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A historical perspective on the link between Romania and Europe, through the dynamics of spiritual values

Coculiana ACĂR*

Abstract

An important lever in establishing and maintaining relationships between Romania and Europe is the presence of spiritual values. The proposed theme identifies and analyses spiritual values in a European context on three temporal coordinates: the 16th - 19th centuries, the interwar period and postmodern period. This topic addresses the cultural specificity of Romania in relation to Europe. Spiritual values shape national identity that has a special role to play in defining a people's culture. The important moments in the synchronization of the Romanian culture with the European one were marked by the Romanian humanists who played a special role in the formation of the historical consciousness that contributed to the evolution of the Romanian people. Subsequently, representatives of modernism promoted Western civilization among the Romanians, favoring the opening, but within certain limits, to the Western culture, in the sense that they preserved the values specific to our people.

Keywords: spiritual values, culture, Romania, Europe

Introduction

Since the issues that concern us and which we are pursuing are related to the role of spiritual values in the performance of the link between Romania and Europe, we proposed an axiological vision of the historical time that defined the relationships between Romania and Europe through the convergence of the three chronological aspects: the 16th - 19th centuries, the interwar period and postmodernism. In support of this goal, we endorse the “axiological vision of history by which we see an axial historical present through the social life it represents, the past through the treasure of inherited values and the future through the prospective values that it inspires them, towards the fulfilment of imperatives in the offing” (Isac and Stănciulescu, 2006, p. 54).

To that effect, investigating the meanings given to values, we can distinguish two senses: on the one hand, the term value refers to objects, man's products, found in expressions such as:

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“universal culture values” or “antiquity values”; on the other hand, the value denotes features that characterize man, for example: “moral values” / “spiritual values” (Culda, 1982, p. 185). Starting from the idea that man adhered to values, integrating them as principles of conduct in all actions of life, history imposes human consciousness as an objective “culture to educate mankind!” (Isac and Stănciulescu, 2006, p. 53).

So, in the proposed approach we will follow the availability of spiritual values in establishing the collaboration and integration relationships of Romania at European level; that is why “spiritual values, sustained axiologically, become real, objective and operative factors in the life of man and society” (Isac and Stănciulescu, 2006, p. 46). We propose an axiological vision of historical time, in relation to Romania and Europe, an integrative vision that considers past, present and future in an interdependent functional and unitary continuity. A historical component is the knowledge and understanding of the past as indispensable to the construction of the future.

The European Union is today the main way of preserving the spiritual values of the member countries. With an obvious cultural identity, Europe is defined both by characteristics common to the cultures of different ethnicities and peoples of the European geographical area, as well as by characteristics specific to them. Romanian culture, like all cultures of the European continent, could develop only in direct contact with the European culture. Concerns about the European idea arise with I.H. Rădulescu, not only at the level of concept, but equally civically and publicly. An example in this respect would be the magazine “Studii filosofice” (1897), the first of its kind in the country; the “Societatea de Studii Filosofice” (1910) is then founded, which later becomes the “Societatea Românească de Filozofie”.

Another relevant aspect is the contribution of Romanians to European culture in all fields: art, philosophy, economy, sociopolitical organization. Thus, Romanian intellectuals who took the path of exile after 1965: S. Alexandrescu, M. Călinescu, Virgil Nemoianu, as a result of their perception with the Western cultural environment and the process of redefining their own identity, need to overcome some primary disjunctions, such as: Western / Oriental. The historical or moral condition of the European man also has an unusual dynamics.

The second category of characteristics defining European identity is that of the particular traits specific to the other cultures of Europe, due to which there is this diversity that forms one of the main riches of European civilization. Romania occupies a respectable place within the original civilization and culture, no less European, even if on the outskirts of the continent. EU construction begins to turn into practice after the Second World War. The cultural unity will be maintained thanks to the intellectuals who keep the ties and promote common ideas.

Europe is not isolated, but in full process of globalization, subject to changes that take place quickly. EU is a planetary model, despite the problems it faces.

1. Romania in the 16th - 19th centuries - European type spirituality

The synchronization of the Romanian culture with the Western one is considered to start as far as the 16th - 18th centuries marked by four moments: the appearance of the printing press, the writings of the chroniclers Grigore Ureche and Miron Costin and the scholar Dimitrie Cantemir, the literary and historical work of the Transylvanian School of Transylvania and the activity of the young students from Paris during the period preceding the Revolutions of 1848. Hereinafter, we will refer to the role of the Romanian humanists in the formation of Romanian spirituality in European context, also highlighting some outstanding personalities of the 18th - 19th centuries who have contributed to the development of Romanian culture.

At European level, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, 1448, promotes the access to culture for a wider audience. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Byzantine scholars take refuge in Italy by saving ancient writings and contributing to their spread in Europe. Romanian humanism manifested later than the European one, more precisely in the 16th - 18th centuries, the 17th century being considered the period of maximum effervescence of this cultural current. Coming from boyar families, Romanian humanist scholars have the opportunity to study in countries such as: Poland, Italy, Constantinople, which facilitates their contact with the European culture of that time. Through the themes approached: the history of the stirps and the Latin origin of the people and of the Romanian language, Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin lay the foundations of Romanian historiography. If we refer to Miron Costin, he can be considered a complex writer for that time being the author of lyrics, translations, and writings in Polish. Through the work "De neamul moldovenilor", M. Costin "released into circulation famous phrases" (Pricop, 2011, pp. 51-52), entered into the common language.

Considered the representative figure of the 18th century of our culture, Dimitrie Cantemir would be "the first European in the history of Romanian culture"(Constantinescu, 1972, pp. 189 - 190). In the 18th century, the century of Phanariot reigns, there was a contact, a communication between the Romanian culture and that of Western Europe, facilitated even by enlightened Phanariots. Constantinople, when D. Cantemir was studying there, was a great cultural centre, permeable including to Western culture. The Moldavian ruler finds an equally favourable context for cultural contacts with Europe after his exile in Russia, which during the time of Peter the Great knows one of the most pro-occidental eras in his history. Becoming a member of Berlin Academy in 1714, D.

Cantemir adopts the cultivated scientific discourse at that time in the European space. In 1716, at the request of the same Academy, the scholar writes “*Descriptio Moldaviae*” in Latin.

A special moment for the development of culture is the appearance on January 1st, 1840, in Iași, of the journal “*Dacia literară*”; the title is significant for the ideal of the Union. In the first issue of the journal, M. Kogălniceanu publishes the program article “*Introducere la Dacia literară*”, in which he emphasized the fight against the imitation that became “a dangerous mania because it kills our national spirit” and the translations, especially the bad ones. The ideas outlined in the program article and promoted by the journal are reflected in the Romanian literature of the middle of the 19th century. Kogălniceanu is considered “one of our first parliamentary orators, since 1857, but especially during the period of Al. I. Cuza, having a great power of persuasion “ (Manolescu, 1990, p. 212).

Another outstanding personality of the period under discussion is represented by T. Maiorescu who, through the vision of the cultural phenomenon, imposed with the article “*Against today’s direction in Romanian culture*” first appeared in the journal “*Convorbiri literare*” (1868), then in “*Critice*”. Maiorescu formulates the theory of “forms without substance” and takes a stand against the radical vice of Romanian culture of that period, the *untruth* manifested in all areas of political life, and not only. T. Maiorescu disapproves of the fact that young people who went to study in the West (France, Germany) starting with the first half of the 19th century took over the forms of Western civilization without being able to apply them to their own culture background non-existent at that time.

Apparently, at that time, the Romanians had all the forms of Western civilization (politics, science, newspapers, academies, schools, literature, museums, theater and even a constitution) without having the necessary background to adapt these forms. He is not against the takeover of external cultural forms, but they have to be adapted to the national specificity and anticipated by the creation of the background. T. Maiorescu’s conclusion is implacable: “For without culture, a people can still live in the hope that at the natural moment of their development this beneficial form of human life will emerge, but with a false culture, a people cannot live [...] because in the struggle between the true civilization and a tough nation, the nation is destroyed, but never the truth”. The theory of “forms without substance” synthetically defines the condition of Romanian culture of the second half of the 19th century, which “not only brings any benefit, but it is quite ruinous because it destroys a more powerful means of culture. The purpose of cultured people is to strengthen the background in order to normalize the reverse evolution” (Lovinescu, 1924, pp. 136 - 137).

We can conclude that the period of the 16th - 18th centuries singles out by the formation of the historical consciousness which is gradually achieved starting with the preoccupations of the humanists, and the evolution of the Romanian people was determined not only by the psychic background but also by the historical conditions, in order to define in the next century values on

which the political and social organization of the civilized world is based and on which EU will be subsequently built.

2. Interwar Romania and Europe

The 19th century spiritual crisis, when in Europe, along with the failure of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, it became apparent that the distance between the bourgeois artists and the intellectuals would be deepened by the outbreak of the Second World War. Hence the tendency of *fronde* expressed in violent terms along with the avant-garde. In Romania, this general context is justified by the fact that the cultural institutions are hardly consolidated, and the Great Union is a defining moment for the Romanian culture, which feels the need for new, Western values but placed on the field of traditional ones, which partly explains both the success of traditional currents (poporanism, *gândirism*), and the national concepts validated by the books of some intellectuals such as N. Iorga (“*Istoria românilor*”), C. Noica (“*Pagini despre sufletul românesc*”), N. Ionescu, M. Eliade (“*Tratat de istoria religiilor*”, “*Sacru și profan*”, etc.).

Romanian modernism was formed around the magazine *Sburătorul* (1919 - 1922 / 1926 - 1927) and the Literature circle having the same name (1919 - 1943), which appeared under the direction of E. Lovinescu. He takes over some of Maiorescu ideas, but polemically relates to the theory of “forms without substance”. E. Lovinescu supports the imitation theory taken over from the French psychologist and sociologist Gabriel Tarde. Related to the imitation theory is the principle of synchronism, which supposes the acceptance of the exchange of values between cultures, the acceptance of the elements that give novelty and modernity, ideas exposed in the works: “*Istoria civilizației române moderne*” (1924 - 1925) and “*Istoria literaturii române contemporane*” (1926 - 1929). The critic pointed out that in the interwar period, Romanian civilization had become to look more and more like the Western one. Urban social classes, namely the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, have had and will have the role of promoting the Western civilization among Romanians.

Another orientation in Romanian culture during the interwar period is represented by the traditionalists who were looking for models for Romania’s development in the autochthonous past, considering that the cultural imports from the urbanized West do not fit our national specificity. Most of them grouped around the magazine “*Gândirea*”, led by N. Crainic. He takes over some of T. Maiorescu’s “forms without substance” ideas, going to the militancy in favour of the national soul, but engrafted on the basis of Orthodox spirituality. The program oscillated in two directions: on the one hand, Blaga, who, through the ideas exposed in “*Revolta fondului nostru nelatin*”, pushes the tradition beyond the boundaries of the autochthonous Middle Ages, into prehistory and myth

(Romanian mythic time); on the other hand, N. Crainic promotes a theorized orthodoxy in the program article “Sensul tradiției”.

Not being located in the centre of Europe, Romania has a “marginal culture” (Alexandrescu, 2000, p. 36), but not inferior, because the edges, where cultures interfere, are the most creative, forming an interference culture. Starting from the specificity and stylistic unity of any cultural fiction (individual or collective), L. Blaga elaborates the “stylistic matrix” theory, as follows: the stylistic matrix represents a system of forces, acting as *stylistic fields*. L. Blaga applied his theory about style to the Romanian spiritual phenomenon, defined as a *mioritic space*, characterized by an undulated spatial horizon, advancing wavelike temporal horizon, a *sophianic* transfiguration attitude of reality and a definitive forming aspiration through orientation to geometric and stichic forms.

Representatives of “Gândirii” core have had a quite intimate contact with German culture that will influence the way of thinking and approaching culture in the European space. In particular, “Blaga will be fascinated by Goethe, Nietzsche and Spengler. He immediately became aware of the new trends in German art and literature in the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire towards the end of the war” (Crohmălniceanu, 1978, p. 61). This explains why the ideas promoted are “perhaps less an aesthetic problem than a metaphysical one” (Crohmălniceanu, 1978, p. 64). In the spiritual crisis he was going through, Europe was looking for an “ethos literature”, the latter was called upon to achieve “in the vision of a new Cosmos, the organization of the chaotic content of the time.” Blaga regrets the fact that the aspiration towards absolute of modern art does not find enough correspondences in the rest of the manifestations of human life because “the vegetation around us shows painful gaps [...] Europe is about to create a new dogma and new spiritual collectivism or a church” - an idea developed in the “Dogmatic Aeon” of 1931.

Concerning the Romanian specificity, C. Noica in the work “Ce e etern și ce e istoric în cultura românească” (1943) submits to the analysis three distinct moments of Romanian history (16th, 18th and 20th centuries) to which are associated three cultural personalities: N. Basarab, D. Cantemir and L. Blaga. The thesis of the Romanian eternity, successor of Hegel’s philosophy, is followed by the antithesis of the history, the criticism of Romanian permanencies, so that Blaga’s philosophy represent the synthesis in which both the “nostalgia of unchangeability and the modernist passions” melt (Noica, 1989, pp. 23 - 24). He is convinced that he belongs to a minor culture (minor in Blaga’s sense), that is, an early cultural age and not a distinct qualitative category compared to major cultures. “Our popular culture, although minor, has achievements comparable to those of large cultures” (Noica, 1991, p. 7).

We can see that modernity can be approached both historically and artistically, but often in ideological incompatibility. Characteristic of the modern idea is the rupture of tradition and the

rejection of classic models, whatever they are. M. Călinescu speaks of the negative passion of modernity that manifests by rejecting or doubting all valuable hierarchies and systems of ideas created in previous periods.

3. Romanian postmodernism in European context

In Western Europe and USA, postmodernism asserts itself since the 1960s of the last century, the relationships with the previous era being the natural ones. In postwar Romania, we could not talk about continuity, but about a hiatus. At the cultural level, the brutal rupture with the interwar tradition is the result of the imposition of socialist realism, whose main feature is the vassalage of the entire spiritual life by the proletkult official propaganda. The phenomenon takes on aberrant proportions, especially between 1950 - 1960. The relative ideological and political relaxation between 1965 - 1970 allowed a partial restoration of the links with interwar modernism, at least in part, a model in the ambit of art, of intellectual activity in general. Postmodernism has a predominantly cultural and artistic component.

If in America, until the 1960s of the last century, postmodernism had been a “classifying, unclear, and all-rounder” concept, and it remained afterwards a “hybrid, ambiguous” one (Călinescu, 1995, pp. 233, 238) hypothetically, postmodernism in Romania is defined by its reference to modernity and modernism, as “a temporal and historical concept” (Frank *et al.*, 1995, p. 67) which designates the way we understand the present in its historical, unique actuality, that is, in what distinguishes it from the past [...] and in what promises us for the future.

Among the attitudes of postmodernism, at least two of them are fundamentally different in composition with the modernist ones. First, the attitude towards the cultural and artistic tradition that they do not reject with the same vehemence but from which they want to recuperate in a specific manner some components. Postmodernists especially reject the elitist tendency of art, modernist literature, trying to reconcile the “high” art with “mass” culture. The differences between modernism and postmodernism are highlighted by Ihab Hassan (1986), and somehow continued by David Harvery who claims that postmodernism, born out of modernism, has “continuity” relationships in regard to it rather than “difference” (Harvery, 2002, pp. 342 - 343). According to others, postmodernity is even “the thoroughness of modernity” (Patapievici, 2002, p. 115) or “the cultural, artistic and ultimately philosophical epiphenomenon of postmodernity” (Cărtărescu, 1999, p. 79).

As a self-conscious movement, Romanian postmodernism asserts itself through the poets and prose writers of the 1980s, for example M. Cărtărescu, the critics: E. Simion, N. Manolescu, Radu G. Țeposu, I. Bogdan Lefter who emphasized the role of the group in establishing the concept of

postmodernism and postmodernist poetic style in our country. Literary creation has often been a way out of the pressing and degrading reality. Moreover, their creation is “a kind of «cultural guerilla»” fighting with the demons of the overtechnicized society (Crăciun, 1994, pp. 133 - 136), among which were the “aberrant” ideologies as well as fanaticisms. It is thus confirmed that poetry was consciously constituted as part of what was later called the “resistance through culture” of Romanian society. Among the many changes in optics introduced by postmodernism, M. Cărtărescu also mentions the fact that, for the poets of his generation, the priority model is no longer the French one. On his own poetry and the poetry of the 1980s in general, a decisive influence was exerted by the American poetry of the Beatles generation from which was taken over not only the ideology, but the “rhetorical, realistic and visionary” realism with roots in Walt Whitman, as well as the long, narrative “agglutinated” and “aggressive” poem (Cărtărescu, 2000, p. 154).

“Authentic” modernity means in contemporaneity, open society “individualistic and democratic values, [...] market economy” (Călinescu, 1995, p. 80). There is a distinction between the modernity of the social life ambit, where it means industrial and scientific revolution, the victory of capitalism - a “rationalist, optimistic, cosmopolitan modernity” and “aesthetic, polemic modernity” (Călinescu, 1995, pp. 7, 86), in essence. Postmodernist ideology is often placed by analysts in the descendancy of Nietzsche’s philosophy that “doubts the reality” characteristic of postmodern spirituality (Lyotard, 1984, p. 145), that is, the ability of science and philosophy to fully know the reality and to provide the basis of a rational organization of the world. We observe that the postmodern civilization man no longer tends towards absolute truth, but to what can lead him to the practical results as quickly as possible, to the increase of the activities’ efficiency of the pragmatic ambit. Thus, “one of the paradoxes of postmodern civilization would be the promotion and defence of individual values, but through the ever-increasing globalization that increasingly restricts the possibilities of manipulating these values” (Huchon, 1997, p. 89).

We can conclude that in postmodernism, the place of culture is taken by the technique based on pragmatic and limited intelligence that “seeks meanings to integrate into the world” (Patapievi, 2002, p. 286). Thus, postmodern multiculturalism based on the idea of equality of all cultures is unlikely to be achievable, because equality is not a natural value. Most likely it means “irrationality, anarchy and threatening indeterminacy” (Cărtărescu, 1999, p. 85). By virtue of this vision, postmodernism is considered a “dead end” (Patapievi, 2002, p. 15) of knowledge, a dead line in culture. The society will have to rely not on universalist ethical codes, but on what naturally exists in the individual being of man, “moral impulse”, “moral ego” (Bauman, 2000, p. 234) moral responsibility, sociability.

Conclusions

In the aforesaid, as an axis over time, we could notice that Romanian spiritual values propelled especially by writers, cultured people of the time have always related to European level because “the international recognition of Romanian culture depends essentially on intellectuals and artists” (Marino, 1976, p. 56). European Romanians from D. Cantemir to T. Maiorescu, from L. Blaga to C. Noica, M. Eliade, M. Călinescu, etc. through their contributions to the contact with European culture brought Europe home.

Having an open mind but not followers of the imitations, M. Kogălniceanu, T. Maiorescu continuing with E. Lovinescu have been important levers in the direction of promoting and synchronizing a European culture but keeping and adapting our national specificity. Romania, after the First World War, was in a continuous dynamics and rapidly synchronized in all fields with the countries that were the pillars of European civilization. After the Second World War, taking over some cultural models became more problematic, ambiguous in a certain sense: the philosophy was placed around frameworks of European thinking. The West does not only mean a number of major cultures, they also exist in other parts of the world, but a number of centres of world cultural management.

For Romanian culture, the synchronization process began in the 1980s against the official trend imposed by PCR. The first generation of postmodernists sought their identity especially in the detachment from interwar modernism. External factors have led to the uniformity of the European life conditions, to openness, acceptance, and an approximate levelling of cultures.

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