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THE AESTHETIC RESURGENCE OF THE POST-WAR ROMANIAN CRITICISM

Nicoleta CLIVEŢ*

Abstract: *The return of the post-war Romanian criticism to the model of the inter-war aesthetic criticism is a difficult process, realized not by rupture, but by a slow dissociation from the clichés of the socialist realism. The first critical model to be recovered is Călinescu's, followed shortly after by a dispute about the risks of turning his model into the absolute reference. Maiorescu and Lovinescu's models will be recovered afterwards.*

Key-words: *literary criticism, impressionism, inter-war, post-war, polemic.*

1. Difficulties of Surmounting the Realist-socialist Syncope

The return of the post-war Romanian criticism to the model of the inter-war aesthetic criticism was somehow automatic; it was difficult to overtake the syncope of the socialist realism, because the renunciation to the Jdanovist concept of literature "was not the consequence of a public polemic, or of a process of internal ideological reformation", but rather "a natural death, perhaps not without any connections with the de-Sovietization after the April of 1964" (Manolescu 897). It was a natural, but also a slow death, because the commonplaces of the ideological literature are still to be met in print media during the following years. A relevant illustration of that is the volume *Literatura română de azi. 1944-1964* (*The Romanian Literature Today. 1944-1964*) (1965), by D. Micu and N. Manolescu. The two decades of literature analyzed here brought significant changes, put on the expense of the liberating act from the 23rd of August, 1944; the period is still seen as a result of the successful building of the new literature, made to the measure of the new world, implying the writers, by "an act of enthusiastic choice, of spiritual freedom" (Micu&Manolescu 14), in the socio-literary reconstruction, initially lead by Gheorghiu-Dej and continued afterwards by N. Ceauşescu (quotations from it are not absent). The so called political subordination of literature, so much upbraided by "the reactionaries", is rejected as fanciness, and this literary interval is disputed between two tendencies: one was of 'taking part in the torments of history' (Micu&Manolescu 19), represented by Geo Bogza, Magda Isanos, Mihai Beniuc; the other, escapist in essence, was interested in anguish, morbid Eros or post-dated surrealist experiences. Still, it is accepted that debating against the "evasionists", the defenders of the new literary movement exaggerated and drifted into *proletcultism*, denying not only "formalist and obsolete literary works" (Micu&Manolescu 22), but also valuable writings. But the explanation is what is interesting here: not the appliance of exigencies which are exterior to literature is the cause for that, not the vicious

* Dept. of Foreign Languages, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

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transplantation of the class fight from the social to the artistic world, but "the dogmatic, vulgarly sociologist appliance of the principles of reconsideration, in opposition with the creative Marxist spirit" (Micu&Manolescu 22). The exaggerations of the socialist realism were not intrinsic to the doctrine, which is why their explanation must be "the insufficient ideological training and the weak professional competence of some researchers, literary critics and editors-in-chief of some magazines and publishing houses" (Micu&Manolescu 23). It must be noticed that "the new literature", of great communist engagement, shakes away the label of socialist realism and becomes "the expression of the highest form of humanism, of the socialist humanism" (Micu&Manolescu 31), also built on strong realist foundations, avoiding the conceits, formalisms and emetics. Generally, the approach is critical and rejects the concept of literature seen as mimesis; from this position, aesthetic in fact, but still formally indebted to the "vulgar sociologies", are the literary works analyzed, according to a strict selection and, obviously, to aesthetic criteria, which are only accidentally abandoned (especially in the section which deals with the novel).

2. The Return to the "Călinescian" Critical Model

The restoration of the aesthetic criterion of the critical judgment becomes more poignantly defined after 1964-1965, but not through a sharp, crisp polemic clash, aimed to unmask al the phoniness, but by an oblique undertaking, by directing the attention towards those features which automatically refuted the aberrations of the socialist realism; for criticism, this meant first of all, to win back the creative dimension, to go back to the "critical creation", by *the return to the critical model of Călinescu*, twice more practical and advantageous: once because it is trustable for the authorities (the recovery of Maiorescu and Lovinescu's critical models was still in progress), and secondly because it offered the creative criticism the most generous formula, which held within the possibility to reach its main objectives. They were: the return to the respect for the autonomy of the aesthetic, the win back of the literary past, again on aesthetic, non-ideological basis, and to revive the critical style, to refresh it stylistically. In such a context, of the need to come back to normality as soon as possible, the "Călinescian" model is referred to as "the perfect interface for the aesthetic retaliation against the politics" (Goldiş 18). It happened that not only the "interface" to be "perfect", but also its main user: Nicolae Manolescu. From the encounter of a veritable critical vocation and its suitable model sprouted the main critical authority of the post-war epoch. The chronicler from *România literară* has admitted himself to be a Călinescian even from the beginning, first of all due to the principles he defends (those of the creative criticism, which is subjective and "unfaithful/inconstant"), because, on the practical level of the critical act, his effort has been, in time, a taming one, with the sole purpose of reaching more and more positive verdicts, unbiased by any temperamental variations. For N. Manolescu there is only the possibility of a mediated relationship with literature, by reference to the cultural memory and the intelligence of the "inconstant" critic. This stern critical conduct, where the literary work does not seduce, but lets itself to be seduced by the critic longing to justify and judge/estimate/evaluate it, promptly becomes a subject of controversy, and morethan that: it starts one of the few post-war critical polemics. This is the dispute between the "Călinescians" and "anti-

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Călinescians", which burst out in 1967, in the pages of the *Familia* literary magazine, started by N. Balotă's article (*The New Direction of the Literary Criticism*) followed by the reactions of other critics, members of the Literary Circle from Sibiu (Ov. Cotruş, C. Regman, and I. Negoiţescu, in a smaller degree), as well as that of A. Marino or Monica Lovinescu. On the Călinescians' side struggle Al. Piru, D. Micu and especially N. Manolescu and E. Simion, and they evolve on two fronts: one, on that defending the aesthetic criticism, liberated from any trace of dogma, and the second, that defending G. Călinescu against the accuses uttered against him, which referred to the variations of "humor" in his evaluation of some of the writers.

3. The Polemic around "Călinescianism"

The first line of the anti-Călinescian offensive was formed out of the Circle's critics, with their intention to not disavow the critic G. Călinescu, but to refuse the hegemonic coverage of an "impressionist" formula, excessively relative and unjustified as a method due to the lack of aesthetical and philosophical foundations. Behind these constantly blamed shortages, the Călinescianism was also suspect of a tendency to transform itself into a construct destined to self-assertion. N. Balotă's article, *The New Direction of the Literary Criticism*, started from the premise of the necessity of a "new direction" in the Romanian literature, after the Maiorescian and Lovinescian ages, both credited for the philosophical and aesthetical basis and because they oriented the course of literature, having, thus, a directive and normative function. The new direction was perceived as the liberation of criticism from its vassal status towards literature, as surmounting its "creative" preoccupation with the purpose of becoming "rather an exploration of the human effort in the domain of values than the play of a discursive intelligence and of the variations of the artistic taste, rather a systematic exploration (…) of the varied territories offered (…) by the subjective, objective and objectified spirit" (Balotă 239). About the literary work's mode of existence, N, Balotă believes in the mandatory "fidelity" of the critic, who is called not "to prove it" or "to invent it", but to set forth on the enterprise of "revealing, dis-covering the creation. (…). The criticism makes the literary work become what it is" (Balotă 250), meaning to be considered "not an *existential*, but an *essential* experience" (Balotă 251), implying more than the author's feelings and experiences. When exercising the axiological function, the criticism should limit itself to the relativism so much endeared by the "impressionists", because the novelty in criticism is not to see the literary work from new perspectives, but to discover *inside it* new ways of existence. The conclusion drawn from the critic's meeting with the literary work is, for N. Balotă, fundamentally different from the Călinescian one, as the critical approach should report to certain normative systems. In the contemporary times, the strictly aesthetic perspective on literature is no longer able to explain the complexity of this phenomenon, thus the need for a more extensive approach, which engages the aesthetic into an ampler axiological system (such as hermeneutics and anthropological criticism). To accomplish this kind of project, the relativist "Călinescianism" must be outrun. The alternatives proposed by N. Balotă are hermeneutics and anthropological criticism because they are implied in opening the literary work towards the philosophical meditation. Hence, the structuralism (which postulates the preeminence of the system over individuality in creation) and the New

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Criticism (founded on both objective and subjective existence of the plurality of meanings within the literary work) are excluded as possible constituting models for the "new direction" of our criticism.

In the polemic opened by N. Balotă intervenes, shortly after, Ov. Cotruş with the article *G. Călinescu and the Călinescians*, who resumes the reasons for which the "Călinescianism" was denied the directory status in criticism: the lack of aesthetic and philosophical foundation, the insufficient autonomy of the aesthetic criterion in order to establish a direction in criticism, the "versatile" temperament, the protean personality of Călinescu. G. Călinescu is not recommended as a model, and more the less as a critical authority, under whose patronage to put things in order inside the Romanian literary space: "G. Călinescu's personality cannot be transformed into an institution of literary squaring" (Cotruş 112), and it is not advisable that his personality be confiscated by the young critics for their own practical use, to make themselves known. Considering that the only rigorously articulated critical model is that of Maiorescu, Ov. Cotruş is forced to recognize, though, that he also is not an efficient model for the modern times and that the proposition of "a new critical methodology, *systematic* and *coherent*, dialectically adjusted to the present spiritual model of our culture" is necessary. (Cotruş 113)

4. Conclusions

Basically, the dispute between Călinescu's adepts and opponents can be translated into the terms of another opposition: between the "impressionist" criticism, which is relativist, open to the new west-European methodologies and a new, "directory" criticism, having firm philosophical and aesthetical foundations. An important contribution to the considerable gap between the two formulas has the age difference and, implicitly, the distinction of vision of the two parties. The Circle's critics, although their editorial debut is simultaneous with the critics of the 60's (forming together the fourth post-Maoirescian generation), were, at that moment, past their first flush of youth, but they still held on to their illusions; immediately after the beginning of the de-Sovietization, they theorize the need for a philosophical articulation of the literary criticism, disregarding the fact that the solely admitted philosophy was, *ipso facto*, the Marxism. More realistic and more pragmatic, the young debutants of that moment acknowledge that "the Marxist scarecrow was prowling" and they prefer to curve their criticism towards a strictly aesthetic criterion, with no other philosophical parley.

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