HORACE AND THE MODERNIST POETS

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Abstract: On a background of aesthetical searches of the beginning of the 20th century, dominated by mainly modernist tendencies, Horace maintains his place in the preferences of some Romanian poets. But in most of their works his traces are rather diffuse, transformed, perhaps involuntarily. In the group of poets around the main literary reviews Literatorul (The Litterateur) and Viața nouă (The New Life), promoters and theoreticians of a new poetry, we also find translators of Horace's work, like Al. T. Stamatiad, sprouted from the Macedonski circle. Macedonski himself, the dean of the Romanian poets of the day, is a kind of Janus, in the words of N. Manolescu, of the aesthetics, because he equally looks towards the past and the future. The Horatian influence could be suspected in Macedonski's nostalgia for his parents'estate, home of his childhood, both lost forever, as he writes in Mângâierea dezmoştenirii II (The Comfort of Disinheritance). Also Horatian in a way is his trust in his destiny of poet, expressed in his poem Epigraf (Epigraph). Duiliu Zamfirescu is Horatian in his preference for neoclassical forms and his philosophy with Epicurean notes, as well a Horatian perception of time, like in his poem Acum (Now). Another poet of Horatian inflections is Pompiliu Păltânea, who translated the Satires, despite being the theoretician of symbolism at Viața nouă (New Life).

Key-words: Horace, classicism, neoclassicism, modernism, symbolism, influence, reception.

In the first decades of the 20th century Horace continues to be in the attention of the Romanian public, mainly through occasional translations, selective or extended and elaborated. Some of these translations are rewarded by the Romanian Academy, as was the case of the Horatian *Satires* translated in 1910 by Titu Dinu and Pompiliu Păltânea respectively. Other translations are due to poets who, generally speaking, through their original poetry and literary ideology, placed themselves in the frontline of the modernization of Romanian poetry.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, Romanian poetry was in the transition stage to Modernism, under the sign of eclecticism. To some extent, some reminiscences of classical poetic formulas are still present, as well as the cult of the form, for example in Alecsandri's *Pastels*, but simultaneously there is a tendency for the innovative experiences of the Parnassian school or Symbolism, tendency intensely theorized mainly in two literary reviews, *Literatorul* and *Viața nouă*. Initially, they gathered around them most of the poets whose poems contained ideas and notes similar to some Horatian attitudes. The Parnassian direction prefers the classicizing formulas, meaning the cult of the form and bookish inspiration, and creates a favorable ground for the orientation of the art towards antic sources. After a few years new poetical formulas begin to appear, which combine the classicizing tendencies with the autochthonism and traditionalist program, this last being, paradoxically, "a style, a formula invented by the modernist poets, which are often schooled in Symbolism" [1], but without leaving the Modernism, as shows the evolution of Ion Pillat"s lyricism[2].

On a background of aesthetical search of the 20th century, dominated by mainly modernist tendencies, Horace maintains his place in the preferences of some Romanian poets. But in most of their works his traces are rather diffuse, transformed, perhaps involuntarily. Most of the translations made in the first decades of the 20th century belong to poets who inscribe themselves into the modernist movement and publish their original poems with some regularity in literary reviews or in volumes of author.

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Thus, the Latin poet maintains his relation with the Romanian literary milieu and public, relation built and consolidated in the previous century by the influential review *Convorbiri literare* The modernist poets, in whose lyricism one can identify Horatian hallmarks, are to be found mainly around Macedonski, in the pages of his review *Literatorul* and in the literary circle he lead. A few years later, other modernist poets influenced by Horace are grouped at *Viața nouă*, lead by Ovid Densusianu.

Without *Macedonski* "we cannot imagine the birth of modern poetry", he is like Janus, with a face oriented to the past and the other to the future [3]. In his youth, he showed a certain perceptiveness to the charms of the rustic life, in a way familiar because of the time spent at the family property in his childhood. Although in some of the evocations of his native landscapes he expresses attachment for the rural milieu, leading some of his critics to interpret it as a Horatian attitude, however one could not say that Macedonski is a poet of the country life. At most, one can say that, such as Horace, he is both *amator ruris* and *amator urbis*, because "his perspective on nature is that of an aesthete "[4] and, similar to the Latin poet, he looks upon nature from the outside, decoratively. In the poem *Mângâierea dezmoştenirii*, II (*The Comfort of Disinheritance*), young Macedonski expresses nostalgia for his parents' lost estate, bringing to mind Horace's own drama at the loss of his father's small fortune. The Romanian poet remembers in a few verses the image of the places he must leave: "Regret albia-ți frumoasă, Amaradie iubită, / Regret piscurile tale coperite de păduri, / Dulcele murmur din moara ce umbla neostenită, / Văile misterioase, adâncite şi obscuri […]". He creates an image similar to that of villa of Tibur, on the bank of small river Digentia, fugitively described by Horace in the first lines of his well-known *Satire* II, 6: *Hoc erat in votis: modus agri non ita magnus, / hortus ubi et tecto vicinus iugis aquae fons / et paulum silvae super his foret. […]*. Sometimes the Latin poet intentionally intermingles landscape elements of his native Venusia, from which he had to be separated, with the idealized landscape of his villa in Tibur. In the last stanza of *Odes* III, 13, *Ad Fontem Bandusiae*, Horace also tries to find a poetical compensation to his nostalgia.

Macedonski's trust in his own posterity as a poet can be considered Horatian, if we consider the second stanza of the poem *Epitaf*: "Dar când patru generații peste moartea mea vor trece, / Când voi fi de-un veac aproape oase şi cenuşe rece, / Va suna şi pentru mine al dreptății ceas deplin / Ş-al meu nume, printre veacuri, înălțându-se senin, / Va-nfiera ca o stigmată neghiobia duşmănească, / Cât vor fi în lume inimi şi o limbă românească […]." The message in these verses has a correspondence to the *Epilog*, one of Horace's most celebrated and well-known odes: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius / regalique situ pyramidum altius, / qoud non imber edax non Aquilo impotens / possit diruere aut innumerabilis / annorum series et fuga temporum …* (*Odes*, III, 30, 1-5). But, unlike Horace, who finishes the three books of odes in an optimistic way, in a solemn manner, with the satisfaction of the fulfillment of his duty as *poeta-vates*, Macedonski adopts a satirical tone for his contemporaries and predicts that, after a century in purgatory, he will regain the glory he deserves and thus be avenged.

In terms of aesthetical options, very close to Macedonski in his first years of activity at *Literatorul* was *Duiliu Zamfirescu*. During his long diplomatic mission in Rome he had the opportunity to appreciate the history of the ancient world's great capital and to have an intimate knowledge of the Latin and Italian literatures by translating Leopardi and Carducci, the last being very much influenced by Horace, as N. I. Herescu demonstrates [5]. As a result of this cultural contact, Duiliu Zamfirescu quit the poetry of romantic inspiration he used to write in order to adopt neoclassical forms [6], a meditative lyricism of ancient inspiration, as in the poem named *Acum*: „Fii fericit, şi fii *acum*! / *Acum* e ultimul cuvânt. / Tot restul : un vârtej de fum, / Iar mai târziu un colț de drum, / O cruce şi-un mormânt."

Al. T. Stamatiad also revolves round Macedonski's literary circle. He is a modernist poet of symbolic signature, much acclaimed by the public and critics of his time. His main contribution to valorizing Horace's oeuvre consists in the translations of some of the most praised of the odes, that he repeatedly published in magazines for over three decades and finally included in the volume *Cortegiul amintirilor*, in 1942.

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Pompiliu Păltânea, a praised translator of Horace's *Satires*, was linked to the Symbolist movement, theorized by him in 1914 [7], in a study published in the review *Viaţa Nouă*. As in the case of other symbolist poets, his classical background harmonizes symbolist aesthetics and Horatian inspiration.

In the middle of the epoch of literary modernism, leading critics like Tudor Vianu, in *Idealul classic al omului*, in 1932, still plead for classical values, considered the universal cultural values. Years later, in 1946, G. Călinescu reaffirms his deep attachment to classicism in *Sensul clasicismului*.

An investigation of Horace's influence on Romanian modernist poets is undertaken by *N. I. Herescu* when he tries to emphasize the development of the "classical line" in the Romanian literature in the inter-bellum, in articles and studies written in the same period. His deep acquaintance with Horace's works and his direct and active involvement in Romanian literary movement were the premises of the identification of some analogies and continuity of vision or atmosphere between the Latin poet and some modern Romanian poets. He perceives Horatian elements in the poets from his own circle, which he knew very well, firstly Ion Pillat, later Vasile Voiculescu, his old collaborator.

The similarities Herescu detects are however reductionist in relation to the whole of Horace's creation and do not represent the essential notes of the Horatianism. In his interpretation, the similarities consist in the connection of the poets to their native land and their "convergence with the nature", of their common vision on the plenty of autumn (however, G. Călinescu observed Horace's preference for the hibernal season). On the other hand, they have in common a special feeling of "deracination" when they are out of their familiar rustic space. Herescu finds the same kind of correspondences between Horace and the lyricism of Nichifor Crainic, Radu Gyr and Horia Furtună. However, the preference of Horace for the rural is a particular form of cultivating the *otium*, a frame for the contemplative, and does not represent a distinctive feature of Horace's creation. He remains strongly related to the urban milieu where he spent most of his life. That's why he intensely appreciates the amenity of the rural life. Horace avoids the tumult of Rome only for short whiles, especially in the second part of his life, after being offered the villa in the Sabin country. The moral pleading in the parable of the two mice in *Satires*, II, 6 should not be understood as a rejection of urban life.

Ion Pillat, next to Adrian Maniu and Radu Gyr, is the most outstanding representative of chthonic lyricism [8], of the native land, of the bucolic atmosphere and also of "the eternity of the moment", like in the very Horatian title of one of his first volumes of poems. The Horatian motives are inserted in his lyricism in various and subtle forms and associations, often bookish. Ion Pillat is, most probably, of the Romanian modernist poets, the most influenced by Horace. Starting with the volume *Pe Argeş în sus* his lyricism adopts more traditional themes, valorizing the elements of the familiar universe: his homeland, his native places and their people, his grandparents, the simple joys of life. Pillat's distinguishing features are the lack of ostentation, the simplicity, the serenity, the sincerity. Ion Pillat defines his poetry in these words: "Ultimately, my entire poetry can be reduced to the vision of the earth which remains the same, to the presentiment of the time that always runs" [9]. So, he admits his allegiance to Horace through the feeling of the volatility of the time. Horatian attitudes and motives can be identified in the work of Ion Pillat through the poetry of Francis Jammes, a Horatian poet of French origin, who's work was very familiar to him and whom he evokes in the poems *Aici sosi pe vremuri* and *Undrea*. In the last of these two poems, Horace and Francis Jammes are evoked together, next to Vergil, in a typically Horatian setting, very similar to that of *Odes* I, 9, *Ad Taliarchum*: ,"Butucii ard în sobă cu trosnet şi scântei. / Din rodul viei tale eşti bucuros să bei- // Cucernic pentru oaspeţi ridici câte-o bărdacă, / Pe fraţii-n poezie nu-i uiţi cu cana seacă. // Şi, ca poet al viei vorbindu-i sfântul hram / Închini pentru Horaţiu, Virgil şi Francis Jammes."(*Undrea*). According to Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, in the elegies of Ion Pillat "the Horatian sentiment is fully expressed, with a painful contortion, mitigated through reflection and wise reconciliation" [10]. Pillat also shares with Horace the pleasure of *otium* that offers him the

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opportunity to contemplate nature and at the same time to interiorize his experiences, as can be seen in his volume *Limpezimi*.

Again, in his pastels written in Alecsandri's manner, Ion Pillat gets closer to Horace, due to the common model that the Latin poet represents for both of them. In *Calendarul viei* we can find the pleasure of contemplation and the taste of country life. His travels in Greece brought him the revelation of the real value of Hellenic art and the classical ideal, which became an interface to his better understanding of Goethe. Goethe, whom he considers "the greatest poet of the modern time", had also underwent the revelation of the Greek world. Thus, the Romanian poet came to the conclusion that with age "more than the changing and ephemeral stars of the moderns, we are always recalled by the distant stars of the great old classical literatures, whose radiance never vanishes. From this point of view, Homer and Sophocles, Vergil and Horace, […] the later they came to me, the more lasting is my admiration. […] all my poetical creation, especially in the last decade, seems to enrich me by the twofold contribution of the classical art and of the folklore." [11] The lyricism of Ion Pillat develops into classicism through the Hellenic themes he chooses, through the propensity to the essentials of his inner experiences or the very elaborated form of his poetry, signaled by Titu Maiorescu since his beginnings as a young poet [12]. Under the sign of "this classicism of attitude, as well as of motives" [13], Ion Pillat wrote his last books. In the volume of poems *Caietul verde* he has, as G. Călinescu observes, "classicist attitudes" deriving from "a sentiment of contemporaneity with classicism without which any classical attitude is absurd" [14]. It can be said that, through Ion Pillat, the phenomenon of Horace's reception in the Romanian literature begins to step across the faze George Baiculescu was speaking about in an article in *Convorbiri Literare* [15], that of the superior internalization of the Horatian themes, motives, moral or mental attitudes in the "original compositions" as a sign of artistic accomplishment.

Ştefan I. Nenițescu belongs to the same group of religious poets around the review *Gândirea* as Ion Pillat, Vasile Voiculescu, Nichifor Crainic, Adrian Maniu. He is an erudite, a classical nature, with solid roots in aesthetics. He writes an abstract, conceptual, intellectual poetry. Although he has not much in common with Horace, in *Algebră* we come across "a poetical figuration" [16] of the perception of the time where he evokes Horace, not unintentionally : „Făcut e spațiul timp, ca timpul spațiu / şi-ntretăierea lor de-antinomie, / prezenți în azi, mi-aduce ani o mie / Pindar trăia, când îl citea Horațiu."

Perpessicius, critic and literary historian, practices a lyricism saturated with bookish references and erudition, however not deprived of sincerity, as observes Camil Petrescu. In G. Călinescu's point of view, his "elegiac" classicism resides in "Ovide-Catullus-Properce's manner" [17]. Indeed, Perpessicius knew Catullus well enough to translate from his lyrics in *Itinerar sentimental*, as well from other Latin poets. He was well informed on translations of Latin poets and he favorably reviewed Herescu's volume of translations from Horace's poetry [18]. *Odă către Postumus* paraphrases Horace's well-known ode, where Perpessicius slips "a slightly modern spleen" [19]:

> Vai! Postume, Postume, cum mai trec anii!
> Ce sarbezi şi iute mai trec şi sărmanii
> De noi, cât trudim şi ne zbatem în viață
> Şi toate sfârşesc tot la malul cu gheață.

The volume *Privelişti* by *B. Fundoianu* contains descriptions of landscapes imagined by the poet "as an intimate protest against the mechanical landscape populated by bullets, barbed wire, tanks" that invaded his universe during the First World War, as he mentions in his foreword, in order to make sure that he is perceived as a rustic and bucolic poet. The title is "polemic and ironical to an entire contemplative tradition" [20]. The poem belongs to "traditional symbolism" and is characterized by sensorial overstress, "olfactive and tactile pantheism" and "intoxication with vital exhalations" [21]. His landscapes are in no case idyllic or sentimental, but gloomy, grotesque, "depoeticized", "defined through negative categories" [22]. Fundoianu does not describe the nature,

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creating pictures as classics do, but he interprets it by proposing his own vision [23]. Among the poems included in the volume *Privelişti* there is the "ode" *Lui Taliarh*, appreciated by G. Călinescu as "Fundoianu's masterpiece", an "exuberant Horatian ode, full of autumn's exciting exhalations, in which the Cotnar wine replaces the Falernum wine" [24].

If the title and the invocation of Taliarch inside the poem did not explicitly refer to the well-known ode of Horace, it would be difficult to associate the two poems at the first reading, because they seem so different. Horace defies the mortal destiny conceived as winter's aggression and he assigns a single stanza to its description, because he prefers to ignore it for a short moment, retired in the refuge of his home, near his friends, in a symposiac atmosphere. Fundoianu replies from the middle of a sordid autumnal landscape, opposite to the immaculate white of the snow in Horace's ode of. The plenty of the autumn richness is described with naturalistic and demystified details, but preserving all the Horatian themes, which he treats with the same melancholic and friendly warmth: ,,[…] Prietene, dă-mi mâna, şi taci; aşa, dă-mi mâna. […] O Taliarh, acum, ca şi-n trecut, exist, / şi beau din vinul ăsta şi beau din cupa asta. […] Vino; să stăm de vorbă cât ne mai ține vrerea; / ca mâne, peste inimi, va izbuti tăcerea, […] Și-atuncea, la braț, umbre, nu vom mai şti de toate; […] Ei, poate la ospețe nu vei mai fi monarh- / E toamnă. Bea cotnarul din cupă, Taliarh."

In essence, Fundoianu's ode is evidently one of the most Horatian poems in the Romanian literature.

The year 1935 was dedicated to Horace's bimillenary. The sensibility of the modernist aesthetics for the Latin poet is due not only to the fact that his oeuvre represented at that time an important part of the culture of any intellectual, but to the fact that Horace, although classicized by posterity, was always perceived as a modern spirit, capable to adapt to the new paradigms of creation and thinking. Thus, the Romanian literature, dominated by the modernist aesthetic, registers an important and valuable leap in the Latin poet's reception.

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