

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE. A LITERARY VIEW

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Abstract: This paper presents the problem of the intercultural dialogue from the view of a Romanian writer born in the inter-war period. Traian Chelariu graduated the Faculty of Letters from Chernivtsi University and received the possibility to continue his studies in France, Paris, Italy and Rome. The years spent in foreign countries like a Ph. D candidate have become the plot of the two volumes of journals, texts which attentively intercept the differences between cultures, mentalities and artistic manifestations.

Keywords: Traian Chelariu, inter-war period, intercultural dialogue, journal, literature.

Assumption

Through a simple Internet browsing, the word *intercultural* captures similar results that lead to the same definition: collaboration between different cultures. Then, reviewing the specialized literature, it can be observed that these propose a through going study of the theme through two necessary aspects: the definition of the notion of culture in anthropological meaning as a set of rules, values, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that belong to a people¹ and the observation of some practices of intercultural dialogue. The dialogue between cultures stands for the action necessary for knowledge and self-knowledge, paradox explicable with the help of psychology. According to Constantin Cucos, the reference to the other, tot otherness represents the opportunity to discover not only the intrinsic identity, but also other identities, because in the other, the man defines not only the other, but also itself.²

Starting from these premises, it can be inferred that the intercultural dialogue represents for different manifestation contexts such as the social, political, psychological and literary one, an important theme. Generally, the literary context surprises between different cultures the act of communication through the exchange of ideas and the identification in the other of some patterns of writing, collaboration that ends with the construction of writer identity. The literary vision proposed through this paper surprises the activity of communication between the French and Romanian culture, but also the one between the Italian and Romanian culture, as presented in the pages of an inter-war journal and in the literary works of the writer Traian Chelariu. The interpretation in intercultural key of the memorialistic work, aims to highlight the need for a dialogue between writers of different cultures, because this creates over the literary work an impact.

In order to understand how has this writer communicated directly with other cultures, it is necessary to shortly present the study period abroad. Traian Chelariu, a Bukovinian born in 1906, succeeds after graduating the Faculty of Letters from the University of Chernivtsi, to obtain a doctoral scholarship in Paris between 1931-1933 and then in Rome between 1933-1934. These years have meant for the young man, already a member of the literary life in Chernivtsi, a phase of shaping and maturation of the creative self through

¹ Mic dicționar enciclopedic, Publishing House Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2008.

² <http://www.constantincucos.ro/2009/08/altul-%E2%80%93-prilej-de-descoperire-si-delimitare-a-eu-lui-cultural>, accesat la 03.05. 2014, ora 23.03.

participation at various cultural events, through the exchange of experience with students of other ethnicities and even through his new social framework.

Paris and Rome, the European cities, have represented for Traian Chelariu new possibilities of training, knowledge and maturation. During study abroad, he has "tasted" each manifestation of art, from sculpture, picture, music, to movie and literature, through museums, exhibitions, thematic meetings, journals and lectures in various fields. The years spent there, present not only the European cultural life, but also the life of Chernivtsi, because the Bukovinian receives weekly letters from home (from his his sister, Mircea Streinul, Ion Nistor or the editors of some publications), that include local newspapers from Bucovina or updated information. The Parisian and Italian cultural life include moments of visit to Louvre, Notre-Dame, Vatican, music concerts, exhibitions and many hours spent in the library.

The contact with the French world

In the inter-war period the European context was engaged in diplomatic problems of bonding of the continent, of maintaining the territorial limits and of building a conciliatory climate between the victorious and defeated powers following the First World War. Moreover, England and France, the great European powers, are named to guarantee the world peace, purpose which due to the discord between the two countries, cannot resist.³ In this context, Traian Chelariu becomes a scholarship student in Paris, in the capital with a great political influence, represented by the new world order and the recent mentalities.

Details regarding the differences between the Romanian and French background can be identified in the first volume of the Bukovinian journal⁴. Beside the differences related to the urban architecture and cultural structure, according to the note from November 15th 1931, Traian Chelariu admires the French people for their fellowship and refinement. "After five o' clock meal. I met a few Romanian and French men about town. Romanians – guys, French men and women – discreet."⁵ The exchange of ideas between France and Romania took place through Traian Chelariu's direct implication in the cultural events of Paris. He saw plays and movies, he visited the great attractions of Paris (Louvre, Balzac's Memorial House, Notre-Dame, Versailles etc.), he read French authors (Paul Verlaine, Alphonse Seche, Baudelaire, François Villon, Bergson etc.) and he joined the literary meetings. For example, on the 26th of November 1931 the writer saw the his first French play, *Légataire universel* by Regnaud, but he was not impressed at all because in his opinion the French are "affected in art"⁶ and the play was not a farce indeed, it was just aberrant interpreted. However, on the 21st of April 1932, Traian Chelariu discovered Paul Valéry's wonderful writing, the volume *La connaissance de la Déese*. He considered the poems opulent in ideas and suggestions.⁷

About the French influence on Chelariu's writings we can only talk in terms of inspiration or muse; Paris became a great place to write poetry: *Urbană (moment parizian)*, *Peisaj de suflet*, *Nud sub stele*, *Preludiu lent* etc. (see the volume *Exod*). By reading the

³ Eliza Campus, *Politica externă a României în perioada interbelică*, Publishing House Editura Politică, Bucharest, 1975, p. 5.

⁴ Traian Chelariu, *Zilele și umbra mea*, vol. I, Publishing House Ideea Europeană, Bucharest, 2007.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

poems we can observe that the common aspect is the elegiac moment that helps the writer lament his solitude or his desert soul; Paris is the place which gives you the mood to express your unfulfilled love. Furthermore, another bookish impact on T. Chelariu's writings was Bergson's studies about the duration, it became a subject of great interest for the Bukovinean.

The contact with the Italian World

The Parisian days end with Nella's apparition, an Italian girl whom he falls in love and gets engaged. She determines T. Chelariu to apply for a scholarship in Rome and he listens to her. Thereby, during the inter-war days when Italy was seen as an influent and dangerous country because of Mussolini's fascism, the Bukovinean enjoys an year in this European Metropolis. Once with the audition of the dictator's speeches, T. Chelariu doesn't hesitate to express his concerns about Mussolini in his diary, whom he considers a selfish man and a good actor.⁸

The second volume of the *My days and my shadow* journal, the second part, *Roman days*, begins with a statement of the author's delight which emphasizes that he prefers Rome over Paris: "I love Rome more than Paris. Not only because of its monuments. Here the rhythm of life is different. More order, more cleanness, clearer skies."⁹ Thus, according to the author's confessions, the intercultural exchange conducted in Rome through the visits to the museums, exhibitions and the participation to various artistic events, becomes one of self-identification with the Italian people. The new host country represents for the Romanian man the otherness that talk about personal identity through the connection point of Latinism. This retrieval in a foreign space, but with common ancestors, is recorded in the note of November 17th 1933, when Traian Chelariu visits St. Peter's Church and writes ardently: "Rome! What is Rome? I say hello to you, homeland of ruins and forever renascent life! Today I have lived a beautiful day."¹⁰

If culturally, the Italian city is a space privileged by the Bucovina man, literary it does not entirely maintain its favorable position. A positive influence of the Italian culture on the writings of Traian Chelariu can be easily seen in the sonnets, as he chooses Carducci and Petrarch as "mentors" (see the volume *Lyrical writings*), of which he visibly detaches himself by building a style proper. But the negative aspect of the Italian culture is that of Marinetti's futurism, known directly through the participation to the founder's conferences. The opinion of the Bucovina man about this new approach that the poetry has is one that disadvantages the Italian, who is exaggerating with the mechanical side: "But Marinetti, requesting the worshiping of machines, the deification of mechanisms, he is nothing but a fifth fascist propaganda agent. The poetry of praise in favor of machine remains a transformation in verbs and not art".¹¹ From his statements about the manifestations of the avant-garde, we can draw the conclusion that he has completely clarified his principles of poetic art, denying not only the futuristic poetry, but also the modern poetry, which is nothing but a way too analyzed experiment, that does not transmit certain feelings.

⁸ Traian Chelariu, *Zilele și umbra mea*, vol. II, Publishing House Ideea Europeană, Bucharest, 2007, p. 338.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.134.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

Conclusions

Traian Chelariu's literary work seen from the perspective of an intercultural dialogue captures the positive aspects of a type of communication of this sort. First, the exchange between cultures makes its presence felt in the plan of writer's personality. This aspect is observed in Traian Chelariu's volumes, *Zilele și umbra mea*, depicting the transition from novice to master. The years spent in France and Italy respectively gave the Bucovina man the necessary confidence of expressing a public critical opinion and of forming a definite artistic creed. The literary activities to which he takes part and the libraries that are accessible to him, are the determinants that build the system of cultural knowledge necessary to a writer. Under another aspect, there is a specific influence in the works published in different volumes. If Paris was a source of romantic inspiration for the lyrical writings and a source of philosophical inspiration for the aphorisms, Rome was finding his own ego again by identifying in the Italian poets a model of writing.

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