

THE UNIVERSE OF VALUES IN THE NEW WORLD OF COMMUNICATION

Facts¹:

On October 13, 2016 a general rumour devastated the cultural world. Announced with a delay of some day, the Nobel Prize for Literature is awarded to Bob Dylan, „for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition“. In spite of the positive or negative reactions manifested all over the world, the American singer is quite cautious. He makes no mention of this prize during his concerts, displays the information on his personal site only 5 days later and does not contact the Swedish Academy.

Context:

1. Nobel Prizes have been always considered the most prestigious awards at global level, which, by the manner of their being decided, do not only recompensate exceptional results of a systematic activity, but also underline what is really important in the scientific, cultural and political world, creating trends for the future. That is why, these prizes have been always accompanied by fundamental attributes – such as excellence, professionalism, devotion, synthesising the most valuable achievements of a certain domain. The Nobel prizes for Literature have been awarded to complex personalities, such as: Rabindranath Tagore (today, the most popular of the winners²), Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Neruda, John Steinbeck, Gabriel García Márquez, William Faulkner, Wislawa Szymborska, Toni Morrison – to mention only a few of the first 10 most popular winners. In spite of the fact that the idea of excellence has always accompanied awarding of such prizes, there existed accusations (expressed more or less explicitly) that, in many of the cases, these awards were offered not for the literary value of the work, but for other reasons, among which mention was made of the political impact or popularity. For the sake of exemplification, we shall defy one of the taboos of the modern world,

reminding of a “sacred monster” of world’s history - Wiston Churchill. Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was awarded the Prize in 1953 “for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values”³. Leaving aside the fact that his memories are written in an exceptional manner, and his discourses remain a model for any course of rethorics, the doubt on the role his stature and political influence might have played in this respect remains.

2. The Nobel prizes for Literature are universal, being awarded to citizens coming from most different cultural spaces. As a travelling ritual, it has been transferred in various countries and continents, in most of the cases highly different as to their tradition and impact. This explains why the prize has not been awarded to an American person since 1993, when the winner was Toni Morrison “who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality”⁴. If such a situation does not appear as problematic in a cultural space with reduced impact, in the North American one it appeared as an extremely serious issue. As early as 2008, the reactions to the criticism expressed by Horace Engdahl, the permanent secretary of the Nobel prize jury, to American literature, demonstrates the actuality of this aspect. He stated that: „The US is too isolated, too insular. They don’t translate enough and don’t really participate in the big dialogue of literature. (...) That ignorance is restraining.”⁵ This explains why no Nobel prize for Literature was awarded to USA representatives between 1993 and 2006.

Questions:

1. Why was the Nobel prize for Literature awarded to an American composer and singer?

2. Is the awarding of this prize to Bob Dylan the result of the axiological modifications specific to our times?

Answers:

1. Bob Dylan, born Robert Allen Zimmerman, is an exceptional singer and composer, as actually reflected by the twelve Grammy prizes obtained along his career. Recognition of his value is completed by an Oscar prize, a Golden Globe, his inclusion in Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and Songwriters Hall of Fame. The importance and impact he has had upon the European and American culture were acknowledged by numerous other prizes, of which mention should only be made of: the Polar Music Prize awarded in the year 2000 by Sweden's King Carl XVI; the Prince of Asturias Award in the Arts category in 2007; the Presidential Medal of Freedom USA, 2012; the accolade of Légion d'Honneur awarded in 2013 by the French Ministry of Education, all of them attesting the complexity of his activity and his worldwide popularity.

The impact of his artistic creation is reflected not only by the numerous prizes he got along time. For example, in Norway, a country renown for the efficiency of its educative system and also for the innovation in the domain, the University of Oslo introduced, as early as 2011, a discipline dedicated to the work of Bob Dylan⁶. With code IDE2084 and denomination *Bob Dylan: interpret of tradition and mirror of culture*⁷, the discipline is part of the specialization in the history of Ideas and Arts, at the Faculty of Philosophy, History of Ideas and Arts and Classical Languages. It is only an example of the manner in which the American singer is perceived in the Scandinavian cultural space and not only.

This long list of prizes and the examples provided, which evidence the impact of the music of Bob Dylan, were mentioned here only for outlining the image the American artist rejoiced in different levels of world's population, from the most refined up to the most popular ones. This entitles us to assert that it is one of the rarest situations in which the choice made by the Swedish Academy was done to its interest, and less to that of the winner. Bob Dylan did not need such a prize (see, in this respect, his reaction), we

dare say he viewed it as unforeseen, the more so after his having observed the reaction of the traditionalistic audience. At the same time, for the Swedish Academy, awarding of this prize represented one of the most important revolving moments by means of which its innovative capacity could be put into evidence, by catching a new dimension of the world, in which Gutenberg Galaxy declines, lost beyond the line of horizon specific to the written down text.

The decision, taken on assuming the risk of losing part of its traditionalistic supporters, was meant at the discovery of new spaces and at adding new dimensions to the literary discourse. The song becomes poetry and, consequently, literature. What should one learn from such a decision? The fact that one should find new modalities of expression, of transmitting messages, the fact that literature is not an objective in itself, being written for more and more reduced elites, in which the literary style has the precedence. It should actually arrive at people, and maintain contact with them. The human being is a scope, while identification of the modalities of understanding their souls, of educating them, is essential, in numerous situations. In spite of all contestations, one may assert that, at first sight, awarding of this prize was a real success. Within less than a month since its public notification - Bob Dylan is the winner of the Nobel Prize dor Literature in 2016 - in the *Most Popular Literature Laureates* top, realized on the official Nobel site, Bob Dylan occupies the second position, after Rabindranath Tagore, surpassing writers recognized as pillars of world's literature, such as Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Neruda, John Steinbeck, Gabriel García Márquez, William Faulkner. Worth mentioning is the fact that this inquiry, realized on the site of the Foundation, involved as respondents persons interested in the domain and with a cultural level over the media.

2. The answer to the second question: *Is the awarding of this prize to Bob Dylan the result of the axiological modifications characteristic to our times?* can be but: *certainly, yes*. As already mentioned, this award represented, beyond any doubt, a positive thing for Bob Dylan, however the "great revolution" and the "great debate" was done by

the Swedish Academy. This is the reason for which one may assert that it was the image of the "great Nobel Foundation" that benefited from the situation. On this occasion, it transmitted three important messages belonging to the universe of values and indicating the changes produced at the level of collective thinking.

The first message indicates that the period in which the print was the main mode of transmitting information is past, since quite a long time, while the Swedish Academy has as main objective preservation of its position, namely defending such a situation. Against this background, the profession of writer gets modified, whereas the innovative tendencies in the field should leave aside the stylistic restrictions and study thoroughly the new mechanisms of communication. Comparatively with visual arts, for example, literature is always stone-still at the level of the eighth decade of the last century, uncapable of expressing the dynamism of the new millennium. Under such circumstances, no matter how paradoxical would this appear, nowadays, literature, considered since long as a revolutionary, reforming domain, has become the symbol of traditionalism. The alarm signal blown by the representatives of the Swedish Academy indicates the necessity of identifying other means of communication, other backgrounds, as a melody, known as orally transmitting a piece of information, may possess the stylistic subtlety necessary for being accepted as high quality literature. Which is the consequence of this mode of thinking? A continuous quest of new subtleties, identification of solutions capable of facing the dynamics of the actual world, going beyond self-importance.

According to the second message, literature should not be written only for intellectual elites, instead it should be open and addressed to an as large number of people as possible. It plays a cathartic, educational part, so that it is the main modality through which man should be made aware of the realities and problems surrounding him, of living or resuming unique fictional experiences, capable of consolidating his own self. The main scope of humanistic sciences should be the formation of man. However, such an objective is not possible if an ever increasing, deeper cleavage is manifested between the

intellectual elite representing the humanistic sciences and the rest of the population.

Fragmentation is not restricted to the intellectuality – rest of population relation, it is actually the knowledge that had been split into isolated domains, no longer capable of communicating among them. The elites, the middle class and the rest of the population do not represent a modern structuring, any longer, being instead built up by the supremacy of certain domains over the others. The classically-trained intellectual does not represent a model for the middle class, any longer – on the contrary, being replaced by the image of the efficient specialist, dedicated on the whole to his unidirectional concerns. The rare situations in which an interdisciplinary dialogue is present are generally professional and marginal. Attaining a positive evolution within the society assumes prioritarily identification of the communication means capable of building up bridges. Such a bridge was considered to be music, as the decision of the Swedish Academy attempted at bringing together two directions having a quite close collaboration at pragmatic level, yet radically separated at academic level.

However, the music – literature relation should be also viewed from a different perspective, involving the development of musical creation and offering a new valoric level to laic music. In such cases, folk, rock music may appear as a cultural and mediation element between the value levels specific to western culture. The issue deriving from here is that of education. How can be education approached in the context of the new communication means? A facile access to information should support consolidation of the epistemic and axiological formation of each person. Unexpectedly and contrarily, however, this came to prevent censoring of information from an axiological perspective, which was the attribution of institutional mechanisms (e.g., the editorial boards). The erroneous information, the non-value, the manipulating information flood the on-line space, the only possible censor being its reader. This situation calls for a new type of education, substantiated on a profound, well-rooted knowledge, including critical structures permitting selection of information and

identification of errors and of their impact with maximum precision and speed. Such a type of education should transform people into a censor fully conscious of the social responsibility they assume both in the development of their own personality and as to the role they play as a first-hand or secondary source of information.

The third message is of pragmatic nature. We are told that, in the society of today, image is very important. In the relation between essence and appearance, it was appearance to win. If, in our opinion, the first two messages provided only a description of the status-quo of our universe of values, such an interpretation observed an action oriented towards reduction of the axiological level of reality. In this respect, precisely for avoiding closing of its confines, the Nobel Foundation initiated some actions, such as the one meant at identifying the popularity of its own winners. Consequently, according to a hierarchy of the most popular winners, the most "popular"⁸ laureate is Frederick G. Banting (prize for Medicine in 1923), while Martin Luther King Jr. (Peace Prize in 1964) is placed before Albert Einstein (prize for Physics in 1921), and Malala Yousafzai (Peace Prize in 2014) before Marie Curie (the only woman who was awarded the prize twice, for Physics in 1903 and for Chemistry in 1911). The author will not analyze this top, as he does not understand its significance. In the opinion of the author, this top evidences the difference between the two levels at which the reality of the Nobel prizes should be grasped: the authentic one, involving remarkable achievements, the result of a life-long effort, of the recognized genius, and that of superficiality and popularity. The two aspects are confronted, so that one cannot avoid the question: what is the most/really important? We do hope that the first one will be recognized as such, the competition of image being only a marketing manoeuvre. In this way, shifting from appearance to essence remains one of the greatest challenges of the millenium, whereas the capacity of identifying the essential elements of the illusory world we are living in will grant our survival as species.

Conclusions

We are now living in a world whose advance and changing rhythm are produced at incredible speed, which explains the modification of our

whole axiological universe. The practically infinite communication possibilities transform the universe of values into a continuous storm, so that the periphery may become the center, the secondary - essential, while appearance gets transformed into a reality. However, no matter how tempestuous this world would be, there will always exist pillars bordering it. Usually, these pillars are of institutional nature and a symbol of traditionalism. When one of these pillars is affected by the impact of change, these are profound, definite, the only solution being a radical reform in which the center becomes the person, as the main decision-maker of his own epistemic existence. The fully opening world hides inside itself unforeseen depths, and it is only one's power of discernment that may support us and help us continue. In the communication world of today, only one salvation may exist: a well-established theoretical education, backed up by critical reasoning and accomplished creativity.

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Endnotes

1. Information used in this first paragraph was taken over from the following sites: www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/; www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/13/bob-dylan-wins-2016-nobel-prize-in-literature; www.theguardian.com/music/2016/oct/17/nobel-prize-bob-dylan-unable-to-reach; <http://bobdylan.com/>;
2. www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 13.00
3. www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1953/churchill-facts.html, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 14.30
4. www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/morrison-facts.html, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 15.00
5. The Guradian, www.theguardian.com/books/2008/oct/01/nobelprize.usa, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 18.00
6. <http://www.uniforum.uio.no/nyheter/2010/11/bob-dylan-blir-universitetsfag.html>, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 17.00;
7. <http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ifikk/IDE2084/>, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 17.00;
8. www.nobelprize.org, 27.11.2016, h (GMT+2) 16.30