CHANGE OF POETIC CRITERION/CRITERIA

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Abstract: *Given the fact that we often approach the field of metaphorical creation, i.e. poetry, from a metaphorical point of view, we have often attempted to find a way in which to approach it without altering the mystery of poetry. Taking into account that the merely historical element in art is the artistic criterion which determines the artistic conventions of the ages etc., we have tried in this paper to examine the evolution of the poetic criterion all along the history of Romanian culture. The only presence in the whole history of the Romanian poetry is the poetic convention. It should not be mistaken either for the literary one where it is only a particular form, or the prosodic one. In conclusion, the history of poetry is the history of the poetic convention.*

Key words: *poetic convention, signifier, signified, sign.*

The change of the poetic criterion occurred progressively because until the middle of the 19th century two different ways of understanding poetry coexisted: the traditional one and the one that at the time was deemed to be modern, influenced by the direction felt at the end of the age of enlightenment, that was going to evolve into the pre-Romantic and Romantic period. During the fourth decade of the 19th century, the Romanian society as a whole still lingered between worlds. Then the balance was going to be disturbed and was going to lean in favour of the western-type poetry through the triumph of the Romantic poetry.

Two writers are noteworthy and illustrative as far as the two directions are concerned: Anton Pann and Ion Heliade Rădulescu. Their literary activities are perfectly consistent with the old world and the new world respectively. Negruzzi's failure in the field of poetry is due exactly to the cultural uncertainty (predominantly manifested into the field of poetic creation) in which he lived.

What Anton Pann did for the old poetry is consistent from the historical importance point of view with what Heliade did during the same age for the new poetry. This is the reason why comparing Anton Pann with Heliade seems natural and, at the same time, profitable for the understanding of the evolution of poetry during the fourth and the fifth decade.

Anton Pann carries out a synthesis of vernacularising levantism; Heliade marks the national emancipation and the imposition of a new spirit into the Romanian poetry. The former (irrevocably) completes a journey, while the latter initiates a new one. Notwithstanding, we may see enough signs of conservatorism in Heliade; in addition, it would be naïve to believe that during the revolutionary times when poetry ceased to be reduced to signifier the former understanding of poetry disappeared.

Given that the prejudices lost their power and strength in the 19th century, the former heresies are mandated as poetic rules.

It was the presence of these great poets (Heliade and Alexandrescu) that structured the poetic genre in the first place and the existence of a cultural environment displaying an effervescence impossible to be encountered before the birth of press. The fact the original rhymes rarely benefited from the privilege of being printed shows that poetry was still an activity that was viewed as luxury, that occupied the second place in order for priorities of the time (namely the activities perceived as such) to take

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precedence. Progressively the western poetry meaning and in general literature meaning took its place. The language is not yet fit for significant subtleties, given that the unfixed forms are disturbing to the year of today's reader.

But poetry was no longer understood as it used to be in the past. A discrepancy was generated between the way of understanding a poem by the creator and by the receiver. There were increasingly more poetry readers and as there was a tradition, some of them become backward-looking, conservators, and they inevitably incite the "moderns" of the time. This is probably the most interesting phenomenon of the age.

In this climate of "lingering between worlds," the structure that was more often than not encountered in poets was the classicised one; the occurrence of a new poetic criterion determined the representatives of the new poetry to close up ranks in order to impose their vision of the poetic creation. But the paradoxical effect was that, in parallel with the organisation of the structure of the new poetry as artistic direction, the spontaneous "organisation" of the traditional-type poetry could be noticed (that never happened before), thus giving to G. Călinescu enough material so as to write an entire chapter called The Antibonjurists.

The first poetic criterion resorted to by us was a formal one; in that case it was only natural that the emphasis be laid on the signified of poetry. The change of the poetic criterion resulted in laying the emphasis now on the signified. Budai-Deleanu was detached from the signified (for ironical purposes), but without shifting the emphasis to the signified. In Heliade's generation and especially in the generation of the disciples thereof (Cârlova and Alexandrescu), the existing signifier was "in search" of a signified specific to poetry. And even when the problem of specificity was misunderstood, the emphasis was still on the signified.

If the emphasis was shifted to signified, that did not entail that the signifier was ignored. On the contrary, an instrumental value was attributed to poetry, thus making it a natural thing that this "craft" constituted a concern of the time (Heliade was going to write a Grammar of poetry); he was also going to make comments with respect to prosody and addressed to Alexandrescu, with a view to discrediting the same, thus deeming that the public was not going to "forgive" the sins disclosed). An apparently curious thing would be noticed, namely that the signifier was achieving perfection (obviously from a traditional point of view) during the time when it was no longer upheld as absolute. The attention given to signifier would be great, experiencing essential novelties (Heliade raises the issue of specificity of poetic expression).

Poetic agreement achieves an enhanced complexity, as it was no longer reduced to signifier, even if the former agreement was going to be illustrated as far as the middle of the century.

The changing of the poetic criterion would have significant consequences, of which we may specify:

- The most visible indicator of the poetic revolution resides with the change of the poetic vocabulary;

-the understanding of poetry itself was visibly changed;

-A more complex understanding of the "poetrisation" (an appropriate signified was sought for the signifier);

-the elegiac tone was starting to be deemed as characteristic to poetry, although it was encountered more often than not in prose texts as well;

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-The change of models. It was noticed that one of the characteristic features of poetry was the scarcity of western models and the much mediated character of western influences;

Now the western models could be seen every step of the way, although the Romanian "filter" would not be hard to identify. The translations that we are going to indicate are eloquent with respect to the changing of models.

- To the shift of emphasis from signifier to signified another shift is added, within the poetic signified (that was heterogeneous until then): the shift of emphasis to lyricism that was more and more viewed as a defining element of poetry.

By signalling the changes occurred, it is our duty to underline the elements of continuity as well. The fundamental rhetorical "strategy" was still the same: discourse decoration.

The importance of the shifts of emphasis was significant in the history of Romanian poetry, since they made possible the raise of symptoms of a journey that attempted to find the "integrator synthesis" that Eminescu illustrated. The novelties indicated could be seen both in the poetic creation itself and in the understanding of poetry and the programmatic attitudes.

Our culture experienced a revolutionary thing during the fourth decade of the past century: the idea that poetry was more than a rhetorical exercise was generalised and therefore a conviction that had dominated Romanian poetry from the very beginnings thereof was disproved.

In the preface to The Fertile Year (1820), Vasile Aaron spoke about the "natural call to poetry" and compared the poets with musicians and revealed the ludic underlayer of their activity: „the work of both is the toy of nature" (V. AARON, "The Fertile Year", E.S.P.L.A, Bucharest, 1820 : 15). The break from the old mentality would still be extremely difficult to undertake.

A very important moment in the development of Romanian meditation regarding poetry was constituted by the booklet Rules or Grammar of Poetry. Translated into Romanian by I. Eliad, Bucharest, 1831. Printed at the beginning of that fantastic fourth decade, it was going to guide a whole generation of poets. The work was a processed paper of the French authors Levizac and Moyssant, who had written the Course on literature that was a compilation of classical poetics, relying especially on a literate man of the Age of Enlightenment: Marmontel.

Heliade proved now to be a very good and useful conveyor, just like Anton Pann, the only difference between them lying with the fact that the former also conveyed aesthetic ideas (many of which would be assimilated by Heliade). The title of the interpreted work renders evident the normative character thereof, although the first chapter of the same talked about "Spirit, Genius, Taste and Talent".

The fundamental principle of artistic revolution had been expressed (outlining the idea of understanding poetry as expression of emotion) before the revolution was completed yet. It would be relatively slow, given that the transition to the new understanding of poetry was carried out progressively; the resistance of old prejudices was strong and although in 1832 he expressed the above-mentioned idea, Heliade asserted in 1834 that "the main feature" of a verse lied in "embellishing the truth", (H. RĂDULESCU, "For Style", Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978: 34).

One cannot talk about the constitution of a poetic climate without introducing the polarising factors. During the third and the fourth decades of the past century these factors grew numerous and their premises — that became visible during the previous century — led to the creation of an authentic vernacular poetic climate.

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The most important factor lied in the institutionalisation of culture, accompanied by the natural corollary: attention was drawn towards the development of instruction (where rhetoric, versification and elements of literary history were taught) and of printing, and to the organisation of press in Romanian. It would be hard to conceive the literature boost experienced during 1830 and1848 in the absence of newspapers such as Romanian Courier and Albina românească (Romanian Bee) (with their literary supplements: Adaosul literal (Literary Supplement) and Alăuta românească (Romanian Lute) respectively, Gazeta Teatrului Naţional (National Theatre Newspaper), Curierul de ambe sexe (Courier for Both Sexes), Foaie pentru minte, inimă şi literatură (Sheet for Mind, Heart and Literature), Gazeta de Transilvania (Transylvanian Newspaper) and many other.

In a time when printing a poetry volume was deemed to be a luxury, newspapers played a decisive role in conveying poetic texts (some of which quickly became models), resulting in the incitation of virtual creators and the education of the public.

Then the incipient forms of “literary clubs” (that were accommodated by the houses of philanthropic boyars) and especially the cultural societies were added as essential polarisation factors of writers that revolved around aesthetic preferences and convictions. These factors created a new mentality. They highlighted the necessity of printing and the fact that a poet such as Conachi did not take advantage of Guttenberg’s creation was suggestive. Nevertheless, the attitude with respect to printing did not automatically involve modernity or desuetude of the poetry it created.

An extremely important polarising factor was represented by the versed translations (first volumes — Lamartine, 1830; Young, 1831; Byron, 1834, three volumes), that constituted models for vernacular creators, as well as by the first original printed poems.

The presence of many polarising factors led to the creation of a mentality that was totally different from that of the versifier who used to write in a “small book” his versed sorrows. Efforts for poetry purposes (and generally for literature purposes) became collective efforts. A fragment from a letter sent by Cezar Bolliac to C. Negruzzi was eloquent in this respect: “An assembly of several connoisseurs always comes up with ideas in the most righteous way; an assembly of several workers makes it common."(C. BOLLIAC, Opere, E.S.P.L.A., Bucharest, 1956, volume II : 7)

The apotheosis of these attempts to polarise the writing efforts was represented by the emergence of programmatic attitudes and of programmes belonging to a series of magazines. Attention was brought to the fact that the modern Romanian literature resorted to “the methodical cultivation of poetry” in order to assert the belletristic status thereof. This explains why the first genre rendered autonomous within the Romanian literature was poetry and why in the creation of the Romanian literary “mythology” the first “heroes” were poets. In the old times, poetic presences had been the texts (the conscience of literary ownership was too feeble, some texts were not even signed, while others were signed by their transcribers and so on and so forth); now authors were imposed as poetic presences.

Becoming aware of the existence of a new way of understanding poetry (essential phenomenon within the climate of the time) paradoxically entailed the “making of common cause" (even if not through adhesion to a programme) of “old-fashioned” poets, escalating into the ostentatious programmatic rejection of what was new.

The literary terminology used at the time must also be subject to a detailed analysis, in order to avoid erroneously seeing Wallachian followers of western currents before their actual appearance.

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Acknowledgments regarding the increase of fluency of Romanian verses must devolve upon poetry interpreters, who were extremely numerous during a time when translations were programmatically supported by cultural societies and encouraged by newspapers. All the poets of the time were also interpreters of foreign poetry, which was also a reflex of the (acutely felt at the time) need for models.

The number of translations and of translators grew a lot if one considered the interpretations disseminated through magazines and those who were kept as manuscript. Among the printed works we should bring to the fore the new versed translation of David's psalms: Psaltirea prorocului şi Împărat David (Soothsayer's Psalter and King David) (Braşov, 1827).

Translations were construed, at least during the fourth decade, as a praiseworthy creation. One should not forget that during the debuts as publishers of Heliade (1830) and Alexandrescu (1832) original poems were deemed to occupy a secondary place compared to some translations.

In connection with the mentality of some writers of the time, a fragment from a letter sent by Bolliac to C. Negruzzi in 1836 was quite suggestive: "Kind Sir, I happened to see many literary products and translations of several of my friends, which, I must confess, could have passed as masterpieces given the state of our literature." (C. BOLLIAC, Opere, E.S.P.L.A., Bucharest, 1956, volume I : 43)

In the Introduction to Iliad (translated by 1837), Heliade motivated quite clearly the need for translations in a culture that was just beginning to take shape (he himself had made his debut as publisher through translations): "In the beginning, translations open the road to compositions and form the language, by shaping it according to the patterns of the authors of past centuries. Each and every translator has, for example, the language and the author from which the translation is carried out and the translator identifies himself to a certain extent with the model thereof. The poor translator is a slave to his text. The translation of the former disseminates an exquisite original (s.n.), while the one belonging to the second disseminates a foul copy. One of them resembles the author while the other resembles the ugly and incapable self." (H. RADULESCU, "Introducere la Iliada", E.S.P.L.A., Bucureşti, 1978)

Translations used to be one of the concerns of the literate people of the time. In 1838, Bariţiu drew attention that "the merit of good translators is great, the enrichment of the language through proper translations and the uncovering of literary treasuries of other peoples, these are their merits" (Traducere) (Translation).

No matter how didactic, Bariţiu's considerations, since they were expressed in 1838, they deserve to be recorded, at least on a fragmentary basis: "The art of translation does not rely on an empty handling lying in covering the thing in a foreign language with words in the other, on performing a mechanical copy of sayings, it is obvious that the translator's duty, especially when it comes to poetic things [...], is to encompass the features of the original with an artistic spirit and, being closely acquainted with the genius of both languages, to abide by the general rule: to express the thoughts of the poet as he would have rendered them if he had written in your own language."

(Bariţiu also notices that there were two kinds of translators: "Some want to emphasize only the beauty and euphony of foreign phrases, while others emphasize only their meaning.")

Such discussions — not at all infrequent at the time — prove the concern of literate men of the time with respect to this cultural activity with undeniable usefulness under the historical circumstances of our country. Therefore, one cannot be oblivious to the extremely important role played by the translations of poems performed during this

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age, especially during the extraordinary fourth decade, when the poets whose works were being translated were poetic (modelling) presences in the vernacular literary climate. The fact that in 1840, a statement could be made against the translation abuse proves the rapid growing of our literature.

Therefore, one may assert and emphasize the fact that the translations performed at the time were themselves a symptom indicating the change of the poetic criterion.

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