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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Caius DOBRESCU

Plăcerea de a gândi

moștenirea intelectuală
a criticii literare românești (1960-1989),
ca expresie identitară într-un
tablou global
al culturilor cognitive



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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**PLĂCEREA DE A GÂNDI. MOȘTENIREA
INTELECTUALĂ A CRITICII LITERARE ROMÂNEȘTI
(1960-1989), CA EXPRESIE IDENTITARĂ ÎNTR-UN
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AL CULTURILOR COGNITIVE**

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ADDENDA

Summary

THE PLEASURE OF THINKING.

The Intellectual Heritage of Romanian Literary Criticism (1960-1989), as an Identity Marker within a Global Map of Cognitive Cultures

For 18th century philosophers the notion of “taste” expressed both the ideal of an adaptive social creativity, and an aspiration of sorts towards an existential feeling of plenty. It expressed both the acute distinction and the concomitant exercise of physical and intellectual functions indispensable for the realization of a state of *decorum*, of intellectual delight (Moriarty 1999).

The present study investigates this classical ideal of taste as the cultural premise from which literary criticism emerged and evolved. Where “literary criticism” is primarily understood neither as an academic subject matter, nor as a literary genre, but as a form of creativity that codifies and sustains a distinctive cognitive culture.

The manner in which we understand and train our different perceptual and intellectual inclinations in order to grow them into accomplished “faculties” is directly influenced by the world-view, the *Weltanschauung* of the culture in which we participate (LeVine [1973] 2007, Schmidt 1996). On the other hand, we have to admit that we don’t use to manifest our faculties separately and distinctly, but rather in a conjoint manner, in constellations shaped by the adaptive and evolutive experience of a given community (Mink 1970, Schleifer, Con Davis & Mergler 1992). In this study, the notion of “cognitive culture” is used with the meaning of a distinct and distinctive cultural fashioning of the spontaneous twinnings

between the fields of action of the cognitive faculties. From this perspective, “taste” does not mean, under any circumstances, the exercise of a solitary, isolated sense, but a summation of techniques of simultaneous mobilization of affective and intellectual, analytical and intuitive abilities. In other words, we considered “taste” as a synthetic practice destined to mediate between two regimes of the human cognitive propensities: the one of adaptation, which supposes the integration and processing of information, notions, concepts, world-images, as responses to the challenges of a “reality” defined by uncertainty and unpredictability; the one of pure gratuity, which could be described as a break in or a bracketing of the functioning of the self-preservation instinct, a state that could be attained only at the expense of the manifestation of a competing instinct, “artificially” enhanced so as to be able to inhibit the former, more basic one – this later instinct being the one of play.

The pluridisciplinarity of literary criticism is, so to say, inborn; it implies the correlation not only of information, but also of different modes of the cogito, and of different paths and practices of acquiring knowledge. Actually, criticism emerges as a profession and latter on as a distinctive epistemological field from the confrontation for preeminence between advocates of the notional and argumentative intelligence and the and the apologists of what we most probably would term today as “emotional intelligence” (Gardner 1993, Chen, Moran & Gardner 2008, Emmerling, Shanwal & Mandal 2008). The office of the critic is styled and legitimized as the one of an umpire in the Kantian “conflict of faculties” (Kant [1798] 1979, Rand 1992). In other words, as the one of keeping a fine balance not only between different modes of discourse, but between substantially different modes of thinking that otherwise seemed to constantly tend toward polemical discord.

The function of literary criticism can be defined in meta-cognitive terms, as oriented towards the problematization of cognition, as fulfilling the tasks of preparing, asserting, protecting a consciousness of the implicitness and diffuseness with respect to the basic cognitive practices, as destined to explore, consolidate and/or periodically renovate the channels connecting the “spontaneous” cognitive practices and a certain

epistemological ethos. This condition seems to be quite accurately described by the notion of “personal” and “tacit” knowledge, notoriously theorized by Michael Polanyi (1958).

In other words, we regard literary criticism as a vector of modern sociability, where sociability is seen as evolving as a community of intellectual curiosity, but also of doubt, of systematic cognitive and ethical inquiry.

But “cognitive culture” is equally determined (and made necessary) by the social relationships of power and influence, of competition and cooperation, all of them contained in intricate, sometimes hermetical cultural codes. A play of balances that directly implies the generation and regeneration of the social bond, of the very social tissue. Therefore the cognitive culture is equally determined by the amount of subtlety, refinement and analytical perceptiveness required by the most basic imperative of co-existence, with its most direct implication of avoiding violent conflict. The mechanism of accumulating experience, of synthesizing and styling knowledge directed towards this fundamental strategic aim has been attentively scrutinized by the cultural anthropology and distilled mainly in the form of the theory of politeness. A famous model for the emergence of complexity and of a humane ethos of the social intercourse, supposed to activate, on a anti-entropic basis and against aggressive egoistic instincts, the equally natural/instinctual imperative of communal self-preservation, is the general theory of politeness devised by Penelope Brown and Scott Levinson ([1978] 1987).

Consequently, we could state that the social instincts, once they undergo a process of refinement and decantation, generate virtues of moderation and prudence that could congregate in a cognitive culture and that could be emphatically expressed through the discourse and practices of literary criticism. The political contribution of literary criticism has to do with the fact that democratization does not mean only the uniformity and universality of judicial structures granting abstract rights, but also the proliferation/assimilation of practices of communication and networking specific to the intellectual socialization. Practices, as a matter of fact, meant

fore and foremost to generate intellectual pleasure. Intellectual pleasure conceived, in its turn, as an essential principle of social cohesion.

Hence a cognitive culture that brings together an aesthetics of interpersonal communication that we could confidently call “conversational” (Miller 2006, Li 2004), with an ethics of the self-scrutiny and self-exploration through an intra-personal “dialogue” that could be described as “confessive” (Şora [1947] 1995, Delumeau [1990] 1998). Setting this theory of embedding the confessive into the conversational as its main premise, the study explains the birth, occurring in the early modernity, of literary criticism from the spirit of polite conversation. Which alludes to tracing the origins of politeness itself as a manner of thematizing/encoding sociability and as a targeted and concentrated exercise of “sociogenic” (supporting the perpetual (re)generation of sociability) virtues.

The chapters consecrated to this survey (i.e. “Political politeness. Diffusion, Graduality, Mutuality, Elegance, Spontaneity, Complexity” and “Criticism, Politeness, and Knowledge”) prepare the ground for understanding the ethos and cognitive culture of literary criticism in East European Communist societies. That is to say, a form of criticism configured by a nexus of determinations not dissimilar to those in which literary criticism surfaced in Western Europe within social-cultural frameworks such as the city-states of Renaissance Italy, the baroque monarchies of the 1600s, or the enlightened absolutism of the 18th century.

This is mainly the focus of the chapter called “Polite conversation and public space in post-Stalinist societies”. In the said societies, the emphatic role played by criticism was a consequence of the fact that, by its very nature, the condition of literature itself as a public discourse is open to controversy. The literary work as such is “dumb” (Frye 1957), and this natural status was consolidated under the specific circumstances of Communist dictatorships. Having to confront the pressures of a huge mechanism of ideological censorship, both the writers and the critics were interested in emphasizing the paradox of expressivity as non-expression, and of the “speechless speak” of literature. The “muteness” of literature was construed as a paragon of implicitness, as a strategy of *preserving* rather than instrumentalizing the expressive potentiality of the natural language. It was, therefore, the lot of criticism to provide for what we could

call a *manifest* social discourse. Or, in other words, to test, approximate, and gradually enlarge the confines of what could be publicly expressed in a Communist society. Which meant continuously generating, even if at a microscopic level, the essentially mental space of a civic society.

Another important underpinning of this situation concerned what we could call the policies of defining knowledge. Politeness, as expressed in a skeptical practice of refined observation and nuanced distinctions, functioned as a perpetual transgression from an aesthetic to an ethical perspective along the continuum of intellectual subtlety. In other words, politeness appeared as the correct/proper *form* of doubt, as the “orthodoxy” or rather the “ortho-morphism” of doubt. And it has to be noticed that literary criticism was especially well-placed in order to uphold such views because if the Communist ideological monopolists couldn’t admit even the slightest public philosophical disputation over social or political matters, they were more comfortable with the apparently inoffensive judgments of taste and with the peaceful coexistence of a plurality of interpretations of a literary (master)piece.

On the other hand, the value of pluralism was advocated by the literary criticism as an expression of “creativity”, of intellectual “fecundity”, that was acceptable for the official post-Stalinist cultural policy since it might have been construed as demonstrating the “fullness” and “richness” of life in a Socialist society. An advocacy for intellectual diversity had to simulate the most natural harmony with the post-Stalinist version of the “pursuit of happiness”, with the ideal of a multilateral realization of the individual aspirations and potentialities harbored by the Communist authorities in, for instance, the 13th article of the slightly liberalized 1965 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania: “In the Socialist Republic of Romania, all state activity is aimed at the development of the system and the prosperity of the socialist nation, the continual rise of material and cultural well-being, the assurance of liberty and human dignity, and the multilateral assertion of the human personality” (translated in Simons 1980: 320).

Actually, what the post-Stalinist censorship tolerated was a limited and strictly controlled plurality of the means of expression, without any

relativization of the core tenets of the official ideology (Haraszti 1987). But literary criticism hosted a cluster of strategies hinted at tacitly transgressing the Communist party project of a strictly controlled, mainly ornamental political liberalization. In the critical practice, plurality was construed and deployed as touching not only on the form of expression or analytical methods, but also on the substance of opinion and conviction. The eminently benevolent rituals and mannerisms of the critical polite conversation gradually promoted pluralism not as a means to an imposed common end, but as a finality to itself.

The literary criticism could make an open theoretical connection between diversity understood as a community of doubt and diversity understood as the celebration of intellectual dynamics and creativity under the provision that this connection was inserted in the official ideological framework. The official Marxian epistemology claimed that, given its indisputably material essence, the world is entirely cognizable. But on the other hand, given the Marxian commitment to the dialectical method, the totalization of knowledge can never be definitive. Therefore the philosophical subtleties of dialectical materialism allowed for a metaphorical use of the notion of “mystery”, understood as the unknown that lays ahead of the cognitive consciousness, submitted to objective laws that are material and predictable in nature but that are temporarily inaccessible to the human intelligence. Indeterminacy is conceived as provisional and transitory. It is not ontological, it is only an effect produced by the contingent limitation of the data available to the cognitive subject. But even so “indeterminacy” could be admitted in the vocabulary and mental frame of the official Socialist epistemology.

This allowed for the generation of an imaginary *prospective* public space, configured around a definition of doubt as a strategy of approximating the future. The cognitive doubt, seen primarily not as a confrontation of opinions, but as an open process of interrogation and self-interrogation, could simultaneously be construed as the major means of adapting to uncertainty. Literary criticism promoted the intimate connection between intelligence and uncertainty, the “future” (a matter of consensual concern, if not of consensual solutions) being itself defined as a field of tensional (inspiring) uncertainties. Thereby generating public space

as “home” for a dynamics of uncertainty and a certain freedom of hypothesizing. A social space born from a break in the prophetic self-confidence (i.e. the pretense of controlling the future) of the official Communist ideology.

The process that took place in most of the Sovietized East European countries was actually the regeneration of the culture of the pre-Communist sociable classes, with the important effect of preserving the manners of thinking and the knowledge that were incompatible with or inconvenient to the ruling Communist parties in a state of “tacitly conversational” dispersion. But even if the forms of the conversational culture were historically attested in Central and Eastern Europe since the early modernity (Chrostowska 2012) and tended to preserve their prestige and social function along the 20th century (Uhl 1999, Cornis-Pope & Neubauer 2004-2006), the Romanian case has been rather singular in that this culture represented in itself the most extended and effective network of intellectual socialization alternative to the Communist ideology and institutions.

It is evident that other East European countries under Soviet occupation had had an aristocratic tradition in the most rigorous Western meaning of the term, as it is the case of Hungary (Tötösy de Zepetnek & Vasvári 2011, Czigány 1984, Cushing 2000, Rady 2001) and Poland (Kridl 1956, Zajaczowski 1967, Schneider 2005, Björling & Pereswetoff-Morath 2005, von Klobuczynski 2007). These major East European cultures naturally inherited a predominantly social and political understanding of their own feudal past (Szűcs 1983, Gella 1989, Dénes 2006). In Romania, what could count as a domestic tradition of nobility could not be historically linked to the feudal hierarchy or law and presented only partial functional equivalents with the classical feudal establishment. But it is precisely because of this that “aristocracy” represented less an expression of actual heritage, but rather a cultural project (implying both the serious dimension of assuming a set of values, and the pleasure of practicing the manners as a form of social play) intimately linked to the idea of Westernization and, implicitly, modernization (Binder-Iijima 2010). For the Romanian intellectual elites, the aristocratic ideal was experienced as a challenging form of reinvention of the (both social and personal) self.

Within the Romanian literary criticism the culture of polite conversation preserved the intimacy between the training of the rational cognition and the refining of the aesthetic taste long after this mutuality had been abrogated by the Western European positivist literary criticism. The instauration of the Communist regime did not uproot this culture, but actually, in a paradoxical and most assuredly unintended way, it contributed to its conservation and reproduction. The analysis of the survival of the spirit of polite conversation and of its gradual acquisition of culturally relevant cognitive properties is carried out in the chapter called "The Dilemmas of Modernity and Romanian Traditions in Criticism".

The French influence over the institutions and mentalities found, actually, an important catalyzing element in the very social structure of 19th century Moldova and Walachia: the secular elites became the vectors of the local version of what Norbert Elias termed "the civilizing process" (1937), their influence being that of gradually converting their traditional social capital into the modern status and charisma of the "homme d'État", of the "homme de science", also sometimes of the champion of modern technology (as in many places in Europe, the descendants of the local aristocracy manifested a marked inclination toward aeronautical experiments and experiences), and last but not least, of the "homme de lettres" (Matei 2004).

This historical background is drawn in order to substantiate the tenet that the Romanian literary critic was a descendant of the French 18th century "philosophe", historically distilled from the liberal aristocrat and naturalized (i.e. adapted to the Romanian social-cultural milieu) through a sense of participating to a "long durée" of the local social elites (perceived not so much as a ruling, but as an educated class, as a repository of the local tradition of civility). Just like the original "philosophe", the Romanian ideal literary critic had to be defined, and therefore validated above all by intellectual curiosity (to which empathy was accessory), by rhetorical elegance (primarily manifested as the ability to discern the finest nuances of meaning), and by the pungent dynamics of the psyche (which should allow for a sustained state of positive intensity, but without any lapse into blind enthusiasm).

Along the Romanian Westernization initiated at the middle of the 19th century, the social prestige of the literary criticism was intertwined with the diffuse but persistent and influential respect for what could be called an indigenous aristocracy. In the late 1930s and in the 1940s the subsequent dictatorships of king Carol II, of the Fascist-like “legionnaire” movement, of the pro-German marshal Ion Antonescu, this ghastly suite culminating with the Soviet occupation at the end of World War II and the imposition of the Communist system, have massively disturbed the distillation and diffusion of the social capital of the nobility within the local “civilizing process”. But, in spite of the exercise of such formidable disruptive forces, the process could not be permanently terminated. The official Communist ideology tended, especially in the 1950s, to demonize the alleged reactionary propertied classes, and especially their upper segment that contained the descendants of the big landowners that still preserved, in terms of social memory, a link with the traditional boyars. But institutionalized hate-speech generated the reverse effect of intensifying, at least for the social and mental horizon that preserved a sense of the memory of the Westernization process, the charisma of this extinct social class and, at the same time, of accomplishing the integral transmutation of the social aristocracy into an ethical ideal. That is why the new intellectuals who should have been the outcome of an ideologically correct system of education actually aspired, whenever and wherever they could manifest their free will, towards personal standards that could be termed as post- or rather meta-aristocratic.

In this process of preservation and of adaptive restructuring of an entire socio-cultural memory, the literary criticism was to play a crucial role, mainly through the influence it exercised not only among the learned (i.e. academic), but also over the educated classes in general. That is to say, over those elites that, enjoying a certain autonomy deferred by their professional self-reliance, and therefore being less or less-directly controlled by the party structures could in their turn exercise a certain influence over society at large (Alexandrescu 2000, Gheorghiu 2007).

The reconstruction of this whole context is meaningful for placing the literary criticism at a socio-cultural and cognitive pace. While after the

World War II the West European literary criticism evolved towards a profound ideologization, in the political meaning of the word (Sontheimer 1976, Boschetti 1985, Kauppi 1994, 2010, Lottman 1998, Geyer 2001, Pavel 2001, Marx-Scouras 2004, Parkes 2009), the East European space, both as a side-effect of the cultural frost generated by Communism, and of a visceral rejection of the intellectual elites (or, better said the cultural counter-elites, diffusely opposed to the political elites) of any kind of ideologization, tended to conserve the Enlightenment tradition of the sovereign (in a "meta-aristocratic" sense) cultivation of the intellectual curiosity.

The subtle but essential differences of approach, values, and intellectual sensitivity that opposed the Romanian critics representative for the 1960s to their radicalized Western (mainly French) peers are formulated, at a theoretical level, in the subchapter 'A "transatlantic" and "heterocronic" generation'. The topic is pursued at an analytical level in the case studies presented in the second part of the study ("Resistance Through Civilization: Romanian Postbellum Criticism in Three Case Studies"). We focus subsequently on precisely defined samples taken from the work of three outstanding literary critics and public intellectuals of the epoch investigated: *Timpul trăirii – timpul mărturisirii* (Time of experience – time of confession), the "Parisian diary" of Eugen Simion ([1977] 1986); the fourth volume of the vast essayistic series *Teme (Themes)* authored by Nicolae Manolescu (1983); Mircea Martin's manifesto *Dicțiunea ideilor* (Utterance/Phrasing of the Ideas - 1981) and his volume of studies *Singura critică* (Criticism, the One and Only - 1986).

To summarize, let us say that the specificity of the birth of the Romanian criticism was granted by a bundle of determinations whose conjoint effects on the literary culture of the country are obvious to this day: a) a symbiosis of the local mainly military elites with a Byzantine emigration and the creation of a rather elaborate local court culture; b) the modern transformation of the domestic nobility (the boyars) from a formal social class, clearly defined by its privileges, into an informal social group, characterized mainly by its life- and thinking-style; c) the influence of the French aristocratic model and of the culture of the literary salon, seen as a form of both superior leisure and Westernization; d) the imitation (in the

19th century) and then internalization (during the Belle Epoque, the interbellum period, and up to the Communist epoch) and intellectualization (in a cognitive sense, evolving from the subtlety of manners to the subtlety of the conceptual thinking, but also in a social sense, of replacing the persona of the aristocrat with the one of the intellectual) of the West European culture of politeness.

The interplay of all these factors allowed the Romanian literary criticism to oppose the rhetoric of the Communist propaganda, which was massively partial to the exaltation of effort for effort's sake and to an ethos of assiduity and self-sacrifice patterned on an subjacent mythology of labor seen as recovery from the Original Sin (that was, for instance, the meaning implied in sentencing the descendants of the "exploitative classes" to periods of forced agricultural or industrial labor, a "rite de passage" disguised under the secular name of "reeducation"). What the meta-aristocracy of literary criticism implicitly offered as an alternative to the puritan official values was an ethos of playful invention and innovation, of creative gratuity, of intellectual elegance and refinement, of serene sovereignty over the "objective determinations". Obviously, the critical ethos did not despise work ethics *per se*, but attempted to construe it, starting from its innermost essence rather as a superior play than as a form of penitence. Literary criticism did not only contemplate such a transfiguration of the central concept of the Communist ideology, but also tried to transmit this vision of polishing and graciously refashioning "work" to a larger public. The critics felt themselves compelled to thematize and problematize their inner liberty, but also to "represent" it, in both the meaning of speaking in the name of those who believed in this value, and in the meaning of turning it into a public representation of rhetorical brilliance, in the public expression of the genuine pleasure of thinking.

Another major theoretical tenet of the present research is that the notion of cognitive culture, with special reference to literary criticism could be accurately perceived and defined only in a broad comparative perspective. In other words, the study points to the possibility of using the

concepts and instruments of comparative literature in order to articulate a cross-cultural approach to literary criticism.

A paradox that seems of the essence of today's comparative literature is that the system of reference in which the act of comparison is usually situated is built so as to eliminate a mandatory reference to the different and specific cultures and traditions of literary criticism that fatally underpin the literary works brought under investigation.

This doesn't mean that the intellectual, social, or cultural were downplayed or utterly let aside. On the contrary, "culture", in its most extended social and anthropological understanding, is obviously taken as an absolute premise. It is seen as a background without which the individual literary works couldn't as much as be perceived, let alone described or analyzed (Kushner 2001, Suassy 2006). But the paradox lies in the fact that a high level of awareness of literature's cultural determinations goes hand in hand with a manifest lack of interest for the diversity of those specific mediational mentalities, skills, value systems, forms of social behavior, which we could even if approximately sum up under the notion of "literary criticism".

Why should we pay attention only to culture-in-general, and not to such *specific* cultural filters or nurturing beds of literature as the different cognitive cultures of literary criticism? This amounts to stating that, in bringing face to face two literary artifacts with different cultural backgrounds, we inevitably confront two notions of literature, resulting from two different processes of cultural and social evolution, from two different manners of distilling and modeling the experience of indulging in language-based interactive, complex, tensional, expressive, highly symbolic and empathetic virtual worlds.

Actually, literary criticism, as an object in itself of the comparative inquiry might provide a fertile perspective on the global intercultural negotiation of the very notion of "literature". Literary comparatists, who act for the most as literary critics themselves, should accept that, at least by the very process of constantly defining the substance and the area of application of the notion of "literature", their scholarly peers from other cultures mould to a certain extent the literary works produced in the

respective cultures. In close connection to these, attention should be paid to the negotiation of qualifications such as “world” and “national” as in the notions of “world literature” and “national literature”. Precisely because these notions are seminal to their science and craft, literary comparatists should be aware that it is not reasonable to see them as emerging directly from the confrontation of their own value-free scientific mindset with the varied objects of its interest. In many instances, their approach should proceed from the distinct possibility that the world vs. national conceptual dialectics has been previously devised in intricate ways by the literary criticism (or its functional equivalents) of the cultures that host the literary samples tagged for comparison.

The task of exposing the more often than not diffuse and implicit cultures of literary criticism which surround (as halos of social and aesthetic values, cognitive attitudes and social conventions) the literary works that are brought face to face should seem natural to the comparative approach to literature. Which is to say that the comparative approach has to acknowledge, on the one hand, that literary criticism evolves in different forms, through different patterns of social-cultural determination and embeddedness, and, on the other hand, that there is a normative-cognitive power inherent to every culture of literary criticism that no reasonable scholar of literature can afford to ignore. Another implication being that a coherent comparative approach should attend to bring together, in the virtual space of weighing analogies and equivalences, *differing* conceptual representations of what is “universal” as well as of the “world” vs. “national” literary/cultural dynamics which emerge in *different* cultural areas.

The call for a comparative cross-cultural perspective on literary criticism wouldn’t imply the study of how an already-constituted universal something that we choose to call “criticism” takes roots in different cultures, but of how different critical cultures evolve from within different social and cultural milieus. This demand cannot be fully supplied by the histories of literary criticism that are available today. Of course that some of these enterprises are as praiseworthy as they are useful, beginning with that of the unjustly forgotten solitary pioneer of a global comparison of

literary tastes, Augustin François Théry (1838, 1848), and on to René Wellek's masterpiece *The History of Modern Criticism* (1955), to the Romanian scholar Adrian Marino's six volumes *Biography of the Idea of Literature* (1991-2000) or to the intensive team-work concentrated in the nine massive volumes of the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (1981-2001). Some influential anthologies of the critical thinking and practice could also be called into question, as Gay Wilson Allen and Harry Hayden Clark's *Literary criticism, Pope to Croce* (1941/1962), for the English-speaking world, or, in the Romanian literary scholarship, the three volumes of *Poetic Creeds* (Arte poetice) focusing on Antiquity (Pippidi 1970), Romanticism (Ion 1982), and Renaissance (Condrea-Derer et alii 1986). We could also point to the inherently comparative turn of historical approaches of given national traditions of literary criticism sponsored by scholars, mainly American who are not part of that traditions (e.g. Fellows 1970 or Henry 1994, on French literary criticism).

But even if such approaches are or tend to be as open-minded and cosmopolitan as possible, they are obviously centered on the core Western European literatures and more often than not on Western European core values. At the same time almost without exception they take for granted that the history of literary criticism is the direct reflection of a general evolution (if not progress) of the human spirit.

My point in criticizing such a universalist approach is not that it would be plainly false. It can be reasonably maintained that, especially in the modern times, due to unprecedented possibilities of a dense and sustained interconnectivity, one could meaningfully speak of consistent global intellectual communities. These communities have a history, or better phrased: the intensity and effectiveness of their present-day manifestations pressures our sense of perspective into perceiving them as having an articulated, global and goal-driven history. But if it is obviously true that such networks of intellectual exchange develop a strong communality of values, sensitivity, hermeneutical habits, it is also true that these processes do not concentrate and exhaust the meaning of the global sphere of cultural/intellectual/literary practices.

In other words, even if a “vertical” trans-cultural sense of the global relevance of a Western history of the literary criticism is an undeniable and highly influential fact, it doesn’t suppress the evidence of the “horizontal” natural diversity of the literary criticism cultures. The universalist perspective could (and should) not be simply dismissed, given its strong spiritual appeal and the growing body of social and cultural evidence that seem to support the pan-rationalist intimations of the historical Enlightenment (ironically enough, at a time when they simultaneously come under the most savage attack from different breeds of radical philosophical relativists). It is, for instance, relevant that, taking upon himself the daring task of distilling an overview of the literary criticism from ancient to modern times, a widely-learned and theoretically sophisticated Muslim British Indian scholar such as M.A.R. Habib has no problem in strictly identifying it with a historical canon unequivocally rooted in Greek-Latin and Judeo-Christian hermeneutical and philosophical traditions (Habib 2005). Still, the fact that such visions presuppose on so many levels the notion of a common and essential humanity does not from itself make them exhaustive.

The above-mentioned attempts at a general history of the literary criticism necessarily adopt an understanding of criticism that equates it with a system of ideas. But we live in an age when even the philosophers or at least the intellectual historians seem to acknowledge that the influence of an idea is not so much derived from its logical solidarity with other equivalently abstract entities inside the enlightening frame of a big theory, but rather from its embeddedness in a wider social fabric of habits of the mind and of the heart. This is, for instance, the spirit in which the representatives of the Cambridge school, and especially Quentin Skinner (1969) understood to unearth the subtle tissue of references that support and give substance to the vocabulary of the political philosophy of the English early modernity. A spirit, it should be reminded, that also fertilized the field of the literary studies, mainly, but not exclusively through the highly influential New Historicism (Gallagher & Greenblatt 2001).

The comparative study of literary criticism(s) could also profit from the Cambridge contextualist method. The fact that the critical discourse is

generally expected to provide a context (for a work of “genuine” literature) should not obscure the fact that it is itself depending on the context of a given intellectual and emotional culture. One should therefore neither ignore nor underplay the civilizational implications of literary criticism, going from the role it may be ascribed as an intellectual *arbiter elegantiarum* in the process of refining the social norms and polishing the mores, to the covert or overt political overtones it may acquire in different contexts and under different circumstances, to its variable degrees of implication in what the French philosopher Jacques Rancière calls *la poétique du savoir*, the “poetics of knowledge” (Rancière 2000/2006) or Michael Wood calls literature’s “taste of knowledge” (Wood 2005).

Let’s consider the fact that literary criticism either takes roots or comes to a new flourishing in all modernizing societies (Schmeling, Schmitz-Emans & Walstra 2000: 115-204, Suassy 2006, Jameson & Miyoshi 2008, Gupta 2009: 62-96). We could hypothesize that the diffusion of literary criticism has to do with a widely spread inclination *to bring together* and *co-exercise* dispositions of the mind as different as conceptual concentration, logical consistency, the free play of imagination (implying the widest gradient of counterfactuality), norm-orientation, socially pragmatic or metaphysically informed types of empathy. Or, among other things, utter sensual pleasure.

Literary criticism can be globally described as a form of cognitive practice whose specificity is given by the association of intellectual faculties whose public exercise, according to the standard grand theory, should have been carefully separated within the mental frame of modernity. The said association of faculties may highly vary from one culture/society to another in point of scope, manner, ratio or depth. At a psychological level, it is this very diversity that invites a comparative cross-cultural approach. But at the logical level, the prolegomena for any future comparative research rests on the possibility of a general, cross-cultural understanding of literary criticism as the education and manifestation of a *cluster* of emotional and intellectual cognitive faculties.

It may of course quite rightfully be maintained that creating opportunities for transgressional transactions between mental faculties is

also the attraction behind the worldwide success of literature itself, as a means of cultural self-expression and communication. This observation calls for a more precise definition of the mediating/transgressional status of literary criticism (Sell 2000, 2001). The social identity of this cultural practice, or of this species of cognitive culture, is given by the fact that it constantly oscillates between the status of a craft and that of a science, between the pretence of representing an objectifiable, generalizable cognitive discourse, and the self-protective claim of being essentially a form of "tacit" (Polanyi 1958, 1966) or "local" (Geertz 1983) knowledge.

Literary criticism causes and hosts not only mutually transgressive associations of faculties, but also of social functions. It can freely blend together formulating norms, incorporating hierarchies of values, and participating in the perpetual consolidation of the general symbolic frames of the social-communal life. And this with the most different social and political implications, ranging from the overt or covert legitimation to the direct or subversive de-legitimation of the political order and power system. On the other hand, literary criticism is compatible with the intricate etiquette that imposes the display of civic mutual benevolence, and it expresses (or rather puts to a permanent test) the socially acceptable balance between polite compliance and the free expression of personal preferences and tastes (Seiwald 2011).

This fine-tuning is exposed in several interdisciplinary surveys of the critical culture of different moments in space and time. The complex fabric and highly context-bound nature of literary criticism is analyzed in works that investigate the mentalities of the 18th century Britain (Klein 1994, Parker 2003, Goring 2005) or France (Maxwell Cryle & O'Connell 2004, Kale 2005). Then, there is a lot to deduce for the benefit of the investigation of the emergence of critical cultures from more general intellectual and cultural histories of the Habsburg and post-Habsburg Europe (Schorske 1961, Lukacs 1988/1994, Lăcătuș 2009). There are also studies that directly or derivatively enlighten the polyfunctional condition of literary criticism in Communist societies. With respect to this thematic field, the case of the Soviet Union traditionally monopolized most of the interest of the international academic community (Kagarlitsky 1988, Shlapentokh 1990,

Lahusen & Kuperman 1993, Dobrenko & Tihanov 2011), but there are also literary criticism-relevant insights in the post WWII cultural and intellectual history of, for instance, the ex-Yugoslavia (Mlikotin 1976, Wachtel 1998). An interesting problematization of the role of the literary criticism under the Communist regime is to be noted also in the case of Romania, proposed both by Western (Verdery 1991) and by indigenous scholars (Bodiu 2000, Terian 2009, Fotache 2009, Macrea-Toma 2009).

Significant elements of a comparative approach to the cognitive cultures of literary criticism can be distilled from some attempts of offering a regional perspective on the interaction of “literary cultures”. The latter notion is explicitly used in the self-assertion of at least two remarkably comprehensive research programs: one centered on the “literary cultures” of Central and Eastern Europe (Cornis-Pope & Neubauer 2004-2010), the other, on the “literary cultures” of Latin America (Valdés & Kadir 2004). A similar broad regional approach, even if limited to the 19th century, has also been attempted for the Middle East (Rastegar 2007). But the comparative approach is also inherent in surveys of the literary criticism of cultural areas that on the one hand, expose a tremendous inner diversity, and on the other hand, went through several phases of dramatic acculturation. I am referring to South Asia (Dev & Das 1989, Dasgupta 1995, Devy 1995, 2002) or the Far East (Karatani 1993, Denton 1996, Cai 2001, 2004, Button, 2009).

Judging on the basis of scholarly experiments such as these, we might conclude that the benefit of a comparative approach to literary criticism is, to speak in classical Hegelian terms an enhancement in the general self-awareness of the human spirit. This self-awareness is actually what places my definition of the cognitive culture of literary criticism at a clear distance from Fish’s “interpretive community” (Fish 1980). This notion seems to denote a totally path-dependent intellectual behavior, completely absorbed in hermeneutical practices impervious to any (self)critical examination. But the literary criticism cultures are not simply about applying interpretive patterns, but about creatively transforming them from within, and about self-consciously and autonomously reflecting on the very cognitive faculties that are at work in the process of interpretation.

So, were it to be applied to literary criticisms, the comparative method would not bring to awareness cultural practices deeply embedded in local habits (as it might be the case if we compared “interpretive communities”), but rather confront culturally diverse practices of explorative/interrogative self-awareness. By constructing a coherent basis on which these practices could be brought together we no less than expand and refine our understanding of the manner in which the human consciousness not only exerts, but experiences and assumes its own cognitive processes. But the kind of self-awareness we may derive from the understanding of the forms of cognitive culture implied in the practices of literary criticism can also play a more pragmatic role, namely to ground and nourish a critique of ongoing cultural public policies.

In order to substantiate this claim, I will focus on an example taken from the contemporary European cultural and educational initiatives. Let us begin by considering the EU Culture program (2007-2013), which had a budget of 400 million euro. The main goals stated in the famous *European Agenda For Culture* which gave the rationale for the program *Culture 2007* + are “the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; the promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs; the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union’s international relations” (Commission of the European Communities 2007).

We have to clarify immediately that the European legislators traditionally understand cultural diversity in ethnic and linguistic terms, so that the notion of the diversity of cognitive cultures as developed in the present paper cannot operate within their conceptual framework. Then, it is essential to bear in mind that their notion of culture is directly linked to economic imperatives such as “growth” and “jobs”. The fact of bringing culture and economy together is in no way unreasonable or detrimental, and it is highly improbable that it had been intended as a polemic trivialization of the notion of “high culture”. The real problem is that the direct juxtaposition of culture and economic rationality seems to leave no places for the playful and gratuitous experiment on which creativity, as both an individual and a social process, essentially depends.

The EU cultural philosophy also shows an incapacity to discern the *market*, a field of social activity of which “culture” as an economically productive activity is a natural part, from the *publicity*, understood as a virtual place of the intellectual production, of the generation of opinions/ideas. In order for both of them to be productive and vibrant it might be necessary to closely-knit market and publicity together. European literary criticism in particular has a well-established historical record of creatively spanning these two social playgrounds. But the unilateral subordination of culture to the logic of economic effectiveness (a tendency not created, but significantly supported by the EU cultural programs) implies, in our case, that the critical opinion is *totally* subordinated to the priorities of the literary market. Such circumstances bring about the complete nullification of the charisma of the critical office, traditionally conferred by its *independece d’esprit*. The immediate result is, for instance, that the literary reviews tend to be assumed not by their individual authors, but by editing houses or literary magazines. The critic as a creative individual instance is put between brackets. His name cannot become a brand anymore.

If this is how the EU policies reflect the degradation of the office of the literary critic as a public speaker for the value of free thinking (which is free not only in the sense of a lack of external restrictions, but also in that of its inner mobility of invention and association), let’s now consider criticism in its scholarly-academic capacity. In this respect we should weigh the impact of the Bologna Process, that is to say of the creation of a so-called European Higher Education Area on the literary studies and, implicitly on the academic status of the literary critic. Such a detailed evaluation would, of course be an immense challenge, but it is a fact that humanities in general, and literary studies in particular have been proved unsuccessful at adapting to the ideals of precise qualifications and of thoroughly quantifiable standards for the research activities lately imposed on the European universities. The bureaucratic logic instituted by the Bologna Process attacked and to a disquieting extent eroded the specific intellectual culture of the academic literary criticism. The institutionalized non-adequacy of the Bologna-related evaluation schemes directly threatens the tacit knowledge historically accumulated by the literary studies. Which is

to say: their multi-secular culture of improvisation (Hallam & Ingold 2007, Peters 2009, Landgraf 2011), implying cognitive practices and strategies that are simultaneously creatively indeterminate, intellectually flexible, adaptive and dynamic. The intellectual lifestyle characteristic of the academic literary culture is also pressured into marginalization or complete eviction. The Bologna Process is impervious to what sir Joshua Reynolds identified, in his time as “the advantage to society from cultivating intellectual pleasure” (Reynolds 1801: 1-8), and consequently finds no use for an academic tradition rooted in skeptical, hedonistic, playful, imaginative manners of thinking.

The better historical understanding of the complex and intricate cognitive culture of the European literary criticism, to which a comparative approach relating it to different other cultures of the world could essentially contribute, might make us realize the magnitude of the damage the European bureaucracy is currently inflicting upon a unique intellectual heritage. Beginning with the early modernity, the European literary critic managed to be simultaneously a learned scholar, a public intellectual, and an entertainer. Of course, these capacities would not be equally relevant for each and every practitioner of the art at every moment in history, and the national traditions could also vary as far as the checks and balances of the three are concerned. But still we could invoke the stability of the principle of alliance between the same cognitive faculties and between the same social roles/public offices, and we could propose a unifying European critical ethos based on intellectual charisma (brilliant intuition), acumen (seductive self-expression), and *decorum* (Müller 2011).

It might be argued that this nexus of faculties and cognitive strategies is only an atavism of the early “paradisaal” phase of the European modernity, when the structural necessity of intellectual specialization and of the separation of the different fields of the social and cultural life was not yet a pressuring objective imperative. In fact, far from expressing the resistance to the modernization project, the cognitive culture of the literary criticism was one of its most active agents. But literary criticism bares witness to a morally active attitude in front of the modern imperative of specialization and separation of the domains. The “organic eclecticism” of

the literary criticism was, actually, the expression of the fact that the separation between, say, conceptual intelligence, symbolic imagination, expressive sensitivity was not passively accepted as fatal (or providential), but that this process was understood as necessarily implying the active and permanent participation of the individual (self)reflexive consciousness. The cognitive culture of the European literary criticism is infused by the belief that the differentiation of social playgrounds, and of respective social and moral responsibilities generated by modernity are essentially produced and therefore permanently modulated and negotiated in our own minds. Accordingly, the decomposition of the literary criticism complex might be the indication of a spiritual demise: the apathetic acceptance of a world-model in which the regulating institutions that differentiate the faculties of the mind function in and from themselves.

The above analysis leads to the conclusion that the study of the specific cognitive culture of the European literary criticism should also lead to the commitment of protecting it from the dissolving action of social pressures that the European cultural and humanistic research policies do not try to contain, but actively encourage. The present study ironically argues that a step in this direction, which might contribute to saving Europe from itself while illuminating the global dimension of the phenomenon and thereby stimulating the interest of the comparatists' community, could be to define the cognitive culture of the European literary criticism so as to place it under the provisions of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2006).

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