A PROPHET IN HIS COUNTRY

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Abstract:
This text is a tribute to the academician Eugen Simion, on his 85th birthday. A former president of the Romanian Academy (1998 – 2006), member of academic societies in France, Denmark, Moldova, university professor, literary critic and historian, editor, essayist, he is still more active than ever and his achievements are brimming over with energy and youthful enthusiasm. The intellectual merits of the humanist Eugen Simion place him in the gallery of encyclopaedic personalities of culture worldwide.

Key words:
Eugen Simion, academy, personality, tribute, literature, destiny.

The academician Eugen Simion is celebrating his 85th birthday and, at the same time, more than half a century of activity in the field of literary criticism, history and theory. Two things are striking: the age written in his identity card, which has nothing to do with the looks of its owner, and his unusual work capacity, which is most likely typical of his years of youth.

The academician holds himself straight as the firs on mountain ridges – ageless, perennial, evergreen, august and austere. We believe this association befits him.

On the other hand, the cultural edifice whose artisan is Eugen Simion is just as impressive. The tens of thousands of pages written incessantly evince his freshness and intellectual longevity and so the legendary phrase "tinereţe fără bătrâneţe" ('youth everlasting') becomes, in this case, against any official data, a truth. His writing style in all spheres of concerns, the extent of which I find it useless to invoke here, is pervaded with a constantly fresh and incisive spirit and occurs in the form of genuine debates. Like other personalities of our literature and culture, the academician Eugen Simion

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deserves the title of national author, earned by a small number of writers who, going beyond the limits of social time, have manifested on a superior level, within the pale of national elites. Nicolae Manolescu, a contemporary of Eugen Simion, his literary critic and sometimes his adversary, would remark on an earlier anniversary occasion: "The author of some remarkable synthesis studies, he left no corner of the picture unpainted".

By insisting upon these aspects, we would only reiterate things, ideas, facts that are already known.

In the cultural history Romania has passed through, providential spirits have now and then emerged; in the face of exasperating realities and beyond any obstacles, they have persistently believed in our good destiny. They have seen further, into the future, and have shown that nothing is superfluous, that it is not resignation but fight – the constant activity, without pessimistic slackness, concessions or complaints – which is the only way to go. In a culture of the mioritic space, in a culture in which Master Manole should not be mistaken, as some do, for Sisyphus (because Manole places sacrifice above his own existence, converting it into aspiration), the presence of providential human natures is meaningful. In reply, it is said that "nobody is a prophet in their own country" for the mere reason that prophets do not refer to the immediate present, which human crowds cannot separate from. Throughout their lives, crossed by storms and insecurity, amidst lightings in the dark, prophets show us the path to follow. They are left with the disappointment of not having been believed, the pain of having been blamed and the mystery of not having been understood. Prophets have nevertheless continued to believe in what the others considered to be a mirage. Their cause, ignored or lost beforehand, takes shape due to the obstinacy and tenacity with which they have gone about their own preoccupations. And, if their existence is long, despite all the hardships they have faced, prophecies begin to loom during their lifetime.

Of the rare breed of prophets of this sort is Eugen Simion part of – a man of culture that can be said to take his thoughts to the very end, fighting predestinations in the face of which most feel captive. As a scholar of the deed, Eugen Simion is the author of many fundamental books and studies on Romanian spirituality. Throughout a career that goes well beyond a half a

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century, the professor has made a creed out of the Romanian culture, to the knowledge and cultivation of which he has dedicated his entire work. A number of disciples have followed him. Others have left him along the way, but his convictions have been embraced by new followers and now, on his eighty fifth birthday, in spite of the disconcerting diversity of opinions - we reiterate - the results of his prophesies are starting to come true: he restored the 45 Eminescu Notebooks, the poet's manuscripts donated by Titu Maiorescu to the Romanian Academy in 1902 (which had long been unavailable to the public), to the contemporary reader; he completed Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române (DGLR, 7 volumes, 2004 -2009) and has already edited four other volumes of the eight of the second edition ("revised, enlarged and updated"); he coordinated 27 volumes of the Cronologia vieții literare românești (CVLR, 1944 - 2000) and published Enciclopedia Literaturii Române Vechi (2017); he prefaced most of the 200 issues of the collection Opere fundamentale of representative Romanian writers, the Pleiade format; he initiated the series of international academic meetings Penser l'Europe, which is now in its seventeenth year, with the participation of scholars from Romania, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria, Serbia, Greece, Israel, the Republic of Moldova and, last but not least, he is the organiser of the Colocviile naționale ale tinerilor critici ('The national colloquia of young critics'), which have reached the 12th edition this year.

Along with the projects he runs, his personal work enjoys recognition and visibility both in the country and abroad, where some of the studies authored by the literary critic and theoretician have been printed by prestigious universities and publishing houses: The Return of the author, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illionis, (USA, 1996), Le Retour de l'Auteur, L'Ancrier Editeur, Strassbourg (France, 1966), Mircea Eliade, Spirit of Amplitude, East European Monographs (USA, 2001), Mircea Eliade, romancier, Paris, Oxus (Franța, 2004) Le Juene Eugen Ionescu, Paris, L'Harmattan (France, 2013), Cioran, une mythologie de l'inachevé, Paris, Le Soupirail, (France, 2016), Existențialismul românesc și metafizica europeană, Belgrade (Serbia, 2016). Of the studies published in the country, we should mention: Cioran, o mitologie a nedesăvârșirilor (Editura Tracus Arte,

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București, 2014); *Mircea Eliade. Nodurile şi semnele prozei* (5th edition, Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold, București, 2016); Ion Creangă, cruzimile unui moralist jovial (3rd edition revised and enlarged, Editura Tracus Arte, București, 2017); Posteritatea critică a lui E. Lovinescu (Editura Tracus Arte, București, 2017). Due to the lifetime contributions of this great personality, in the last decades a number of tribute volumes (2003, 2008, 2013) as well as monographs such as Modelul de existență Eugen Simion (Editura Semne, București, 2013), by Mihai Cimpoi, or Eugen Simion. Profil spiritual (Editura Tracus Arte, București, 2015), by Marin Diaconu, have been dedicated to Eugen Simion.

We have had the opportunity to write about his books and we can say without any reservations that, as far as we are concerned, they have all been revelations of the high mission criticism has in literary life. We have begun to study the texts in which we have discovered a programme, a course towards aspirations we have pursued ourselves, but by means of different strategies. To start with, we have noticed that his points of reference would deepen our literature like a riverbed on the solidification of which all great writers had been working (critics or artists of the word), that the professor had removed all the mirages, wide and generously open to the most unexpected directions, in order to subordinate himself to a single, fundamental creed. He would fight wastefulness with the painstaking effort to move toward the future, for, according to Professor Eugen Simion, the history of literature is a history of the masterpieces of Romanian language and literature. With this in view, he started by studying Eminescu, then, not in a chronological order, the others: E. Lovinescu, Marin Preda, Nichita Stănescu, Tudor Arghezi, George Călinescu, Ion Creangă, Lucian Blaga, Petru Dumitriu, Neagoe Basarab, Dimitrie Cantemir, Ion Ghica, Kogălniceanu, Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu, Emil Cioran – all writers and exemplary artistic minds, about whom he has written prefaces, studies, monographs and books of great value, sharing with us the feeling that they are a celebration of the Romanian spirit and that, before searching and showing their human weaknesses, we must rejoice that they have existed.

In our short tribute, we shall now linger a while over the most important of his messages, a message that we deem both revealing and

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prophetic. We owe the scholar Eugen Simion, the author of dozens of books and thousands of studies, the optimistic view of the Romanian culture, for he has shown us, in every page he has ever written, that Romanian literature has a fortunate destiny, contributing with the forces of a small, though not minor (as other peers think), culture to the great adventure of the imagination of ideas that culture and literature worldwide are responsible for. A lucid spirit, intent upon all that is happening in the cultural debates in our country, the professor nuances the "prophecy" we have mentioned, looking ahead and warning everybody: "A great battle awaits us!".

Therefore, at this festive moment, I believe that we can affirm, with no trace of doubt or reluctance, that Eugen Simion is part – alongside of other such personalities as D. Cantemir, Titu Maiorescu, B. P. Hasdeu, Mihai Eminescu, Nicolae Iorga, Vasile Pârvan, E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica, Eugen Ionescu, Emil Cioran – of the family of the most distinguished native humanistic spirits.

These lines about prophets and prophecies belong to someone who believes that, in these times, we need them more than ever.

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