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roumains d'études littéraires

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MIRELA ROZNOVEANU

Civilizația romanului. Rădăcini
("Civilization of the Novel. Roots")

There are few literary species that aroused so much interest as the novel. A polyvalent and much beloved species, the novel was much commented upon from more and more specialized viewpoints especially in the modern age. First people described its history, then analysed its procedures. Naturally, the most commented upon was the European novel — and its substitutes — which is actually considered the main topic. Writing a book on Civilizația romanului ("Civilization of the Novel"), whose first volume is titled Rădăcini ("Roots"), Mirela Roznoaneau plans to approach the history of the novel from another point of view. The idea according to which the novel was born in the 18th century exclusively is no longer accepted by the author of Civilizația romanului, who traces back its roots much earlier in time and civilization. In Mirela Roznoaneau's view, the 18th century is the date when the European novel appeared. But it has numerous predecessors and she undertakes to dwell on them. Given "the miraculous integrating aesthetic power of the novel," the author wonders whether we should regard the novel as the ideal aesthetic form of a spiritual vehicle. Taken like this, where there is civilization, there is the novel too. Any prestigious civilization implies the novel and to look for it where archaeology and history directs us means trying to describe the history of this species. Hence the title of the book and its explanatory subtitle: roots. Therefore, we are not told about the novel proper, which was examined and analysed by present-day theorists, but about certain preparatory forms — some of them being complex ones — which point to a longer and non-European history of this species. From this vantage the history of the European novel becomes a recent historical alternative of the novel.

The texts to which the author demonstratively and significantly resorts are the Asian ones first of all, where she looks for forms able to begin the historical series of the novel earlier. Of course, Mirela Roznoaneau distinguishes between the novel as a genre and the narrative modes that were used in the books she examined. She is careful enough when defining these texts as novels, but the conclusion one can infer from her book is that the species and its spirit especially, as well as its means, are much older than the 18th century and that to discuss the novel without these roots implies an error in the critic's outlook. Both the epic of Gilgamesh and the Bible come into the picture. Is it possible to take the holy writings out of their well-established metaphysical status? wonders the author. The texts under consideration are the Bible and even the epic of Gilgamesh. The answer is clear this time too: "The modern reader does no longer raise the book to the rank of a myth, he interprets it." Mirela Roznoaneau's book is openly polemical, but it does not send arrows uselessly. This essay writer is concerned with this Asian influence which is suggested to her by the entire history of

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The first text she analyzed is Ramayana and the last one is The Golden Ass. If we think that some of the texts discussed again by Mirela Roznovanu had already been considered novels, part of her precautions seem useless. Particular in this case is the proportion and the decision of the critical endeavour, which includes a more comprehensive cultural judgement. "Here we actually polemize with a European myth, with a self portrait of intellectual Europe, a portrait completed by so many illustrious predecessors which should be taken into account. Eurocentrism forgets that the world is older. The present book essentially has a programme rejecting this intellectual status and also revealing that secret 'readiness for Asia' of European culture."

Acting this way, Mirela Roznovanu is against the limited perspective and for the importance of the species that has compulsorily been generated by every great civilization.

"What is and what is not a 'novel' in Ramayana?" This question opens the book on the civilization of the novel and it works initially even if it is no longer repeated in every chapter. First Mirela Roznovanu tries to detect the epic procedures, the way they operate in the relationship between the real and the imaginary and whether a certain "philosophy" or style are implied. Finally, the main question is to identify the natures and elements of the novel (plot, characters, realism, etc.) in the Indian epic. This is exactly what she does, not forgetting to remove the false theoretical obstacles at the same time the author detects the elements of aesthetic anticipation: "As a strategy of love and adventure, these scenes of Ramayana anticipate the 17th-century novels such as Great Cyrus, Clélie, Zoyde, etc."

The author does not ignore the elements which free the writing from the common standards of this species and offer a sound support. Odiseea maieste de Odisseu (The Odyssey before Odisseus) is the epic of Gilgamesh considered from the vantage of the novel and read carefully paying attention both to the epic procedures and the questions of the text. Owing to the theoretical and analytical difficulties the author's attempt at including several Egyptian fragments and stories among the texts opening the way for the later novel is daring enough. But the most important part is played by texts such as Pharaoh Keops, and the Wizards, w'emon's Travel, The Story of the Two Brothers and others in which Mirela Roznovanu finds the prestigious and respected models of the Hellenistic and Alexandrinian age. Although the narrative image is rather limited in Aveste, the author looks even for the features of a novel-type story with two characters trying to illustrate the imagined existence of a tortured conscience, "a novel-like form of the debate". In the numeration of the novel-like forms handed down to us by Asian civilization, an important part is played by the Bible, in which several kinds of narrators are identified, a genuine "catalogue of styles." The architectural rigour of the Biblical text is the major characteristic. Here are other characteristic features that will later influence the modern epic genre, the prominence of theoretical characters and the polemics of ideas.

In the Bible that Mirela Roznovanu finds most arguments really to trace back the history of the novel and of its development in time on a geographical area larger than Europe. Then there follows another substantial chapter decisive for the aim of the author's demonstration; it is devoted to the Chinese novel. She prefers the texts corresponding to the European idea of the novel and consequently analyzes them. The first text is On the Bank of the River, a 13th-century novel, which is a genuine novel with extensive action and numerous epic intricacies; hence its 1,250 pages. An
other novel is Happenings of the Scholars’ World, where the emphasis is laid on the narrative procedures, but also on the questions it poses and on its realism. There follows We Cheng-en’s novel, Journey to the West (Xi you ji), a complex book in which one can detect a parody of the Veda-like novel too. The last novel under consideration is The Dream in the Red Pavilion, a work difficult to classify according to European standards. In a certain respect it can be compared with Wilhelm Meister and Doctor Faustus, but it especially represents the synthetic capabilities of the Chinese epic genre, the type of the homophonous novel. The Iliad and the Odyssey take us to the European area and Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Appuleius’ The Golden Ass, to the Latin classical age. The progression is not only historical and aesthetic, but also a geographical one. According to the author’s outlook, the novel practically moves from Asia to Europe, and will later be discovered in a distinct variant by the Europeans in the 18th century, after certain stages that Mirela Roznoveanu still has to survey in the other volumes of Civilizația românului.

Although it is historical-geographical, her method does not differ from E. M. Forster’s who undertakes to discuss the novel this way: he lays all the books on the table, irrespective of the date when they were published, and considers the authors his contemporaries, his major concern being especially the possible similar aesthetic classifications and problemizing. When reading the old novels, Mirela Roznoveanu takes them out from under the influence of history, but does not ignore this influence. The book in question rejects fixed limits and theoretical preconceived ideas. It wants to be free as regards movement and conclusions and this is what it is to a certain extent. It detects identical facts of literature and art although they are very distant from one another, historically and geographically. Although Mirela Roznoveanu never uses the term of protochronism, her survey provides arguments in this respect because protochronism does not separate things, does not make them look provincial, but brings them closer to one another. Asiatic literature had a complete literary and aesthetic experience which precedes the European one by far. The author’s refusal of the Euro-centric outlook is justified. In its essence the novel is a much older and better constituted reality than it seems to be. To absolutize the European formula is to deprive it of its complexity.

The essay Civilizația românului is inciting because it overlooks the unimportant, useless examinations and becomes an intellectual construction proving both freedom of movement and of the spirit.

M. UNGHEANU

JORGE USCATESCU

Agustín, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard: Nuevas lecturas de Filosofía y Filología,

En su reciente libro sobre algunas figuras europeas de primera magnitud, el profesor Jorge Uscatescu reactualiza la dinámica bipolaridad entre filosofía y filología, que ha utilizado tan eficazmente en algunos estudios anteriores sobre los fundamentos de la estética, sobre el lenguaje y la creatividad o sobre el pensamiento de Juan Bautista