

THE POWER OF REMEMBERING

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Abstract

The main idea of the essay is that remembering (whose meaning here involved is that of bringing up to present experiences recorded by emotional memory), is the same with the act of artistic creation. In support of this idea, we take into consideration two literary works (*Childhood Memories*, written by Ion Creangă, and the poem *O, remain...*, by Mihai Eminescu) showing how, through creation, the two writers remember, bring up to present and live again the experiences of their childhood, forever preserved within their emotional memory.

For those accustomed to such matters, it is not something of a novelty to say that any act of authentic creation is an act of remembering, as well. This theory has been known and acknowledged since Antiquity. For instance, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, it is said that Mnemosyne, the impersonation of memory, is the mother of all Muses and the poet, inspired by them, spontaneously remembers the truths that he has forgotten after he has drunk, like any other mortal, from the water of Lethe, *the river of forgetfulness*. Obviously, we are not talking about some accidental truths, but about primordial truths, the ones that lead us to the origin, to the beginnings and to the essence of things.

So, saying that to create is to remember, as well, is a truth known for a long while.

And yet, we keep on saying it. We say it because of our belief that it is a precious truth which, if we think on it for a moment, may shine again through time and bring more light into our consciences.

We shall illustrate this idea with Ion Creangă, the writer whose main work has even in its title the word "memory ? remembrance"¹.

Thus, while writing his main and most famous work (*Childhood Memories*), Creangă remembers. What does he remember? Happenings and people from the space and time of his childhood? Of course, he remembers all these, too. But,

at the same time, Creangă remembers much more than these.

And let us remember a little ourselves!

For the teenager Ion Creangă, leaving his mountain village to attend the courses of the Theological Seminary of Iași meant breaking up with the paradise of his childhood and teenage years in his native village, Humulești. He would not have left his native place *for the world*. He knew, or he foresaw that, once in Iași, he would feel a stranger and would remain a stranger till the end. Creangă will never manage to fit completely in the world of Iași, which, given his social status, he became part of. One of the letters he sent to Eminescu, after the latter had moved to Bucharest, ends with these words: *Come, brother Mihai, come, for I am a stranger without you!*² (*Vino, frate Mihai, vino, căci fără tine sunt străin!*) At the same time, no returning to Humulești would have been possible, any longer. If, forcing the hand of destiny, he had returned to his native village, he would have still remained a stranger. The world he had left in his adolescence did not exist anymore, everything had been changed, while the adolescent who had left a world so dear to him had become himself a different person.

A certain conflict between him and the world he was given to live in had to be manifested, with its climax in Creangă's defrocking and, consequently, in his leaving the position of a school teacher. For him, this was a moment of great inner crisis: *I sat a day and a night, elbows on my knees, temples in my hands, looking at no one and nothing and not wanting to see or hear anyone*². (*Am stat o zi și o noapte cu coatele pe genunchi și cu tâmpilele în mâini și nu mă uitam la nimeni și la nimic și nu vream să auz nici să văz pe nimeni*). And maybe it was only then when, in the most intense effort to summon all his inner strength, Creangă started remembering...

Many of the harshnesses that we encounter in our passing through life, if properly received and accepted, may be converted into something whose worth is unvaluable. Freed from the obligations of some positions by which he felt trapped in the social life, Creangă remembers, from that moment on, more than just people and happenings from the time of his childhood. All his attention, focused now entirely on his inner being, starts recovering what he thought that may have been lost forever. He recovers what one might call, "the state of being a child", a certain way of resonating with the world. A manner of being that has as its main features only playing and lack of care, innocence and good will, freedom of fantasy and joy.

Located in the depths of the subconscious, where the common time of our daily life can no longer act, this state of being may be reactivated anytime through creative-remembering. The story-teller, like the reader sensitive to his message, makes the leap from this common time into another time, and rejoices. He feels that his *heart throbs with joy, even to this day (îi saltă și acum inima de bucurie)*. It is the joy of creation and remembering, the same in its essence with a child's joy. An innocent joy that no one and nothing can take it away as it remains within the eternal time.

In a way, just like Creangă, Eminescu lives the same experience. A complete integration in the world that he was living in is no longer possible. The world in which he, like Baudelaire's albatross, might live completely free is one that the ordinary man has no access to, a situation which explains the conflict that, one way or another, bursts out in the poet's relations with the world. Hence, the poet's running away from the world, from his common time, trying to find himself in another time and a different universe. Thus, like Creangă, through creative-remembering, in a poem like the one entitled *O, remain... (O, rămâi)*, Eminescu manages to recover and recreate the blissful state of childhood.

The calling that the personified wood addresses the child becomes for the poet a way of *remembering* and entering another time (*illo tempore*) and a lost universe, of living once again

the condition of being a child. From the depths of the subconscious where it *has been hidden* and where time can no longer alter it, this state of being a child returns through creative-remembering, being manifested as the experience of an unspeakable, unique beauty of the child who fully resonates with nature. It is a heavenly state of being, an experience whose unique ground and motivation is love, the unconditioned love which, only it, can lead to genuine knowledge: *O, remain, dear one, I love you,/ Stay with me in my fair land,/ For your dreamings and your longings/ Only I can understand. (O, rămâi, rămâi la mine,/ Te iubesc atât de mult!/ Ale tale doruri toate/ Numai eu știu să le-ascult.)*

Just like Adam before the Fall, the child is the king, the master of nature, and being so, he can feel the deep mysteries hiding in nature, in life, in the world, in man: *You, who like a prince reclining/ Over the pool with heaven starred;/ You who gaze up from the water/ With such earnest deep regard. (În al umbrei întuneric/ Te asemăn unui prinț,/ Ce se uit-adânc în ape/ Cu ochi negri și cuminți)*

The last stanza of the poem was rightfully interpreted as expressing the poet's belief on the grown-up's impossibility of returning to childhood: *Now though even I roamed that country/ How could I its charm recall.../ Where has boyhood gone, I wonder./ With its pool and woods and all? (Astăzi chiar de m-aș întoarce/ A-nțelege n-o mai pot.../ Unde ești copilărie,/ Cu pădurea ta cu tot?).* The existence of a grown-up is happening within the space and time of daily life and between him and the former child an irreversible gap has occurred. It is a finding that the poet states with a deep sense of regret.

In her monumental work entitled *Eminescu and the German Romanticism*, Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, making a comparative analysis of this very last stanza, concludes that: *The heart-rending question that puts the equality sign between the paradise of childhood and the paradise of the wood echoes a bitter pain when facing the unremovable order of things in the contingency, that cannot be undone. By the suffering it shares with the whole universe, this stanza becomes one of the most beautiful of the world*³.

Trying to continue the analytic thread of Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga's comment, we will say

that, undoubtedly, one can perceive discreet and profound suffering, the suffering that can be shared by every human being. But, is it only suffering? Why is it then that these delightful lines are now regarded by the renowned Eminescu's exegete as one of the most beautiful of the world?

The poet, like the grown-up sensitive to the aesthetic values of art, at least in the moments of creation or in when perceiving the message transmitted by the work of art, is not an ordinary man. For him, the path of a different way of being, other than that of ordinary people, is not totally closed. He may even return, re-enter the time and space of childhood, as the lines of the first part of the poem show. It is a sacred space, transfigured in the light of the moon, and it is also a sacred time, the dimensions of which no longer fit the common time: *See you thus amidst the ripples/Which the moon's pale beams engage,/ And your years seem but an instant,/ And each instant seems an age.* (*Și privind în luna plină / La văpaia de pe lacuri,/ Anii tăi se par ca clipe,/ Clipe dulci se par ca veacuri.*)

Obviously, no one can remain forever in such a state of supreme happiness. It is rather like pre-testing of what will be when, biologically, we will have been departed from contingency...

This poem may be regarded as a model of the way in which, assuming the profound suffering

within the very existence of man on earth, a true poet converts it into joy-giving value, an aesthetic value, of course.

Thus, both Eminescu and Creangă are recovering, through artistic creation, the blissful state of childhood. From beyond time, they bring it back to reality. But, to do this, they should remember and realize that, in fact, where they bring it back from to be once again manifested, it had always existed.

References

1. Speranția, Th. D. (1976) *Amintiri despre Ion Creangă*, Iași, *Viața românească*, pag. 13, ap. George Munteanu, *Introducere în opera lui Ion Creangă*, Editura Minerva, București.
2. Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, Zoe (2009) *Eminescu și romantismul german*, Editura Nicodim Caligraful, Mănăstirea Putna.

Endnotes

- 1 The original Romanian title (*Amintiri din copilărie*) can be easily translated as *Childhood Memories* or as *Childhood Rememberings*.
- 2 Th. D. Speranția, *Amintiri despre Ion Creangă*, Iași, *Viața românească*, pag. 13, ap. George Munteanu, *Introducere în opera lui Ion Creangă*, Editura Minerva, București, 1976, pag. 24.
- 3 Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, *Eminescu și romantismul german*, Editura Nicodim Caligraful, Mănăstirea Putna, 2009, pag. 138.