian 'character', different from that of the United States in *The Precipice/ Prăpastia* (1948) and from the Western European one in *The Watch That Ends the Night/ Veghea care pune capăt nopţii* (1959). Similar claims are made by international critics who argue that in each of his novels, MacLennan tackled a specific area of national concern:

> "In *Barometer Rising* it is the First World War and the emergence of the problem of Canadian national identity; in *Two Solitudes*, it is the French-Canadian problem and the conscription crisis; in *The Precipice* it is Puritanism and Canadian relations with the United States; in *The Watch That Ends The Night* it is the effect of the depression and the rise of fascism on Canada; in *The Return of the Sphinx*,

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> the complex nature of the French-Canadian problem allied to the generation-gap." (Buitenhuis, 1974: 19).

MacLennan is also praised for the Governor General Award he was granted for *Two Solitudes*. We are not told that, in fact, he has won five Governor General's Awards for his books, and he has been given several prizes by the Canadian government, awarded many honorary degrees, and made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (*idem*, 1974: 13). The Romanian rewriter notes that the intertextual instance in the title is a quotation from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, i.e. "Love consists in this,/ that two solitudes protect,/ and touch, and greet each other". The novel is interpreted as an account of the concerns of MacLennan's Anglophone and Francophone contemporaries (symbolized in the novel by Paul and Heather, the main characters) up to WWII. The translation of the last part of this novel (envisaged as 'a parable of present Canadian realities') is incorporated in the article which ends with considerations on the characters and the plot that do not go beyond an impressionistic stance: the specific atmosphere of Canadian provinces is said to have brought the success of the book, and not the slow growth of generations and internal drama of the heroes; a fine observer of human nature, the author tried to reveal the mystery of human destinies.

The fragment from *Two Solitudes* chosen for translation is a representative one for tackling issues of Canadian identity that concerned the nation and its writers. As one of the characters argues:

> "Canada was imitative in everything. Yes, but perhaps only on the surface. What about underneath? No one had dug underneath so far, that was the trouble. Proust wrote only of France, Dickens laid nearly all his scenes in London. Tolstoy was pure Russia - Hemingway let his heroes roam the world, but everything he wrote smelled of the United States. Hemingway could put American into the Italian army and get away with it because by now everyone in the English-speaking world knew what an American was. But Canada was a country that no one knew. It was a large red splash on the map. It produced Mounted Policemen, quintuplets and raw materials. But because it used the English and French languages, a Canadian book would have to take its place in the English and French traditions. Both traditions were so mature they had become almost decadent, while Canada herself was still raw." (quoted in Cameron, 1981: 1972)

Morley Callaghan

Morley Callaghan is another prominent figure of Canadian letters who helped shaping the country's literary canons by means of his works that "remind us of the density of Hemingway's concise style" (Bottez, 2004: 46) As outlined by a short biographical note accompanying the 1986 Romanian translation of his novel, *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (*Ei vor moşteni pământul)*, his first novel, *Strange Fugitive (Ciudata fugară)*, was published in 1928 in the USA. However, it was the subsequent novels that brought him international fame. The rewriter lists the most important ones: *They Shall Inherit the Earth (Ei vor moşteni pământul)* – 1935, *The Loved and the Lost (Cei iubiţi şi cei pierduţi – 1951)* that granted him the Governor General Award, *A Passion in Rome (Patimi în cetatea eternă)* – 1961, *A Fine and Private Place (Un loc frumos şi singuratic)* – 1975, and *A Time for Judas (Vremea lui Iuda)* – 1983. It is also mentioned that he was made a Companion of the Order of Canada in

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1982. In a quotation from Edmund Wilson at the end of the short presentation, he is compared to Chekhov and Turgenev, a claim also made by Pădureleanu in her critical piece on Callaghan in *România Literară (Literary Romania)*.

The article devoted to Morley Callaghan by Mircea and Georgeta Pădureleanu in 1985 is the result of the authors' Torontonian encounter with the Canadian novelist. The Romanian rewriters express their enthusiasm at the acquaintance with "the prestigious senior dean of English Canadian writers" (1985: 21), confessing that they were looking forward to this meeting for two reasons: first, because Callaghan began his career as a writer along with Ernest Hemingway, "that virtuous figure of American prose" (to whom Bottez compares him, as we have already mentioned above) after WWI at the "Toronto Daily Star" – a biographical detail that drew the attention of the Pădureleanu couple –, and second, owing to Edmund Wilson who compared Callaghan's work to Chekhov's and Turgenev's. As previously mentioned, this assertion was also included on the back cover of the Romanian edition of *They Shall Inherit the Earth*. By employing Wilson's quotation, the critics prove that the influence of Russian authors is not a way to cope with the Marxist grids of communist ideology and manipulate the target readership, since the reference is taken over from international criticism. Although the Romanian rewriters do not mention it, Callaghan is also compared to other Russian classics such as Tolstoy due to "his image of humanity which considers love (…) a fundamental trait in human nature" (Conron, 1975: 4).

Mircea and Georgeta Pădureleanu make general considerations on Callaghan as a writer who, in his seventeen novels, not to mention the short fiction, approached various universal themes, thus breaking with the overwhelming provincialism reflected by Canadian literature before him. Further on, they argue, in an impressionistic stance, that despite the modernist accents favoured by the disappearance of traditional taboos and inhibitions, which marked Canadian novels, the Torontonian novelist does not give up psychological analysis on a social background. Thus, he initiated a writing of his own, drawing on a neorealist vision. From this viewpoint, the Romanian rewriters share in common with international critics who generally assert that Callaghan's novels focus on situations of primarily psychological interest, not dealing with his native Canada "in any editorial or informative way, nor are they aimed at any popular taste, Canadian, American or British" (Conron, 1975: 108). Furthermore, Callaghan's "distinctive plainness of language, a laconic, detached narrative manner, an unassuming structure" is believed to originate in three concurrent events: "the general inclination toward literary realism which had been gaining momentum since the last quarter of the nineteenth century in North America, (...) the cultural *malaise* which afflicted Western civilization after WWI and (...) that youthful experience as a newspaper reporter with the *Toronto Daily Star*" (Hoar, 1965: 3). Moreover, Callaghan is regarded as "one of the first major prose writers of The New Colonialism. His work marks the shift of one kind of writer away from a growing sense of Canadian identity and even away from a British influence towards the influence of the power and culture of the U.S.A." (Mathews, 1978)

After a brief account of the Romanian-Canadian exchange of impressions (the Romanian rewriters, bewildered by Callaghan's personality, the Canadian author expressing his regret that he did not have the chance to visit our country despite the fact that he had populated his novels with immigrants from Eastern Europe), the Pădureleanu couple moves to the analysis of *They Shall Inherit the Earth*. The book renders a 'drama of conscience and destiny' giving

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its author the opportunity to portray 'the guilt complex' of the main character in a larger social context of the sense of human existence. Even a quotation by the Canadian critic F.M. Watt is employed as an authority to validate the rewriters' interpretation of Callaghan's fiction.

The Romanian critics also refer to the Romanian book market and the Romanians' passion for reading so as to provoke the author to reveal (literary) secrets of his youth. In this way, the Romanian readership becomes acquainted with Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris (Acea vară pariziană)*, a collection of essays that renders the author's life in the 1930s when he enjoyed the friendship of the authors in 'The Lost Generation' (Hemingway, Fitzgerald) and became close to Joyce, Pound, Picasso, Cocteau, to name only a few. Further on, the critics express their bewilderment, in front of the author, on the shift of the thematic paradigm in his work: if novels like *A Fine and Private Place (Un loc frumos şi însingurat)* tackle the relation between life and art, the individual and the society, the much debated on *The Loved and the Lost (Cei iubiţi şi cei pierduţi)* and *A Passion in Rome (Patimi în cetatea eternă)* approach less typical issues for the Canadian community such as racial segregation or Roman Catholicism. In reply, Callaghan explains that, in *The Loved and the Lost*, he tried to escape 'a schematic manichaeism' or the 'protestatarian-humanitarian' aspects that dominated the relations between white and black people, whereas *A Passion in Rome* is the result of his youth recollections when the neothomist French philosopher Jacques Maritain lectured in Canada. According to Hoar (1965: 13) *They Shall Inherit the Earth* belongs "to that period in Callaghan's career when his association with the French philosopher, Jacques Maritain, encouraged him to explore Christian humanism, a vision of the strength and worth of the human being." The article ends with the translation of a fragment from chapter 25 of the novel.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be argued that the criticism on English Canadian authors practiced by the periodical *România Literară (Literary Romania*) during the communist period was a neutral, impressionistic one. The two critical pieces on Hugh MacLennan and Morley Callaghan, respectively give an accurate account of the Canadian authors and their works; the novelists are acknowledged for their place in the Canadian literary tradition, and even similarities with the works of other authors are found (e.g. MacLennan is compared to Joyce, and Callaghan to Russian classics). Mainly rephrasing considerations of international critics, the Romanian rewriters practice an impressionistic criticism unmarked by Marxist grids, unlike paratextual criticism (e.g. the anonymous preface to the translation of MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*).

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