

MACEDONKI'S MODERNISM. HERMENEUTICAL APPEAL

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Résumé : Cet article, qui fait partie d'une étude plus vaste, vise à structurer un système de réception de Macedonski, qui indique l'évolution de l'œuvre et de l'écrivain, de la contemporanéité jusqu'au présent. Une telle approche est indispensable pour comprendre l'échec prolongé dans la réception de l'œuvre, marquant en même temps les moments décisifs du changement d'attitude de la critique littéraire, qui conduisent à la consécration de l'écrivain. La simple explication polémique pour argumenter la contestation de la création à l'époque est insuffisante, car les générations de critiques littéraires, qui n'ont pas été témoins de l'esprit combatif de l'homme Macedonski et de son manque de délicatesse dans certaines situations, évitent le traitement de la création. Par conséquent, la tâche d'essayer de dissoudre les mystifications qui entourent l'œuvre et le créateur reste sur les épaules des anciens disciples.

La nécessité d'une telle approche est argumentée principalement par la nécessité de lier à la contemporanéité la vision critique par rapport à Alexandru Macedonski et par la nécessité d'observer aussi l'absence d'un dialogue efficace entre les voix de la critique littéraire, par lesquelles on peut expliquer le statut de la création macédonskienne dans de différentes périodes historiques et les mutations produites dans la réception. Le titre interrogatif de l'ouvrage indique d'une part, l'un des thèmes préférés de la critique littéraire à l'égard de Macedonski, et d'autre part, l'une des raisons de l'assimilation tardive du poète.

Mots-clés : Alexandru Macedonski, électisme, herméneutique, itinéraire critique, dialogue critique.

Introduction

This present research follows the sinuous route of Macedonki's creation with referring to negative criticism or to hermeneutical errors, concerning the modernism of creation that therefore delayed the assimilation of his work. The cultural and historical context definitely blurs the value of creation. The 19th century marks the beginning of the modern Romanian society, in terms of rise of democracy, the development of the bourgeoisie and the beginning of industrialisation. Transmitted at the *aesthetic existential* level through exploiting the sublime feelings, the sublime individual nature, the elitism or the taste in appreciating art, *modernism* penetrates the literary field, existing in a genuine

form in Macedonski's work as well. The negative shades involved in the modernization of the society draw the rejection of social progress, of innovation in literary area also, activating a virulent anti-modern traditionalism, embraced by "Junimea" society and its collaborators (Alexandrescu, 1999: 5).

Macedonski's creation is disregarded or ignored, not only because of his complicated life, of the fusion between it and his work, but more because of the modern side it has. Assimilating and recognising Macedonski's extravagant thinking and the modern side of the work remains almost absent at that time.

Critical itinerary

Considering the analysis of the poet's appreciation, from the point of view of his modernism and from the changes that would occur years later, it is explainable why his creation is non-adherent to contemporaneity. The contestation of Macedonski's modernism and the polemic that rose around several articles, that aimed to prove the modernism of his creation, maintain the idea that the critical perspective was inefficient in seizing the essence of the poet's creation.

Eugen Lovinescu attempted to create the profile of the writer, in which he put together aesthetic and intimate factors, in an effort to overcome the limiting hermeneutical view of the epoch. The apparent hostility towards Macedonski's creation, visible in his first articles, when he notices the "tumult" that surrounds the poet's personality, is hidden underneath an attempt at objectivity (partially achieved). The premise he uses to support his comments reveals the lack of an aesthetic principle needed for the evaluation of the work and a priority for the biographical factors that alter the critical approach.

Without any passion, unmoved by the biggest universal topics such as love, death or divinity, living without revelations and without questioning himself, Macedonski is not, according to Lovinescu, a great poet, and the so-called *modern aura* of his poetry derives from the pure sensational element, born from impressionism and the abolishment of emotion. The posthumous popularity of Macedonski's poetry, nourished by its emotional deficiency, would self-devour precisely due to this factor:

"It is through this purely sensational quality that Macedonski's poetry takes on a character of modernism and legitimises its later success in contemporary poetry. [...] Without having reached a frank intellectualisation, Macedonski's poetry remains linked to the sensation. Its emotional insufficiency makes it successful today; but it will also be its dissolving principle." (Lovinescu, 1969: 267-283)

Despite the attempt of examining Macedonski's vision, Lovinescu builds an analysis that resorts to personal factors, and his comments are more of a biographical nature than of an artistic one. Taking into account the fact that he is visibly disturbed by the modern nuances implied by Macedonski's poetry and by the reassessment of his creation in a lighter perspective, the critic intends to minimize the *Macedonskianism* impact and cultivate through justified comments the disputable nucleus of his poetry, outlining the image of the poet in that antipoetic society, views that are visibly distorted by the principles of the age, an age that starts feeling the insufficiency of the critique, but still continues validating the critics.

After a few years, Vladimir Streinu's intervention that involves Macedonski's lyricism in the study *Versificația modernă* proves to be equally limiting, but despite the fact that he acknowledges Macedonski as being the initiator of the modern verses, he paradoxically considers him his adversary and practically a theoretician of modernism

(Streinu, 1966: 173-183). The attempt at restoration fails inexplicably, because Macedonski, even though he is within the modern poetry due to his lyrics, is denied his recognition. In the same position within the polemic critic, but nuanced by a spirit of objectivity with favourable hypotheses, we may also find Nicolae Davidescu's articles, which suffer important changes in the critical reception along the way. In 1992, the critic attempts to annihilate the idea of the poet's "unfair martyring" and to debunk the modern image he embraces (Davidescu, 1912: 217-228).

The hypothesis is debated a couple of years later and it leaves Macedonski estranged from any symbolic tendencies or convergences with the French literature, as successor to Bolintineanu, Depărățeanu and Grigore Alexandrescu. Macedonski's work is once more minimized due to its social prevailing trait. The poet is placed among the classics of the era (Davidescu, 1924: 90-96). Lacking in brevity, his work is rather viewed as a thorough documentation of the events of his era and of his personal social tensions than as a work of art.

"The great tragedy of Macedonski's work was, and continues to be, its quantitative prolixity. An entire myriad of things, typical just for establishing the atmosphere, on the way, of the literary café of old times, suppresses the few stylish columns that Macedonski detains [...]. This part of the work can have at most the secondary interest, but also precious, perhaps, of the material necessary for a future history of Romanian literature, reflecting with a thorough precision and up to his present date nearly all the fights, aspirations, conversations, polemics, of more than thirty years and about to rebound; it might serve to complement a lot of details still lacking precise contours." (Davidescu, 1924: 90)

The hypothesis of biographic emphasis that are too obvious is exceeded in that case by the total conversion of the work into a simple recording creation, a projection of social intrigues and personal polemics. The error of critical reasoning is so well-marked that Macedonskianism is so totally depersonalized, uprooted from any modernist imprint, annulled in its own innovative sap, designed as an extension of mediocre literature devoid of artistic expression. Critical opinions of this type lose their viability over time, seeming extremely naive and narrow today. Certainly, the time and the flourishing of modernism lighten the duty of literary criticism towards a creation difficult to assimilate, changing the vision regarding Macedonski's innovations. Dumitru Micu includes Macedonski in a *Scurtă istorie a literaturii române*, synthesizing the essence of creation, lyrical and narrative pioneering, innovative style based on instrumentalism, discursiveness, denying the limits of a single literary current:

"Through «Literatorul», Macedonski has become the main factor in the modernization of Romanian literature and art, the daring initiator and stimulator of all poetic experiments, of all attempts to renew the lyrical language. Artistic orientations and practices that would triumph after 1900 and even after the First World War have their starting point in «Literatorul». With this magazine, in fact, the 20th century begins in Romanian literature. Symbolic, expressionist, surrealist prefigurations, sounds of « pure poetry » can be deciphered in Macedonski's verses." (Davidescu, 1994: 308)

Even if Macedonski, as Dumitru Micu puts it resorts to the typical romantic instrumentalism and the macabre, he does it in an original way and differs from Alecsandri, Bolintineanu or Eminescu, who cultivated Thanatos in order to accentuate the fantastic and the fabulous. Macedonski brutally dissects rotting corpses, carefully observes the

pictorial values of decomposition, uses “imitative harmony” and musical suggestion as no one has done before, although the processes themselves are no strangers to the writers of the time (Micu, 1994: 304). It is not by inventing new concepts or by inserting hitherto unaddressed currents that Macedonski is new and original, but by the way in which, using the same means as many other writers of the time, he succeeds in overcoming previous experiments. How Macedonski detaches himself from the vision of the time and projects a young breath to creation is explained by Adrian Marino in what follows:

“Even by the immediate confrontation with the «modern» sensibility, Macedonski's work is not diminished, on the contrary. The poet meditates on the condition of poetry and lyricism, explores emotional and affective areas «turbulent», instinctual, «neurosis», alternating with great refinements, «correspondence» and ineffable states. He ceased the possibility of poetry to attain «knowledge», the feeling of poetry for poetry's sake, the «prosaic» notation. His vocation to achieve the absolute in art and life is organic. The erasure of the differences between the real and the ideal, diurnal and dreamlike, flesh and spirit, poetry and non-poetry, the passion for the dream, the discovery of the idea of chance and the absurd, seem to vaguely anticipate certain quasi-surreal concerns.” (Marino, 1967: 736)

Thus, the excessive personality of the poet, the affective bipolarity, the emotional imbalance of man, the fervent search of the creator, the neurotic states or the impossibility of abstracting from reality, although they seem to hang as hard as lead on the *wings of Poetry*, they come to particularize the creation which, under *the pressures of matter* and constantly ignited by *the impulses of ideality*, becomes truly unique and modern. Nor is the mixture of life and art unfavourable to Macedonski in this direction, for the *organic* character of his profile, observed by Marino, built from the fusion of the two *selves*, carries its specific echo over the centuries, resonating beyond the limits of the age. The obsession with achieving the absolute consumes Macedonski's visionary, which, intertwined with the permanent availability for the new, anticipates avant-garde states, concerns and ecstasy.

Considered by Ion Negoïtescu as the most influential poet on modern Romanian lyricism, Macedonski gradually recovers his identity depersonalized by the errors of thought of an era that failed to penetrate his literary and social stridency, phantasmagoric visions or Don Quixote profile. Growing up in an *improvised* culture, dominated by ancient traditions and devoid of Greco-Latin values and without adapting to the circumstances, Macedonski, “engaged in a social destiny and one of existential disorder” (Negoïtescu, 1966: 67). Rejected by contemporaries with brutality, he projects over the centuries the song of sensory ecstasy, the ostentatious instinctually of adolescence, pure virility and the confusion of romantic sensuality. Negoïtescu understands that Macedonski did not merely exist, but *became* and *is*. Passing through *existential purgatory*, Macedonian poetry purifies itself and perfects its form and substance, germinating over the centuries through its modern replicas:

“From the poetry of cruel and barbaric pleasures, to that of a decadent aesthetic of refined feelings and musical, aromatic euphoria, from the ideal of romantic-Hellenic youthful beauty to the simple and transparent poetry of friendship and soothing nature, from the gloomy madness of hatred and revenge to the hymn ecstasy of germinal nature, Macedonski's lyricism deepens its ideal fire and purifies its form. From this poetry remains, over its historical reflection and over its human interest, an immortal diamond, whose irradiation envelops and germinates the work of Petică, of Argezi, of Bacovia or

Barbu [...], of Pillat, Voiculescu, Adrian Maniu, Mateiu Caragiale or Mihail Celarianu, so almost all our modern poetry.” (Negoițescu, 1966: 91)

Nourished by the tragic consciousness of a dual existence, creation oscillates between reality and illusion, ascension and fall, sublime and ridiculous. Declaring himself a follower of modern poetry, Macedonski has affinities with French lyric poetry, but as Iulian Boldea remarks, “the primary source of Macedonski’s search and experiments consists in the intention to create more, to innovate the substance and expression of Romanian lyricism” (Boldea, 2002: 17). The critic notices the poet’s availability for everything that stands out from the lyrical knowledge of the time, even with the risk of stigmatization. Including him in the category of symbolists, Iulian Boldea emphasizes that Macedonski, although he imposes the principles of Romanian symbolism, through his tireless vitalism does not remain caught in the limitations of this trend, but combines romantic, Parnassian and symbolist nuances (Boldea, 2002: 19).

The same idea is supported by Marin Mincu, who connects the poet’s innovative spirit with the fundamental trait of his personality, *the egotism which reached paroxysm*, identifying the processes of assimilation and surpassing any contemporary trend (Mincu, 1968: 5). Macedonski frees himself from the pattern of any assimilated and personalised trend, always pursuing the conquest of new horizons of creation, always pursuing the phantom of the ideal, and the first statements of symbolist ideas, as Lidia Bote remarks, are indisputably due to him (Bote, 1966: 79).

His creative profile cannot be placed within the limits of a single direction, even if the history of literature consecrates him as a symbolist and gives creation the modern attribute. In Macedonski live primordial instincts, ultramodern paroxysmal tensions, classicizing tendencies, baroque refinement, Parnassian exuberance. Șerban Cioculescu observes that the feeling of obsession, the expression of banal truths and especially *poetry as a way of existence*, nuances Macedonski’s modernism enough to delimit it from the vision of the time (Cioculescu, 1976: 219-220), while Vladimir Streinu notes the “freshness” of Macedonski’s lyricism and points out the peculiarities of this poem sung *differently*:

“For his poetry is truly, even in its substance and not only in the gestures that frame it, a lyrical revolution. New themes, another poetic vocabulary, the sensation become in itself exclusive lyrical material, dissociated from feeling, in other words, modern sensualism, urban refinement, more subtleties of civilization, along with those of culture, the nuance of inspiration sometimes decadent (against the background of congenital energy)...” (Streinu, 1944: 308)

It is to be expected, therefore, that contemporary writers and critics will find Macedonski’s work insufficient, imperfect or even devoid of visionary spirit, for it, although it represents a true testimony of active creation and the breath of a literary age, it does not submit to the same existential premises common to other writers, nullifying any creative reasons established by the critique of the age. However, the modernist combustion of creation lies in its unity. Fragmentation, separation of unsuccessful forms and their exclusion actually split Macedonski’s spirit, unique precisely through its imperfection, constant in instability, new precisely because it had assumed the collateral damage of experimentalism. Macedonski’s portfolio includes minor works, unsuccessful touches and superficial characters, but the shaping of the creative profile also involves the exploitation of those imperfect areas. The misunderstanding of this fact involuntarily entails a series of analyses and comments that truncate the image of creation.

Dana Dumitriu writes an essay that aims to essentialize Macedonski's lyrical universe and thus highlights the unique *magnificent vocation* of the creator, the obsession with form and the poetic messianism to which he was faithful all his life. Moreover, she observes that each roundel projects the pleasure of beauty typical of the poet, yet Macedonski appears completely only when all the rondelles are unified (Dumitriu, 1978, 180: 199). However, the vision is limiting because, although it synthesizes extremely well the characteristics of his creative spirit, it develops the hypothesis according to which the rest of the creation would be an imitative game drawn after the models of the ancestors and only the roundels, perfect by their architectural form would project the true lyrical personality.

Despite the favourable and restorative intention, Macedonski reveals himself in fractions, and one part of his creation is subdivided into another, excluding itself by inferiority in value. Roundels appear as the only authenticating form of lyrical modernism, arguing the European influence, the cult of form and the sculptural capacity of the poet. However, the 21st century tends to blur the whims of critical voices distorted by the mentalities of the ages, filtering only hermeneutical acts that can penetrate beyond temporal limits, authenticated by a subtle visionary spirit.

The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature emphasizes that, “remaining above all a great poet, at the confluence of his fundamental romanticism with Parnassianism and especially with symbolism, creator of an inner myth of «excelsior» and «perihelion», as well as of a specific lyrical tone, remarkable also through his meditation on poetry, Macedonski is a forerunner of aesthetic directions and styles imposed in the poetry and prose after the First World War.” (Crețu, 2005: 168-169)

Conclusion

Disputes over the modernist nuances of Macedonski's work eventually reach a consensus and an at least partially assimilated direction. Macedonski's place in the history of Romanian literature is perfected, as Mircea Anghelescu well captures “not only by the richness and unique variety of his work, by the indisputable value of the best poetry and prose of a new type that he inaugurates, but also by its role as an active ferment in the consciousness of an age” (Anghelescu, 1976: 46). Macedonski is a visionary spirit, one of the most important writers turn of two centuries, a forerunner of modern poetry.

His creation boasts successful attempts, but also failures that together translate the experimentalist tendencies assumed as a *way of existence*, constantly fed by the palpitation of innovation. The hermeneutics could hardly say today that Macedonski is a mere imitator. His creative profile radiates unique experiences of the individual whose profession of faith is the principle of dandyism, enabling the corrosive charm of his creative intelligence to alternate dual images of the universe, dissolving them only to rebuild them into a new form.

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