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Philosophy and Poetry

Research in the world of Eminescu's manuscripts has brought again to discussion the bond between culture and creation and, within this, the relation that we are especially interested in, that between Philosophy and Poetry. It is a known fact that the poet studied philosophical works intensely, not solely out of the obligation to prepare for a university career (as Maiorescu had suggested him), but mostly because he had the passion for philosophical problems, as it can be concluded from the analysis of his entire poetic work, as well as the exploration of the "hidden world" in his notes books. He knew, most of all, the German Philosophy, as he transposed into Romanian pages from Kant¹; but he discovered thinking affinities with the "pessimist philosopher" Arthur Schopenhauer, whom he assumed as a sort of spiritual mentor, relating thus with young Nietzsche, who had declared in his first book, *"The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music"*, his veneration towards the same master (whom he would, with the same passion, renegade later). Eminescu, however, did not part from Schopenhauer, but took him also as a guide to discovering the old oriental Philosophy, especially the Indian one, that had also inspired the author of *"The World as Will and Representation"*. Therefore, Eminescu accumulated a rich philosophical culture; but did he also produce Philosophy?

If by the term Philosophy we understand "thought" ("cugetări", notion equivalent in Romanian with the Cartesian "cogito"), Eminescu was undoubtedly a philosopher, although he did not write any scholastic works on philosophical subjects; nor did he lay down his thoughts under the form of Pascalian meditations, although the style from *"Les Pensees"* (usually translated by "Thoughts", in Romanian - "Cugetări") was closer to him, by use of the revelatory metaphor, than the *more geometrico* of the rationalist philosophers' dissertations; finally, he did not transform the fragment into a new form of Philosophy, as Gilles Deleuze wrote about

¹ M.Eminescu: *Lecturi kantiane*, (*Kantian Readings*), romanian translation from *"The Critique of Pure Reason"*, edition by C. Noica and Al. Surdu, Ed. Univers, București, 1975.

Nietzsche, although, like the author of *Zarathustra*, he wrote philosophical poems (Nietzsche being considered, by his same French commenter, also as the parent of Philosophy as poem, meaning the poetic genre in Philosophy)².

Eminescu simply integrated his philosophical thoughts in poetry, as a sap that would feed the “creation tree” (I use here a metaphor close to that of the “knowledge tree”, that appears in his writings). By “hiding” his philosophy in his poems, is Eminescu less a philosopher than those who present themselves as “thinkers” (or “master thinkers”)? Heidegger, who was convinced of the natural connection between “thinker” and “poet” and who extracted “essential sayings” guiding for Philosophy from the verse of Sophocles, Hölderlin, Stefan George or Rainer Maria Rilke, has long meditated on the play between what is “hiding” in order to be revealed and what is showing itself, by “hiding” (in “*The Origin of the Art Work*”, art itself being depicted as a “taking out from the unhidden”, in the Greek sense of *Aletheia*, meaning an experience of truth). What (ontological) status does, therefore, have the philosophy hidden in Eminescu’s poetry?

I do not wish to commence here a research on Eminescu’s philosophy, but merely to formulate the problem in a manner that would bring it close to that, more general, of the bond between culture and creation. The image of Eminescu’s culture, as it was reconstructed, for example, by G. Calinescu (in “*Mihai Eminescu’s Work*”), on domains and areas of great profoundness, comprises the substance of a complex process of enrichment of the “internal being”, through assimilation of variant knowledge, reunited however, with measure, in the ray of thought. Among the definitions of the notion of culture, the critic considered that according to which “culture is the highest skill for a certain aim that is in this case poetry”. Eminescu meditated also on the goal of oriented education which is culture and on the relation between culture and creation; it is interesting that he was also preoccupied by the specification of this relation also in terms of finality. For example, in a text on “science and culture” (reproduced in the work “Eminescu on culture and art”, edition supervised by D. Irimia), the poet meditates on the “total diversity of their aims” and on the “total identity of their content” and addresses the issue of passing from “culture” – in a “common and restricted” sense, “of individual culture” – to creation, interpreting this passing as the “overcoming of an essentially individual

² Gilles Deleuze: “*Nietzsche et la Philosophie*”, PUF, Paris, 1962.

and subjective aim”, through the assuming of a “general scope” or “objective”, comprised within the “creative activity”³. Although individual, the need of culture is as well a “generally-human” one, as it fulfills a “call” towards the “sum of all individuals” and, as consequence, “each in his place has to express and bring to life (at) the height and state of the national spirit”. I do not insist on the text, that can be a simple processing or translation, because the style does not seem, however, eminescian. I will stop, nevertheless, at a text that draws attention both by the issue it presents as well as by the expressivity of the metaphor used. The text seems to talk exactly about the problem that we are interested in, that of the relation between culture and creation. It is the text *ms.2287*, reproduced in the edition quoted under the title “*About Talent*”.

“In general”- Eminescu writes- “any human head resembles a room”, that has an “entrance door” and “an exit door”. “In the case of educated people, but without an own talent, the ones owning the dead being, the ideas enter through one door, pass through the darkness of the room and exit through the other door, indifferent, alone and cold”. On the contrary, in the head of the talented man, the meeting with the “outside idea” takes place in a bright context: “the head of a talented man is like a bright room with walls with mirrors”. The talented people, says Eminescu, are the holders of the “living being”. The process of assimilating culture and transforming it through creation is described by meaningful metaphors: the outside ideas “compete in the brightest light”, under the arbitrage of the “great ideas”- “the quintessence of his soul life”, the resembling ones associate and the different ones dissociate, so that when they “exit”, the relations among them are well defined, they form an “harmonic world”. Therefore, the priority regarding talent is firstly possessed by the “own thoughts”, what, in a metaphorical sense, means that the “people of the house are more important than the guests coming in and going out”. Finally, let us notice that the entire representation is set under the sign of an ethos of hospitable treatment, but also of honoring the own “house”, the poet referring at the “tone of dignity” under which the ideas’ meeting ceremony takes place.

If we regard this “fragment” as symptomatic for the manner in which Eminescu problematizes, we will keep in mind first that it is about an

³ *Eminescu despre cultură și artă, (Eminescu on Culture and Art)*, edition supervised by D. Irimia, Ed. Junimea, Iași, 1976. (The eminescian manuscripts were published in facsimile in 2003 by the Romanian Academy).

effort to understand the experience of the “talented man”. In the philosophic vocabulary of that time, “talent” was discussed in the sense of a natural endowment for the creative activity and in that sense, one dissociated - as Kant does also in “*Critique of Judgment*” – between the “genius” and the “imitation spirit”. “The genius” –writes Kant in the section “*The Beautiful Art Is the Art of the Genius*”- “is the talent (the gift of nature) that prescribes rules to art. Since the talent itself, as a natural-born quality of the artist, belongs to nature, we might say that the genius is the natural-born endowment of the soul (*ingenium*), through which nature prescribes rules to art”⁴. As it is known, Kant reserved the term “genius” for the artist, considering, in exchange, that the savant, no matter how great he was (as Newton with his “immortal master work”), was just an embodiment of the “imitation spirit”. Kant’s antinomy is based on the distinction between what can be produced by rules, and as such can be learned and be prescribed to others as well, and what, on the contrary, defies the existing rules and produces new rules, or, as Kant depicted it, “prescribes rules to art”. Following this criterion, Kant identifies three major characteristics of the genius: originality, exemplarity and non-communicability. *Originality* was deduced from the fact that: “The genius is the *talent to produce* without any determined rule, and not a predisposition of the ability for what can be learned by rules; thus, the first characteristic of the genius must be *originality*.” By *exemplarity*, Kant specified the nature of the *productive* originality of the genius, because: “Since absurd can also be original, the products of the genius must also be *models*, meaning *exemplary*. In conclusion, they are not born by imitation, but they must serve others as models for imitation, so as standard and rule of appreciation.” Finally, through *non-communicability*, Kant expressed the belief that “the genius himself cannot describe or scientifically indicate the manner in which he designs his product, but he, as nature, prescribes rules. As consequence, the creator of a product resulted from his geniality is not aware of how the ideas of the masterpiece were born in him; also, he cannot invent them as he wishes or according to some plan and communicate them to others in prescriptions that followed would lead to similar products.”⁵ As opposed to science which, no matter how innovative it might be, “can be learned”, so it communicates, the “skill” of the genius - insisted Kant-

⁴ Immanuel Kant: *Critica facultății de judecare*, (*Critique of Judgment*), romanian translation by V.D. Zamfirescu, Al. Surdu, Ed. Științifică, București 1981, p 202.

⁵ Idem, p 203.

“is non-communicable”, being “shared to each , without intermediaries, by the hand of nature, and dies together with the one owning it”; but the work of the genius – being “exemplary” – institutes another type of communication, *through filiations*, not through imitation, because the creativity embodies in it awakens the “natural endowment” for creation in other spirits, such that the power of genius reappears “when nature endows another with it” and it “only needs an example to determine the talent, of which he is aware, to manifest itself in a similar manner”.⁶

Perhaps that in Eminescu’s description of the talented man as “holder of the living being” a similar understanding of the “gift of nature” from the Romanticism’s representation is embodied. This image is transformed, through Schopenhauer, by young Nietzsche⁷, who transposes the opposition between art and science in the tension of the two principles- apollinic and dionisiac- found however, as constitutive elements, both within art (in the dialectic composition of tragedy), as well as within science (or Philosophy), for example in the paradoxical image of a “musical Socrates”, glimpse of the later description of the “philosopher-artist”. The metaphor of the “living being” is obsessive also for Nietzsche, who regards art as a “defense” of life, the firm situation “on life’s side”, against the tendency to “run from life”; in exchange, the denial of life – form of nihilism- is considered by Nietzsche the main cause for the loss of culture’s creative spirit, described by symptoms of the state of “dead being”. Later, Nietzsche will undergo a true deconstruction of the Romantic image of the genius, in a “genealogical” manner inspired by the positivist spirit of his century; but, in what he will call the “physiology of art”, a certain respect for “the gift of nature” is still kept, meaning that psychic or even biological configuration specific to creative structures (however, starting with Schopenhauer , the “gift” of genius has no longer only a positive significance, but is also associated with “unhappiness”, as depicted in the late Romanticism’s common image of the “deserted genius”.) As opposed to Kant, however, but in resemblance to Eminescu, Nietzsche’s reflections on creation are organically linked to the experience of his own work, are stimulated by doubts and troubled searches, but also by the sensation of revelations which offer themselves only to those who undergo the experience of creation without intermediaries. Nietzsche was convinced that “*in order to*

⁶ Idem, p 204.

⁷ Fr. Nietzsche: *Nașterea tragediei*, (*The Birth of Tragedy*), romanian translation in: “*Opere complete*”, vol. 2, Ed. Hestia, Timișoara, 2000.

understand artists you must be one” and this “inner-circle” understanding can neither be replaced by the “systems” of speculative Art Philosophy nor by “objectivist” investigations of the type of those undertaken by the “sciences of creation” (that were back then at their beginnings, because at that time works like *Hereditary Genius* by Francis Galton and later *L’oumo di genio* by Cesare Lambroso appeared). Moreover, Nietzsche seems to believe that only creative spirits can benefit from the understanding of creation and thus, the interest for knowledge has its motivation in the finality of creation; the “genealogic” research of art is not very useful to the “imitation spirit”, but can awaken the creativity of the productive spirit. In his case, this is the principle of philosophic creation itself: in his reflections on the experience of creation, from the perspective of which he builds his “metaphysics” (as seen in the section entitled *The Will for Power as Art* in the volume of manuscripts published after his death under the title *The Will for Power*),⁸ Nietzsche transforms a subjective philosophy of the creative spirit into a principle of understanding the world. Heidegger understood to interpret Nietzsche’s philosophy from this perspective⁹ and integrate his texts on the philosophy of creation to the main path of modern thinking history, of the metaphysics of subjectivity as “will for power”.

At the beginning of this path lies the Cartesian experience of thought. The philosophy of the *cogito*, interpreted most often as a knowledge experience and, most of all, as a search for the certainties “of true knowledge”, is by no means less a research on creation, a problematizing of what Noica would call his theme “how is something new possible?” When Eminescu writes that, in the case of “the man of talent”, “own thoughts” have priority, “the people of the house (who) are more important than the guests coming in and going out”, he evokes, essentially, the principle of Descartes’s “cogito”, the idea that only our own thinking can be base for both the search of truth, as well as the certifying of our own existence. In the case of the author of “Discourse on Method”¹⁰, since the certainty of existence is rationally deduced from the premises of “dubito” and “cogito”, the “own thinking” appears as

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Voința de putere*, (*The Will for Power*), romanian translation, Ed. Aion, București, 1999, pp.507-548.

⁹ See: Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 1961.

¹⁰ Rene Descartes: *Discurs asupra metodei de a ne conduce bine rațiunea și a cauta adevărul în științe*, (*Discourse on the Method to Well-conduct Our Reason and Search for the Truth in Science*, 1637), romanian translation, Ed. Științifică, București, 1975, pp. 46-49.

“holder of the living being”. But Descartes was not especially hospitable with the “guest ideas”. On the contrary, his methodic doubt is headed in a determinate manner against any idea received as such, against prejudgements and superstitions, of speculations, that make the soul wander senselessly. For Descartes, the spirit is always threatened by the danger of the “dead being”. The awakening to life can only be ensured by the own thought. This being the case, the hermeneutics of doubt begins with Descartes, as it begins as well with the genealogic analysis of the “idols” of knowledge by Francis Bacon. Both set at the beginning of the innovative approach in philosophy the moment of skeptical attitude, the doubt towards “outside ideas” or the critique of “idols”. With Eminescu, who regards the issue from the perspective of the creative project, the atmosphere of receiving “outside ideas” is more relaxed, even celebratory, although not missing the critical sense.; the difference consists in the “background”, that is “bright” or “dark”, of the talented man or the man without talent. We might consider that, in the poet’s case, the trust in his own creative being makes him more tolerant and more open towards building in cooperation, in inter-subjective communication. In fact, as mostly the philosophers of pragmatism, but also those of the philosophical hermeneutics have shown, radical doubt is impossible, since we cannot have “the point of view of the eye of God”, but always judge from the perspective of the situation we are involved in and the “horizon of understanding” of the tradition we are part of. The idea of “the dialogue that we are”, as Gadamer says, is better suggested by the show of the ideas’ association and dissociation, that try to shape up a “harmonic world”. I believe that in the philosophy of artistic creation – starting with Renaissance and Baroque, but also in the esthetics of Classicism and Romanticism – one could identify another manner of measuring up to the world and another vision on the subject than those specific to the metaphysic line of thought began by the methodic doubt of the Cartesian subject and accomplished through the genealogic critique of the “will for truth” from Nietzsche¹¹.

Richard Rorty suggested that the exaggeration of the subject’s role in modern thinking can be understood by the “anxiety towards influence” (or the “fright for originality”), the fear of not losing “the personal touch”, meaning the sign of the personal experience in the world that the

¹¹ Luc Ferry: *Homo aestheticus. Inventarea gustului in epoca democratică, (Homo aestheticus. The Invention of the Taste in the Democratic Era)*, romanian translation, Ed. Meridiane, 1997.

artist undergoes¹². Such an idea seems to be sustained by the fact that modern art treasures, mostly, originality, meaning the difference, that ensures the expressiveness of the work of art; in this sense, art constitutes a paradigm of understanding for the spirit of Modernity, equally representative as the experience of Science or Philosophy. In art as well, the priority given to “the own thought”, including the reflection on “the personal touch”, as source of creative difference, outlining the same awakening of subjectivity, which must, however, not be understood in an individualistic spirit. Creation is, eventually, a phenomenon of communication, the aim of creating works of art is that of communication; and the attention from the receiver, who accomplishes the esthetic relation, supposes also the understanding of the work of art from the perspective of its communicative function. The image of the man of talent, from Eminescu’s reflections, is not that of remaining within oneself, from fear of losing originality, but mostly that of a communicator who “receives” and “offers”, setting, of course, also his personal touch on what passes through the “mirrors’ room” of his “bright background”.

Trying to identify a representative philosophical attitude in a simple meditation of the poet on “talent”, we sought to show that Eminescu’s philosophy must not be recovered under the form of philosophic ideas that can be extracted from his work, from poetry, prose, publications or manuscripts – as it most frequently happened - but can be deciphered in “small details” or “small variations” of thought or literary expression that bears the fingerprint of the “living being” of his personality. Heidegger said that any art is, in its essence, Poetry (*Dichtung*), and, also Language, and further, Thinking, are in their essence Poetry. “To notice that, writes Heidegger, one only needs an accurate perception of language”, different from that of usual understanding. “In ordinary representation, language passes as a category of communication. It serves for conversation, in establishing a consensus, thus, generally for mutual understanding. However language is not only, and above all, is not firstly an oral and written expression of the content that is about to be communicated. Language is not pleased to only transport the manifest and hidden content, conceived as such, with the help of words and sentences, but

¹² Richard Rorty: *Continență, ironie și solidaritate, (Contingency, Irony and Solidarity)*, romanian. translation: Ed. All, București, 1998, pp. 65-92.

Language is that which bring being as being in openness”¹³. To ”bring being as being in openness” is, according to Heidegger, the fundamental experience for the revealing of Truth. This is done by art, but also by language, because “it is only when language gives a name to being, only then, through this naming, being is brought up to the word level, and can appear in all its brightness. It is only this naming that gives name to being, promoting it to its being and starting exactly from it. Such an essential say (*Sagen*) is a projection of the brightness in which it is announced under what form the being appears in the open.”¹⁴ Thinking – that in Heidegger’s case is the name of a philosophy that separated itself from “Philosophy” in the sense of its metaphysical tradition guilty of “forgetting the being”- has also as goal the “essential say”; it also searches for the word that would “bring being in the openness”, to reveal the Truth.

“Where will you find the word that expresses the truth?”- the poet asks himself. Is this a poetic or a philosophical question? We keep it in mind as a verse from a poem. But Poetry, as Heidegger says, brings and holds together Art, Language, Thinking. In the end, Eminescu must be sought in the “living being”, in the “bright background” of a creation that belongs to Poetry, understood in itself in the sense of the “essential say” that Heidegger talked about.

¹³ Martin Heidegger: *Originea operei de artă*, (*The Origin of the Work of Art*), romanian translation: Ed. Univers, București, p. 87.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.