

THE PARADOXICAL UNITY OF THE EUROPEAN CULTURE: THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE COMMON VALUES AND THE DIVERSITY OF EXPRESSIONS

As it is well known, Europe is not only a real entity, it is also an imaginary one. All the difficulties in European activities show that the political Europe cannot exist when intellectuals, artists, creators, in one word those who contribute to outlining the collective imaginary, cannot make up a common, strong, stimulating dream, which should be the pedestal for a real identity and a European culture [Viegnes, p.40]

Jean-Jacques Wunenbuger points out that Europe belongs to an ascending imaginary and a stimulating hybrid, based on powerful images and ideas, as, for example, that of an Empire, also based on ideologemes derived from myths. Even today, Europe lives by myths which guide the meaning of the present and of the future, claiming to have a common transversal mythology. This symbolic culture does not contribute to a mythical Europe, but to a consistent European mythology which feeds/supports the European interculturality and literature. The great myths of the modern epoch, as is Don Juan or Faustus, are "characters of the European mythology" in the same way as are Robinson Crusoe or Gulliver. The comparative literature is the discipline which studies "the European community of myths and themes".

Europe itself is a mythical figure (coming from Asia!), which became the name and emblem of another continent. Ovid presents the image of the young girl abducted by Zeus in the form of a bull. The European identity is thus placed under the baroque sign of journey into the unknown and of the metamorphosis, but also under the sign of abduction. Is in the logic of European adventure of discovery of other continents, the adventure of European languages and culture, says Pierre Brunel (p. 45).

Francis Caludon, in an interdisciplinary study about European cultures, noticed the nostalgia of the European spirit in looking for its own

multiple, convergent and secret roots (p. 62). For centuries, Europeans were faced with the decision of coordinating and adjusting ideologies and cultures of various origins. The Europe of the spirits is in a close relationship, without completely identifying itself with the political entities which shaped the European space (the Roman Empire, the Carolingian Empire, the Holy Roman Germanic Empire, the Napoleonic Europe etc.). Structuring elements of the European geography represent the ancient Europe, which was a Greek and Latin domain, the Germany of Tacitus, the Gaul of Caesar, the Holy Roman Germanic Empire, the Napoleonic Empire. Krzysztof Pomian and others consider to be three unifications in Europe: the first, in the medieval Europe (on the ruins of the Roman Empire), the second, in the 16th-18th centuries (the Republic of Letters/the Republic of Scholars), and the third, the one taking place these days. The hegemonies of the great powers were variable (Spain, France, England, Austria, Russia), nevertheless, the political hegemony did not involved automatically the cultural, linguistic or the literary ones.

To understand what the European culture really is, C.-G. Dubois defines it as a palimpsest, which put into evidence a succession of superposed strata. He identifies the following **diachrony of the cultural periods**: the ancient paganisms and their inheritance (naturalism, the freedom of research and secularity), Christianity and its inheritance (human dignity and the humanitarian principles), technocultures and the mythologies of modernity (the myth of the earthly happiness, of the progress and the man's promotion in the universe). Grete Tartler points out the role of each period in the diversification of the present day European civilization: "from the Greek antiquity we have inherited the rationality, from Rome – a certain vision of the

reorganization of policy and law, from the Renaissance and the Illuminism - the taste for tolerance, innovation and discovery" (p.34).

Tzvetan Todorov remarks that the secret European trumps are rooted in the geography and history of this continent. The Greek way of thinking came over, being reinterpreted by the Roman civilization. Christianity was implemented upon a previous religion, the Judaism, which it reshaped to serve its purpose. And Leszek Kolakowski puts into evidence the potential of totalitarianism which exists in Christianity. In Renaissance there is the tendency for the two great trends, which were already hybrids, (Greek-Roman and Judaic Christian) to amalgamate and harmonize, while in the classical period, humanism is opposed to the Christian dogma, and in the 19th century the liberals and the socialists are confronted with the problem of the role of the state in society. Todorov concludes that Europe makes use of a **permanent conceptual conversion and adaptation**. While, on the other side of the western world, the United States of America give priority to unity, the European tradition is based on plurality. In fact, the extra-European cultures upset numerous European certainties. Based on its century-old experience of plurality, diversity and complexity, the European Union embodies a model of a specific society. Making reference to the plurality of languages, religions, as well as to political institutions, which caused numerous conflicts and made millions of victims, Todorov considers that the Europeans, today, can benefit from the positive effects as the recognition of the interior plurality, of tolerance, of denying to treat any difference in terms of good or bad. The European genius is based not only on pluralism and change, as Edgar Morin underlines in *To Think Europe*, but also on the dialogue of pluralisms which bring about the change. And the new European consciousness is born from discovering its common destiny: "We live with the illusion that identity is an indivisible unity, while, in fact, it is always **unitas multiplex**. We are all **multi-identitary beings**, which means that each of us, in fact, embodies a family, a local, regional, national, supranational identity (Slavic, German, Latin) and, possibly, a religious and doctrinarian identity. These identities may enter into conflict

(...), which is to be found in the European spirit approaching the equation of seeking harmony. Diversity is a given good and not an obstacle in Denis de Rougemont's opinion. Together with Europeans' passion for individual changes, latent crises and conflicts, we can speak about the **paradoxical unity of Europe**, based on long processes of homogenisation, but also, of diversification, because, as Edgar Morin remarks, "in the European culture not only guiding ideas are important (Christianity, humanism, reason, science), but also the correlation of these ideas with the opposite ones. The European genius represents not only pluralism and change, but also the dialogue of pluralisms which bring about change. "The dialogism and the capacity of negation (Mefistopheles, the spirit which denies everything), as it is known, represents the core of the European culture. In a polemic with Morin, Jean-Marie Domenach (*Europe: a challenge of culture*) places more accent on **Europe's capacity of going beyond its limits and to self modeling**, which represents the source of the permanent renaissance of the European culture and which also means that the crisis in Europe is not a collapse, but a permanent condition. The main value of the European culture is "the affirmation, the profound perception and the subtlety of the human being in its unrepeatability, in its beauty and rights". Such examples plead in favour of European open cultural space which is continuously redefining itself, as D.-H. Pageaux puts it, and in spite of conflicts and tensions, it renews the ancient ideal of the Greek *Paideia*, *Humanitas* in Latin, aspiring towards unity (p. 8,19).

Europe has the capacity of assembling, without mixing up the greatest diversities, associating the opposites in an inseparable way. The old continent has unity only in and through **multiplicity**¹.

As C.-G. Dubois underlines, the main motor of a European culture is not unity, but harmony: "It is this permanent will to harmonize the plurality, included in its physical, ethical, historical configuration, which gives the character of singularity to the European imaginary" (p.322). Sorin Alexandrescu presented in the *Provincial Europes* (p. 36, 39), the character of interference of Europes, in which the old

paradigm does not disappear, it either coexists with the old one or becomes an atemporal permanence. Reality has demonstrated that there is only the **Europe of differences**, the fundamental pillars for national and possibly, supranational identity being race, origin, language and religion. Thus, the European culture is recognizable and distinct from that of other continents, being made up of the confluence of many cultures: that of the Middle East, of Greece and Rome, of the Christianity, of the Celts, Germans, Scandinavians, Slaves and Arabs².

On the other hand, the **European cosmopolitanism** is a given fact, recorded in several centuries. Thus, Rousseau wrote, that his epoch did not have French, Germans, Spaniards, or even English any more, there were only Europeans. Everybody has the same tastes, the same manners, because none of them has received a national shape for a certain institution (p. 171). That is why in many other works, he will propose reinforcement of the cultural identity in the national sense (holidays, theatre etc). On the opposite, cosmopolitanism was understood by Madame de Stael as being a synthesis, which the national genius can offer in one moment or another one.

Before having a political sense, the **European construction imposed itself as a spiritual space and concept**, elaborated mainly by writers and philosophers: the European Council about which Novalis spoke for the first time, the Christian state idealized by Schlegel, the perfect republic for Schleyermacher, the search for alternatives to the Napoleonic state with Coleridge, Wordsworth and Saint-Simon, "the European spirit" is to be found with Madame de Stael at the beginning of the 19th century. The comments regarding European identities influenced the personalities of the 19th centuries (Heine, Hugo, Nietzsche, Unamuno) and those of the 20th century (R. Rolland who set up the magazine *Europe*, Berdaev, Zweig, Hofmannstahl, Valery, Curtius, Lorca, Havel). Their vast culture leads them in a spontaneous way to the conception of the European culture and literature.

Literatures, especially in the Nation-State, are connected with the national identity and are anchored either in the history or in the geography of the state. The various political, linguistic,

religious and cultural empires have left successively their mark upon the European culture.

Even from the beginning of the 19th century, F. Schlegel considered Europe to be an "intellectual unity". Even if he defined it as a country of diversity and instability, he considered the European literature to be a coherent entity, having in view only the "great literatures".

In the second decade of the 19th century, Goethe considered the universal literature to be the European literature in the first place. He experienced the periods of the European pre-romanticism and romanticism with the feeling that it was a European movement without frontiers. In his discussions with Eckermann on 13th January 1827, **Goethe** introduced, as it is known, the notion of "Weltliteratur", saying that "The national literature has lost some of its importance, the time for the universal literature has arrived and everybody should act now so that to hasten the coming up of this period of time". Adrian Marino has adopted the idea launched brilliantly in the last century, according to which the universal literature represents a model for the literary "universality" (p. 57).

According to E.-R. Curtius, one can speak about a unitary European literature from the Latin Middle Ages. After the conquest of Constantinople (1453) the Europeans, threatened by the Otoman Empire, became aware of their new fragile identity. This medieval period, European in its essence, based on the primordially of the Christian religion and the use of Latin, gave birth to the main works on which the modern culture was founded: saga, epic poem, the sagas transmitted or written in the national languages which were in full development. From this moment we can speak about the paradoxical will towards uniformization and diversification on the European continent.

In the introduction to the volume *Precis de litterature europeenne*, coordinated by Beatrice Didier, she points out that the diversity-unity of the European literature should be studied according to its various geographical spaces, to the great periods in the development of the literary genres.

Rene Wellek spoke about the fundamental aspects regarding the periods in any literary

history, who considers that the literary periods can be established only starting from genuine literary criteria. And, he considers the notion of literary movement to be the one most close to this sense. Another important theoretician of literature, Yves Chevrel, in the same context, underlines that the landmarks of the national literature can be different. Thus, the history of the French literature develops as a succession of centuries, and the English literature is based on the reigns of kings (the Elisabethan literatures, the Victorian literatures etc), while the German literature refers to great events of a literary origin, as Goethe's death, but not only on these. In this way, the national historiographies have the tendency to follow the history of the nation or of the State, respectively. R. Wellek proposes 6 periods in the European literature: the *Renaissance*, the *Baroque* (less accepted by the French school), *Classicism*, *Romanticism*, *Realism*, *Symbolism*. Sticking to his principle of dealing exclusively with literary criteria, he makes no reference to the *Illuminism*. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the time disparity between national literatures and the coexistence of the literary movements beginning with the end of the 19th century. Yves Chevrel also speaks about the overlapping of some of these periods – Baroque/Classicism, Naturalism/Symbolism (p. 34).

In the modern time there will be favoured periods during which literatures could influence each other. Thus the 15th and 16th centuries were predominantly Italian and Spanish; the end of the 15th century predominantly Italian, Spanish and English; the 17th and 18th were mainly French, English, then German etc.

If the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century witnessed numerous artistic and literary trends (Romantism, Realism, Naturalism, Surrealism, Existentialism, the theatre of the absurd, "the new novel" etc), in the postmodernist period the personalities of great value were dominant. Mainly, when we have in view literatures written in languages with a limited circulation, we make reference to the most representative authors, who embody these literatures: out of the whole Swedish literature, Artur Strinberg is the "European" writer, as it is Henrik Ibsen for Norway, Sandor Petofi for

Hungary etc. But, as Yves Chevrel (p.30) remarks, in the same context we should consider the role played by some writers in exile, like Ibsen in Germany or Adam Mickiewicz in France or the naturalized writers like Cioran in France or Celan in Germany. Wladimir Troubetzkoi will say that Europe is not a monolith, it is a structure in development in which Puskin tries to answer to Stendhal, Dostoivski to Balzac, Thoma Mann, Tolstoi, Soljenitin, Dante (p.183).

In spite of an extremely diverse patrimony, it is normal for the European identity to be looked for in unity, in this way expressing the constituent principles on the basis of **unity and diversity, of literature and literatures**. Lucien Guissard notices that several researchers are skeptical when one deals with the concepts of "European culture" or "European literature" in the singular. The Polish Milosz, in *Another Europe*, says that each country has the tendency to have a concentric approach: the European literature is not perceived in Poland as it may be in France.

Vajda pointed out that the profile of the common European literature is distinguished by **two types of literary structures**: structures of a long term (genres) and structures of short term, the so called periods of style (epochs and trends). Both structures in their turn are distinguished from those belonging to other regions. The researcher draws an important conclusion – all European literatures have had the **same genres and species**: ballad, elegy, short story, novel, drama etc. This fact proves the existence and unity of the European literature. Referring to the **historical structures of styles, trends and epochs**, even if they are not identical (the Anglo-Saxon *modernism* is not the French one, and the Western *realism* does not coincides with the Eastern one): in all European literatures there are present trends like romantism, realism, naturalism, symbolism, while in other parts of the world such phenomena could have appeared as a consequence of the European influence.

According to E.-R. Curtius and H. Bloom, the idea of a European literature is based on a literary canon (Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Joyce, Proust etc.). On the other hand, one can follow the principle of diversification in the framework of the complex mixture of traditions, languages, ideologies, as Denis

Rougemont and Remo Ceserani speak about: the European Literature is not the result of the summing up of national literatures, which we should draw together, compare, unify (horribile dictu!), the opposite being true: our 'national' literatures are the result of the differentiation (often belated) of the common core of the European literature" (de Rougemont *apud* Ceserani, p 28). The specific character of the European literature is given by the fact that it is not based on a history of writers and works but on the relationships between different instances, as Yves Chevrel remarked (p.24).

The objective of the comparative literature, also proposed by D.-H. Pageaux, is the study of differences ("ecartes differentiels"). In practice, such an anthology was proposed by the authors of *Memoire d'Europe*, for whom, even if the texts are chosen according to the way the idea about Europe, about nation or the image of the cultural contacts are treated, inside each period, the main objective is the presentation of a panorama of literatures which represents the cultural life of the continent (v. II, p. 14). The majority of the chosen texts focus on questions regarding the national, regional, and European identity, and also regarding the social and cultural relationships an individual or a writer or a hero may establish with the world, with other people, and this is exactly the function of literature. Dante, Goethe and Chateaubriand belong to the whole Europe while they were eminently Italian, German and French. They would not have served Europe if they had been stateless or if they had written in Esperanto, Volapuk, as general de Gaulle said in 1962 (quoted in *Genton*, 1993, p. 305). A similar interpretation is to be found with the Romanian researchers. Thus, Vasile Voia claims that the comparative literature is not interested in the "popular", ethnic, specific character, of the national character of the French, English, German, Romanian, Hungarian literature etc., he asks himself what features from the outside have been attributed to these literatures: "The comparatistic imagology strives towards understanding the forms of the appearance of images and their effect. (...). We speak about *autoimage* and *heteroimage* (an image born from the outside)."

The study of the European cohesion is linked to alterity, by the relation between I and the Other One: "Identity is built up by contrast, in separation or in confrontation with the other one. **The European peoples have recognized the game of alterity as identity.** (...) We deal with a double image (we are Italians, Hungarians, Germans, Romanians etc., but we are also Europeans) and with a historical linguistic and concrete polyphony." Starting from the fact that each European nation has constructed and applied a model of a pluriethnic and plurilinguistic society, Vasile Voia will assert that "each nation-state represented and represents an image on a small scale of Europe itself - a community of differences and of a system of dialogue." Along the same line, the *Manifesto for the study of European literatures* written in 2007, underlined that literature can, with the same titles the political and social life to awake the consciousness of a community³.

We will draw the conclusion that the influence of national literatures/representative authors on each other in a relationship of exchange or opposition (ideas that imply diversity) demonstrate how national literatures have taken shape as a vast ensemble. Out of the factors that have contributed to this process, we can mention the fluctuating history of the European frontiers, wars, intellectual journeys. Such phenomena represent **constant themes of the European literature**. In an interesting conference entitled *A Certain Idea about Europe*, George Steiner speaks about the important towns (as Athens, Rome or Jerusalem) and about Judaism, Diaspora and certain places as being the **dynamic components of the European cultural identity**.

Studying the relationships between individual national literatures represent the basis for understanding both the differences and the convergences. In his studies, Hugo Dyserinck points out that the **relativisation of the national thinking** creates the European consciousness, the "return" to the **feeling of unity of the European literature**. The German and French comparativism considers the major aim of the comparative literature to be the participation to what is called the study of a Europe seen as a spiritual and cultural laboratory - "Laboratorium Europe".

Referring to the comparative literature, Alexandru Dutu points out that the importance of a unitary perspective of a European literature is given by "its merit to offer each reader a larger perspective upon the literary phenomenon than that discovered in a national literature (...). Instead of a list of masterpieces (...), the comparative literature has the specificity, which enables it to remake the coherence of the literary phenomenon: it goes beyond the geographical frontiers in the same way as it crosses the demarcations of the mental disciplines. **The comparative literature places back the text into the cultural life of the country of origin and, at the same time, in the country of the reader**".

In the same context, we have to speak about the European literature from the perspective of its reception. We can speak about reading, influence or imitation of the foreign works in different national contexts. Thus, it is known Hoffmann's role in setting up the fantastic genre, the passionate texts of Russians, Italians and Austrians, of Zola's novels. Enlarging the number of examples, we will see that all works do not pass over the same frontiers, while others do not cross them at all. In this context we have to mention the extraordinary role of translations to which the world literature is much indebted. Here, we can notice a great time disparity, Shakespeare became really known in the 18th century, while the novels of Paul de Kock were translated into Russian almost immediately.

Regarding the **demarcation line between the western Roman culture and the eastern Byzantine one**, "the forms of the styles and cultural-historical trends often represent differences and deviations from a **temporal and structural point of view**" (Voia)⁴. Adrian Marino concludes, in his numerous analyses, that the pro-European orientation develops the literary consciousness in the western space and "the cultural resistance" in the eastern space.

Maria Delaperriere (p.9) says that, while the western literature enjoyed the luxury of gratitude and dictated the rules of universalness, the literature from the eastern part of Europe, born in the shadow and often under the yoke of the great powers, were first of all placed in the service of defending the national autonomy. None of the nations in this part of the world

escape this terrible traumatism represented by the loss of independence. The period of totalitarianism reinforced this feeling of inferiority experienced by the alienated cultures belonging to the same ideological trend⁵. In this context Kundera speaks about a "kidnapped Europe", and Milosz about "another Europe".

In reality, Maria Delaperriere (17) writes, things are more complex: while at the beginning of the 20th century the liberated countries were looking for western values, today, this search for values is more difficult in the time of their relativization, and the universalness of which the western Europe is so proud of has been emptied of its substance. In this way, the literature of the Eastern Europe and the Central Europe seem to be in search, oscillating between the desire to live the modernity in its depth (which has been denied to it till now) and the obsession of postmodernism. Numerous writers from this space aspire after the universalness, reaching it by irony and self-consciousness, as it is the case with some Czech writers like Milan Kundera, Bogumil Hrabal, the Hungarian Peter Esterhazy, the Polish Slavomir Mrozec, the Albanian Ismail Kadare, Estonian Jaan Kross, the Romanian from Basarabia Aureliu Busuioc.

In the outstanding study *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, the coordinators Marcel Cornis-Pop and John Neubauer focused on the analysis of the specific literary processes in these areas, which were under the empires of the previous centuries, areas-victims of the great and small wars and of the drastic ideologies of the moving and reestablishing frontiers, theatres for xenophobia and chauvinism, but, at the same time, they were fertile places for the cultures of various ethnic media, in a fascinating kaleidoscope, seemingly contradicting Huntington's thesis regarding the "clashing of civilizations" (Tribuna, No. 203, 16-28 February, 2011).

Out of the themes of the Eastern Europe literature, which distinguishes it from the other European literatures, we can mention a few as: non-accepted marginalization, the feeling of frontier mobility and the problematic identity.

In this context, the Romanian literary texts should be interpreted according to the European

themes, and the discussions should be focused on the notion of identity in relation with the texts from other cultures. Here we will accept the perspective promoted by the critic Mircea Martin: "For me Romanism is a component part of Europeanism, and not the other way round" (*The only Criticism*, p.346)

Thus, we will draw the conclusion that the cultural and literary identity of Europe is still to be on the cards, continuing to focus on strong elements of appreciation as it is creation, tradition, import/export and selection.

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Endnotes

1. Arnaud de Raulin: D'un point de vue stratégique, au lendemain de la Chute du Mur de Berlin, le 9 novembre 1989, l'Europe s'est trouvée face au défi de surmonter une division historique et de *construire un monde multipolaire*. (...) Depuis l'origine, l'Europe communautaire se veut un club «ouvert».
2. Larousse Dictionary define these differences as follows: "L'Europe n'est quelque chose qu'autant qu'elle se nomme la France, l'Angleterre, la Russie, l'Autriche, l'Espagne. Ici le particulier l'emporte sur le général. Il ne saurait en être de même pour l'Amérique, l'Asie, l'Afrique, l'Océanie; là, c'est le général qui a le pas sur le particulier" (Larousse, 1866-1876).
3. Federal nature of literature was also stressed by Anne Brasseur: What is literature if not a way to be solidary, to discover by reading what other people live, hope and suffer? Pierre Brunel also records that comparative literature dreamed, from its beginning, to abolish borders, to promote multilingualism, create a community spirits (p. 38).
4. *Renaissance occurs in many Eastern Europe countries later and partially*, but "with the Enlightenment is registered the emergence of a new phase of the structural unit of European literature. *Starting with the Enlightenment, Europe's literatures evolve in parallel, start to have a common history, beyond some differences of chronology.*" (Voia).
5. «Un fait singulier est survenu, très massif en Europe; les régimes totalitaires exerçant une tyrannie idéologique sur les activités de l'esprit, celles-ci se sont réfugiées dans l'exil, la contestation, la dissidence, avec une littérature inédite et souvent d'une qualité éminente. Il reste à écrire l'histoire du «réalisme socialiste» comme de la dissidence littéraire.» (Dans *Patrimoine littéraire européen*, sous la direction de M. Polet).