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Nation's Ethos in Romanian Literature

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Abstract: It is indisputable that the foundation of any national literature is laid by the spiritual life of the people, and the organ of its genuine expression is the people's language. There is a tight relation between a culture and the landscape within it has been forming. Thus the surrounding nature and historical circumstances have a major part to play in determining a nation's literature birth and development. All the Romanian literature draws its roots, at one time or another, from our inexhaustible autochthonous folklore, that is, according to the the great Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu, an essential ground for the future of our national literary art. Romanian folklore expressions evoking the Danube represent a particular interest due to their amazing spiritual freshness, popular wisdom. The Danube's magnificence is being lyrically sung as well in Romanian Doinas for centuries.

Keywords: literary art; the Danube; folklore; ground; progress; awareness

1. Introduction

It is undeniable, the foundation of any national literature is the people's spiritual life in its fullness, and the organ if its authentic expression is the nation's language.

To support the above statement we'll make reference to the opinions of Alexei Mateevici, whose poetic writings represent a valuable artistic document of the epoch and also a source of stirring sentiments, reflecting truthfully the tumultuous years from the beginning of the XXth century. Accordingly, in many journalistic writings by this author there is expressed the idea that the fundamental factor of the nation's

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spiritual revival, of its enlightenment is represented by the native language, the ancestors' language. Namely the language which is spoken by the entire nation is "the primest mover of education and progress" (article *What do we need? / Ce ne trebuie nouă?*).

At the same time, the surrounding nature and historic conditions are among the principal factors which determine a literature's birth and development.

Nature forms the nation's character, temperament, its soul features. Nature conditions of life mostly determine the main occupations of the Romanian people: shepherding and agriculture. These occupations predispose to a peaceful life. It is from here the Romanian's predilection for contemplation, for poetry. However, the historical conditions in which the Romanian had to fight the invaders, hardened his character.

2. Paper Preparation

Making a short presentation, we'll draw as well attention to the following: before our cultured, written literature was born, there existed folk literature which arose in the people, taking shape over the centuries and being formed by a long line of generations.

This literature is of extreme importance not just as a mirror of the Romanian people's creative genius, but also by its importance as a fund, for there are expressed in it: the talent, character, beliefs, customs, joys and sufferings of the Romanians' inner and outer life.

In other words, it is the most vivid mirror of everything the nation feels and reflects on in certain moments of life, it is the most faithful expression of the national character.

Romanian folklore pearls about the Danube convince us about the above statements: "The Danube is big, but at times it decreases a lot" ("Dunărea e mare, însă câteodată scade foarte mult"), the expression is used for suggesting that everything is relative in life; "To become The Danube itself" or "To become the raging Danube" ("A se face Dunăre", "A se face Dunăre turbată"), this one illustrating a man's savage anger, associated with the Danube's violent, forceful waters; "There will flow much water on the Danube" ("Are să curgă multă apă pe Dunăre"), hopeless or long-term waiting for the accomplishment of something important; "One carries water to the Danube"

(“Cară apă-n Dunăre”), referring to “Sisyphean labour”, as pouring water into the Danube is an endless effort in vain.

The Danube is often evoked as well in Romanian Doinas: “Dear Danube, with soft waves, / You keep calling me to you, / To sing doinas on your bank / As I used to, as a child / In the morning at dawn / I was a few years old boy...”.

3. Analysis of Results

We have to be aware from the outset that the entire Romanian literature - one way or the other – comes from the autochthonous folklore, as the matchless poet of the Romanians, Mihai Eminescu states: “A true enduring literature, that we would love and which would be original for the others, may be founded only on the vivid tongue of our own nation, on its traditions, customs and the nation’s history, on its genius” (Irimia, 1970, p. 61).

Hence, by studying M. Eminescu’s creation from the perspective of his specificity regarding the assimilation of folklore, we’ll deduce the fact that the genius poet collects folklore and especially fairy tales, yet not for being published, but with the view to learn from them, to fertilize his own poetic art.

In this context, Eminescu’s aesthetic views are conclusive versus the concepts of the other writers from those times.

Meanwhile, the scholars in the area point out that: “Creating the wonderful fairy-poems *The evening star* and *Călin* (pages of fairy tales) the great poet keeps shortening and adding verses, reconsiders again and again the subjects and the characters, enlarges the signification of the literary works attaining a symbol of it, confers the folk creation a romantic atmosphere, makes, consequently, essential changes in the folklore material, in respect of both its quantity and quality” (Curuci, 1966, p. 117).

On the other hand, a distinctive feature of the other Romanian writer’s manner - Ion Creangă – consists in the following: the use of many words and expressions in their oral and regional form of pronunciation, the author being inspired from real life moments, that is “from the ancestral folk wisdom, the archaic folklore treasure, depicting in his literary art – fairy tales, stories and memories – fascinating paintings of rural life” (Botezatu, 1988, p. 434).

Ion Creangă has the special merit to have expressed faithfully in his writings the conceptions, superstitions, spirit, traditions, language, imagination, the common naturalness of the Romanian peasants.

Therefore, the literary writings by Ion Creangă could constitute an epopee of the Romanian nation, for Creangă is the one of our writers who lived closer to the folk, he comprehended it better and reproduced in a more vivid, lively manner. Being free from any alien influence, he preserved intact the Romanian language and thinking.

At the present time, when the literary art of Ion Creangă has become a heritage of many peoples from all over the globe, we can state with certainty that, among the great narrators of the world, his name appears not just in the list of folklore collectors, but first of all Creangă became famous as a talented author of fairy tales and stories, which are a truthful testimony of our nation's way of thinking and living, as well as of its capability to defeat the destiny hostilities and be victorious.

And since we have mentioned the nowadays epoch, we consider it necessary to emphasise that presently, the folklore constitutes as well a source of inspiration for those who have dedicated their life to the art of the written word.

As a confirmation to the above statements could be taken the literary creation by the poet, prose writer, playwright, essayist Dumitru Matcovschi, about whom the well-known scientist Mihail Dolgan says the following: "Dumitru Matcovschi is, first of all, a poet of *dor* (the Romanian-only thing, *life-long nostalgia* – author's note), of *dor* comprehended as a sentiment deeply complex and deeply Romanian, of *dor* melded with the grand aspirations of the human from the mioritic space: *dor* for life and motherland, *dor* for his nation and native tongue, *dor* for the parental home and ancestors, *dor* for the woman and nature, *dor* for truth and righteousness, *dor* for the good and beauty, *dor* for humanness..." (Dolgan, 2009, p. 21).

In this context we would also like to mention the following: the artistic valorization of folklore in D. Matcovschi's literary creation is reached by carrying forward of some folk motifs, but especially through the act of re-building up of folklore poetic means.

Accordingly, many of his poems have the same rhythmic-melodic construction as the Romanian folk poetry:

"I have made a drop of house
In a drop of dew, small.
Only me and only heaven

In a drop of dew, small.”
(poem *I have made a drop of house*)

In general, one of the essential characteristics of D. Matcovschi’s literary creation is the approach to the rhythmic-melodic structures of the Romanian folklore poetry. This fact made him very popular not just among the readers who had inherited the folk verse’s genetic code of musicality, but also among the composers and music lovers, many of his poems being set to music and successfully performed over many years (e.g. *Nunta de argint / Silver wedding, Bucurați-vă / Enjoy, my friends, Cu numele tău / I named the star your name, Astă vară la Soroca / This summer at Soroca* etc.).

And we can also find evidence of Matcovschi’s profoundly optimistic attitude, responsible to the greatest gift – life, in the following verses:

“Grant me life, my God,
I swear I won’t waste it
It’s sewn with thread,
This life of mine I live
So that I could live humanly right
And that I burn quietly,
Beside a human who loves me,
Beside the kind nation of mine.
(*Dăruiește-mi, Doamne, viață / Grant me life, my God*)

Matcovschi’s D. literary achievements and success have as a background the writer’s love for the written word, for all that is beautiful and holy:

“Mother language, as an eternal flower
Of basil and of nostalgia –
Nostalgia for ground, for ancestral doinas,
For Codri’s rustling.
It gathers us, with sun and moon,
With future and past...”
(*Limba maternă / Mother language*)

Making a brief overview of Matcovschi’s D. poetic creation, we’ll refer to the following appreciations by the literary critics: “Dumitru Matcovschi is a poet of simplicity, of the open, nude, folklorizing, wisdom sharing style, sometimes volatile, and namely when there goes off, over the general state of current tension, an unexpected metaphor. Serenity and universal harmony would have been his

characteristics if Bassarabia issue hadn't expose the nerves to an acute thirst for the national fulfillment" (Craciun, 2014, p. 68).

Another literary critic, Eliza Botezatu, expressed in a clear and comprehensive way the opinion concerning Matcovschi's lyric creation: "Being, up to a certain point, under a single artistic constellation with Grigore Vieru, D. Matcovschi, counts, as his colleague does, upon the particular taste of the genuine word, upon the traditionalism, which is, essentially, no more than an emphasized relationship with the ancestral roots, an ascent to the origins. Through the motifs known as traditional (homeland, house, hearth, family, parents, mother tongue, history), the poet debates the broader issues which concern the human condition in general" (Botezatu, 2013, p. 104).

In the support of the stated ideas a series of arguments are offered. So, characterising himself, the poet confesses:

"They weep in me and in the soil,
Just like autumn weeps in the night,
All the old doinas
Entombed in drops of whispers."
(*Toate doinele / All the doinas*)

Even sowing of wheat turns into a wedding of the motherland's spiritual values – through the word, through doina, through the gesture (the act) of gifting:

"I also sow beautiful word
And the word grows downwards
Reaching doina and reaching
The saint ancestry of mine."

So, here is a deep meaning of the variety of motifs that have been mentioned above, that is "the saint ancestry", "continuity of our nation":

"Play me doina, lăutar,
For I am a shepherd of noble birth,
And I love listening to the ground,
To the lament of a miorița..."
(*Cântă-mi doina / Play me doina*)

(author's note: *lăutar* – Romanian peasant musician playing the pipe, the violin etc.; *miorița* – evoking the Romanian ballad's *Little ewe lamb*).

Definitely, the nation's ethos, its daily cares are rendered in Matcovschi's D. literary works: customs and traditions, songs and dances, legends, fairy tales, anecdotes, doinas.

Namely in doinas the expressed sentiments are characterized by genuine depth, unique diversity, which is why they have been classified into: doinas of lamentations, of love, of *dor* (Romanian only deeply complex sentiment: lifelong nostalgia), doinas of estrangement, of soldiering, of hajduk life-style etc. So that Coşbuc G. had every reason in asserting about doina: "aliens would have lost you if they could".

We have presented here opinions, suggestions, excerpts from pieces of literature which convince us of the following facts: the nation's spiritual life is rendered authentically in the spectrum in Matcovschi's literary works. Having their genuine origins in the mists of time, they are named folklore. By constituting our nation's inherited cultural treasure, it is our sacred duty to be fundamentally familiarized with it, to value and fructify its inexhaustible resources, to pass it to the following generations.

In this context, there are welcome the assertions by our dear departed poet Grigore Vieru: „Eternity acquires a concrete significance when you realize that you can't skip within it the faith, language, history and the wealth of your nation's mores" (Vieru, 2008, p. 430).

A remark to conclude: for a better comprehension of our past, present and for a clearer perception of our future, we need to comprehend the ethos of our ancestors, which is faithfully expressed in our folklore literature, the remote age of which is difficult to determine exactly, yet which is obviously born with the very beginnings of the Romanian people.

Folklore has always been and will remain that rope which ties a generation to generation. It is the spiritual wealth of our people, for the reason of which we need to keep assuming responsibility in exploring and promoting it, to survive as a nation and to preserve our dignity as humans.

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