

# E. Lovinescu's Doctrinarian Crystallization.

Before and After the First World War\*

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## 1. E. Lovinescu, on the Moment of Necessary 'Revisions' (1914–1916)

AS A standing point of my present analysis, I have to bring forward the fact that, in Lovinescu's evolution, one of the indisputable states of grace is related to the moment when the Romanian critic reckoned 'the necessity of revisions' (*'necesitatea revizuirilor'*). Afterwards, this principle served marvellously as a central pillar to his doctrinarian edifice, preceding his theory on the 'mutation of aesthetical values' (*'mutația valorilor estetice'*). The idea of revising things and points of view must have come out while he had been re-reading the critical texts, written before the publication of *Pași pe nisip* (*Step-Traces in Sand*), in order to work them together into a coherent volume. The aesthetical dissuasion and discontent should have been so strong insomuch that the critic felt actually impelled to re-write from scratch his productions. Thus, in the first instance, the concept of 'revision' refers strictly to formal modifications.

Afterwards, while gradually acknowledging that all things written in the "Flacăra" columns (1914-1916) show an evolution from the embellished literary manner to the layer of true criticism, Lovinescu starts to count in the moral criterion as a stringency which comes along with the First World War. Consequently, contrary to all his enemies' slaughtering opinions, 'revisions' are not just the sign of inconsistency, but a sheer necessity (intentionally, at least) to constantly refer to a set of specified and steady principles—later on known as the Lovinescian 'dogmatism'—absolutely requisite to critical authority. Călinescu used to notice with his proverbial righteousness that revision is "an act of deep critical deliberation," "a victory of scientific spirit over the scholastic *amour propre*," with "a considerable share in making the critical, as well as the scientific truth, a function of the creation-in-progress" [my translation, A.P.].<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if this programme here really represents 'an anticipation' of an aesthetical theory dictating

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that “the expression formulae mutate according to ages and temporary conceptions” [my translation, A.P.],<sup>2</sup> let us see, with a stronger accent on concrete examples, how Lovinescu actually understands to revise his opinions.

During the First World War, the militant nationalism—repeatedly professed by the journalist working for a gazette like “Flacăra”—corresponds to the honest principle that morally pressed the disengaged writer to re-engage into public life. As such, one should not mistake this type of ethical and social action with those ‘revisions’ maintaining the formal chiselling: the youth literary impulses passed into completely changed variants when Lovinescu decided to publish them as individual books. The fluctuation of personal opinions and critical verdicts seems to be allowed for from the very beginning as a natural phenomenon, barely avoidable throughout the mutation of values. Yet in the former well-known equation the importance of the critic’s moral consciousness rises to an even greater extent, and is assumed, not always straightforwardly, as the one and only mechanism enabling the critic to recast conveniently his personality and, if the phrase is not too strong, to trim his sails to the wind. Up to a point, having in mind the didactical side of Lovinescu’s cultural profession, I do not see why one should ignore, giving in to some of the traditional prejudices, the crystal-clear connection between the two types of ‘revisions.’ Moreover, this implies a special understanding of personality as a constitutive, organic evolution, crystallized as a dialogue between the private and public spaces, between ‘person’ and *persona*, between intimate emotions and social mask. The Memoirs stately express it and their accents are not completely meaningless. Let us go back to the moment when the critic’s moral crisis flared-up; the journalist’s vexation coincides with the commotion experienced by the Romanian society during First World War.

Now, the politicians’ cowardice awake Lovinescu’s sense of pride and, next thing next, the critic dares to ask that Romania should embark for freedom in the armies of democratic forces. The bold journalist ruthlessly slaughtered those intellectuals who had betrayed the national cause and passed to the enemy lines. Among his common-lot victims, one might find both Gala Galaction and Arghezi, as well as the eccentric circle of artists gathered around Bogdan-Pitești (the reportedly local Maecenas, an eccentric guy with odd views, whose cultural role gets larger acknowledgement in late literary histories).<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that not only the intellectuals were the rotten apple. Notwithstanding their real rebuff against greedy conquerors, all Romanians are subjected to error because of their millennial endurance, quite impossible to dismiss in spite of rapid modernisation of economic and social life. “It’s almost a century since, but for dreaming, we have not been doing anything” [my translation, A. P.],<sup>4</sup> says the young columnist, while he tampers with the idea of the Romanian typical mischief. “We lack a good moral orientation,”<sup>5</sup> he reads further in some other article, “because, during these supreme moments for the existence of our people, *we have to rise out from the swamp or our contemplation. We must change our personality.* [my emphasis and translation, A. P.]”<sup>6</sup> The called-in great personalities turn nevertheless late and the Romanian people is left without guiding lights: the Patriarch sticks to His prayers, the King himself rests on his thoughts. Nicolae Iorga himself, otherwise noisy and ravaging like a hurricane, keeps an enigmatic silence.

Yet Lovinescu cannot stand this anymore, and blasts out his eulogy for “the sacred war” which would, in his opinion, “meet with the instinct of conservation and unity” [my translation, A. P.].<sup>7</sup> Once again, due the circumstances, the art for art’s sake infatuation and the blank aesthetic judgement look like fancies, criminal fancies in many respects. It is just that “during ordinary times the artist’s pen should take a more artistic trait,” but “while the very being of our People is at odds, it must serve other duties, more sacred” [my translation, A. P.].<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, regardless of peace coolness, “our literature should assume a national part by leaving the art’s serenity,”<sup>9</sup> because, goes on the critic, “*we live in a country of imitations—not inherent, organic imitations, though, but exaggerated and totally pointless ones*” [my emphasis and translation, A. P.].<sup>10</sup> Now, whoever knows a whit of Lovinescu’s critical thinking, might fall into the wrong assumption that these words were uttered by one of his worst adversaries. In addition, this would not be a complete blunder as Lovinescu himself, by choking the artistic heart within and his other acquiescence aspirations, steps into the limelight for the first time wearing the robe of the People’s spokesperson. While he stands fast on it, his voice is strong, but rather impersonal. Over three decades pass, and the old and experienced critic rewinds the history threads and, in similar war conditions, his name is written on the wall for the alleged ‘aestheticism.’ The accusation is rather severe and echoes like a tune all around the tradition of Romanian literary studies.

We consequently call the attention to this untouched hypostasis pertaining to Lovinescu’s personality. However, one has to bear in mind the fact that the ethical impetus drives away for a while the critic’s artistic whim. Not only that fancy shrinks in front of current nationalist theories, but also it is now, in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Lovinescu seems to forget his literary vocation. It is at least in this respect that ‘the revisions’ quit on being a sign of artistic awareness and of self-accomplishment passion, as in other periods of the Romanian critic’s life.

## 2. Looking for an aesthetical tradition

**P**UBLISHED IN 1925, *Istoria civilizației române moderne* (*The History of Romanian Modern Civilisation*) is considered Lovinescu’s top doctrinarian work. Here, the author combats against the traditionalist literary trends (namely those called in Romanian ‘*sămănătorism*’, ‘*poporanism*’ and ‘*neo-Junimism*’) whose shortcomings used to relate to the fact that they wasted away literature to petty themes and wane aesthetical formulae. Besides, the so-called ‘traditionalism’ should have been discredited as it circled a reactionary ideology which was prone to create the terrible confusion between ethnic and aesthetic, either of them a value as such, distinguished and dissociated, yet in those times blended together so as to align the Romanian literature to its ‘national characteristics.’ However, if modern Romanian literature (as an expression of creative individualities, sprung by a mature race) came out only in contact with Western cultural forms and had the Romanians not been brought about anything else than folklore anonymous tradition before this contamination, then ‘traditionalism’ would be read more

like a natural inclination towards past, hence a psychic predisposition ('a thinking habit', as Lovinescu himself would say).

Therefore, the absence of a literate tradition prior to the genesis of our modern civilisation proves nothing else than the incongruity of such a premise: sociologically speaking, goes on the critic, there has not been any Romanian 'traditionalism' at all.<sup>11</sup> It is true that, as in any other case, the young Romanian nation awoke to self-consciousness quite late and it lacked those socio-cultural and economical conditions, which, before the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were crucial to individual assertion and literature production as effects of bourgeois life-style.

One can notice that the argument of the critical endeavour drives at self-justification: the modernist mouthpiece speaks about synchronic criticism, about topicality, also about a modern literature, freed from the obsessions of packed nationalism and folkloric foray. Thence, to be modern means, first, accepting subordination and formally submitting to Western literatures; the psyche stays nevertheless the same, that is, 'the national soul' of the race. Then it is implied that, beyond the individual variations, the community still has a homogenous and organic soul. Deriving the hypothesis that any literature represents 'a chapter of ethnical psychology'<sup>12</sup>—even though the critic was drift, at the urge of times, to appreciate and indulge in nationalist, patriotic or biased literature—, Lovinescu does not fall into temptation to look for 'the national character' into contents, precise attitudes or themes.

The ethnic and psychic imprint of literary contents has obviously its share, but not as an essential factor in the process of aesthetical ranking and evaluation. The individual artist creates, in the likes of the popular artist, yet both of them create within the prescribed racial features. The ethnic factor psychologically determines the aesthetic value (not becoming in the least a criterion of aesthetical evaluation too!). In the same manner, the literate and urban creation grows on a ground that exists nevertheless in the national folklore, yet placing itself (as expression or literary form) to the opposite side of popular creation. In other words, the aesthetical value presses out a racial sensibility and still, as a value, must be judged accordingly to other criteria than the psychological ones, namely those linked with the contents of the literary works. The writer's creative abilities are limited or conditioned by race psychology, as well as by a particular language tool. In Lovinescu's own phrase that would sound as following: "the ethnic element is hence both language and spiritual content—apparent only at times—in which aesthetical values are achieved and whose importance grows clearer during the process of value achievement." [my translation, A. P.]<sup>13</sup>

Besides all that, it might be inferred that the great error of traditionalists lies in their inability to cope with the spirit of the age, wherefrom their strain to turn folklore into a fetish as a never-ending and unique source of inspiration for literature. In other respects, Lovinescu seems not only to impart the idea that a folklore remake is needed (only aesthetically speaking, turning back to tradition represents a counter-productive and reactionary movement), but also to accredit such scheme (later on devised by Călinescu's history too), where literature grows naturally from popular to cultured forms. A ready-

made scenario foreshadows everything: the way the aesthetic consciousness quietly separates from the cultural body.

For the founding father of “Sburătorul” literary circle, modern times are specific by the agency of individual consciousness, which, in its turn, validates the aesthetic phenomena. The personality is called on to express freely both as a means of emancipation from the race psychology and of radical opposition against its traditionalist and stereotypical expressions (whether linguistic or mental).<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the more a writer illustrates the frequent themes of ‘the national soul’, complying with the race’s psychological profile, the greater his loss throughout the irreversible process of aesthetic value mutation.

As a matter of fact, the ethnic and psychological factors lose their relevance within the boundaries of lettered culture because the modern life seems so glued up that the ethnic diversity gets levelled and, on the contrary, the importance of updating gains ground. The Romanian critic used to translate wide from Latin and the idea we have just resumed looks similar to the ‘*saeculum*’ Tacitus mentioned in his histories. In Lovinescu’s mind, what the Romanians would borrow from Western culture, chiefly as forms of expression, must bear away once and forever the folkloric pattern and bring us out from the dumbness of a typified creativity that is ethnographically determined. Hence, did the modern Romanian civilization see daylight as a consequence of a revolutionary process (which implies on the one hand, to cut off with the past and the subsequent popular tradition, and, on the other, to plug into the Western culture through imitation, which fits with the other notorious story about ‘burning out the stages’ / “*arderea etapelor*”), it turns out that not only its inner natural development is questioned, but also the possibility to actuate and figure out, step by step, all the evolution cycles the Occidental partners had undertaken. Coming under the incidence of European spirit exactly when Romanticism clocked in, the Romanian literature could not turn and look back. Yet, once raised to a new ‘lettered’ life, it has to put itself on the map and turn things around.

### 3. Is there a Romanian Symbolism?

**P**LANNING TO frame up a Romanian aesthetic tradition, Lovinescu underlines the fact that the birth under the star of Romanticism led to a distressful confusion between ethnic and aesthetic principles. During the first stage, marked by a natural effusion towards the national idea, the turmoil of values can and should be tolerated; yet, once with the triumph of modernity and once one has in sight the ways in which literature tends to create a haughty and autonomous language, dissociation failures seem roughly unacceptable. Consequently, the claim to dissociate the aesthetic traits from other values (obstinately referred to), proves to come in the aftermath of the theories establishing ideas such as literary language specialization and self-determination; the mechanism seems clearer in the course of poetry evolution, from Poe to Baudelaire, going on by Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and reaching at Valéry or T. S. Eliot.

Lovinescu has the merit to guess quite well the direction of this growth: mostly when he identifies that the aesthetical value of literature lies in its capacity to suggest and intimate things; language is thus treasured as a privileged act, beyond any kind of 'ideas' and 'contents.' The critic also underlines the high demand to synchronise Romanian literature with the Western standards, which should bring about the contraction of Romanticism. Moreover, as long as the Romantic patterns carry forth an air of obsolescence, the rising Symbolism should be imported. The critic suggests that only the Symbolist movement integrates the most important features of modernism (namely, suggestion, musicality, the autonomy of language, burning down the distinction between form and content and so forth) and gives our literature the chance to attach to the higher worlds of pure aesthetic values, unmixed with ethic and ethnic additions.

The thesis referring to artistic autonomy and music priority among arts—concurring with the headline idea that, in Paterian words, “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music” because “all arts set a goal that only music succeeds to fulfil thoroughly: *the indistinct fusion of matter and form*” [my emphasis, A. P.]<sup>15</sup>—developed later on the well-known theory about the offshoot of creativity as a process convoluted and embedded in the unconsciousness. In reality, the critic from “Sburătorul” delivers himself to the direct influence of Schopenhauer’s viewpoint (re-featured afterwards by Nietzsche and his modern company). The German philosopher believes that music would be the only means of representation prior to the intelligible forms of reality, which can get to ‘the intimate core,’ to the hidden kernel of the world. Therefore, for Schopenhauer’s Romanian apprentice, the creative process bears a cognitive function (see also Lovinescu’s *Memoirs*) and springs out from an unconscious origin which connects the artist with the essence of things, with that *universalia ante rem* alluded to in the Middle Ages texts. There is only one step from this kind of conjecture—the nondescript and ineffable things are to be conveyed exclusively through musical channels—to the assertion that Symbolism alone can be declared the ‘*ars magna*.’ That is, by breaking all chains, it can concentrate solely to its production mechanism or, as the Romanian poet Ion Barbu would put it, the art as a pure act of Narcissism.

The Symbolist poetics (and, let us not forget, also Bergson’s reflections on duration and the intuitive knowledge) illustrates a larger suspicion towards the conceptual language, which pass over to Lovinescu’s critical discourse. He bears it in mind not only as a philosophical shibboleth, but also as a way to enlighten the creation mechanisms. However, falling back upon principles such as unconsciousness or vague impulsive strains and predispositions goes altogether with his basic intention to circumscribe a personal method that has not found yet its way of action. The ‘predisposition’ mentioned just before—believes the modernist spokesman—does not crop up on a virgin ground; actually, an intense and sustained mental training prepares and impels the unconscious drives to come out and the mechanism shall work as the artist’s distinctive heraldic sign.<sup>16</sup> There lies art, no matter its quota, both in literature and in criticism proper, as long as the critic disentangles the creative process—that is, the ineffable of the artistic work, its ‘musical’ tune—only within creation frame, helped by intuition and artistic talent. This way, Symbolism serves wonderfully as a departure tarmac for Lovinescu’s

exciting theories on the intuitive method and musical core of artistic products. Firstly, the brand new insight into artistic acts gets a description close to the analogical process implied by the ‘hermeneutic circle;’ secondly, the musical core seems to be located imprecisely, as Ion Negoïtescu noticed, in the “pre-rational horizon” (not yet irrational!) of a rather “imprecise and dim conception” [my translation, A. P.].<sup>17</sup>

Everything goes perfectly fine, up to the point when Lovinescu turns out some other passages and, clashed in his polemics against Ovid Densusianu, he is on the verge to sever the aesthetical principle (hitherto understood as an expression of sensibility) and the intellectual factor. This time, Symbolism is branded as “a reaction against intellectualism,” which “has nothing to do with the energetic conception about universe.”<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the old links of modern literature with the High Romanticism, now relieved from verbal emphasis and rhetoric, are as clear as daylight. Călinescu himself used to consider Symbolism as knowledge poetry, while, in the same concerns, a competent specialist like Hugo Friedrich coined the very inspired phrase of ‘de-Romanticised Romanticism.’ Astounding enough, Lovinescu does not signify in the same manner the term ‘Symbolism’ and bestows on it a plural definition. Now, he prefers to handle a rather confining understanding: since this artistic trend refers to ‘humanity in general’, neither the ‘particular,’ nor the ‘national’ traits are mentionable. Therefore, Symbolist art feeds from “the world of instincts,” “being rather a question of physiology than of psychology.” [my translation, A. P.]<sup>19</sup> In any case, does Symbolism illustrate the emergence of a purely aesthetic literature, then the aesthetical value resorts to instinct and physiology as well; consequently, it hints at sensibility (and not in the least at intellect!), which pertains to instinct and unconsciousness. This determines a transgression of borders, marked either by the ethnic factor or race psychology, while sensibility (mainly that of young peoples) gets moulded not by traditions, but accordingly to the spirit of the age.

Bearing in mind the stress on synchronisation and agreement with the Occident, Symbolism should have leapfrogged our literature straight to universality, beyond the linguistic restrictions and corresponding to the Symbolist poetics which, relying on suggestion and musicality, makes possible a clean-cut distinction between the aesthetic aspects and the other values comprised by the literary work. At any rate, I daresay things are not just as we have expected: Lovinescu is driven by his old ethnicism and presumes that the Symbolist movement represents a mimetic phenomenon, namely “the synchronic product of a literary attitude spread through contagion.” [my translation, A. P.]<sup>20</sup>

Thus, it is totally wrong to profess that Lovinescu considered Symbolism as a compulsory stage on the progressive course of our literature: first of all, the Romanian critic had never come to terms, at least on the theoretical level, with the idea that the minor literatures might retread the great histories of major literatures; secondly, his trust in Symbolism deflates dramatically and he comes to consider this artistic movement a sort of peripheral and isolated phenomenon, a commonplace artistic development among others. What Symbolism really brought out, as well as Modernism, is the positive distinction between aesthetic and ethnic traits. Yet, this did not add anything to the inner value of the artistic product. On the contrary. A writer, the critic says, cannot be ‘uni-

versal' unless he is primarily 'specific.' Therefore, the adjoining of aesthetic factor to other literary features seems to work better in literature's interest than the puritan ideas such as language autonomy and aesthetic expurgation.

An ethnic point of view on the aesthetic value makes null and void the lines about the importance of suggestion and musicality in Symbolist poetics. Not only the poetic language in particular, but also the language in general become potentially suggestive, whereas the aesthetic element receives the following definition: it is "an autonomous value impressed in an ethnic material through language and spiritual content."<sup>21</sup> Hence, Lovinescu believes that the literary value depends on the way the aesthetic factor is able to relate and occur together with the other values. The host of "Sburătorul" argues that Romanticism represents the most suited literary movement for our race's sensibility; on the contrary, Symbolism would be nothing but a transient fashion, gifted for theories, yet barely able to come up with authentic literature.

The sheer contradiction is as clear as crystal. On the one hand, Symbolism cannot grant anymore our attachment to Western literature, since it does not encourage the detachment of aesthetic from ethnic traits. The hailed theory just a while back falls into disuse and disfavour because it carries forth the germs of the decadent and languid sensibility. On the other, Romanticism bears a fertile aesthetic impurity, much to the nature and spirit of our young literature. While Symbolism appears to be a minimalist trend resorting to the figures of literature's dissolution, Romanticism has always held out a maximal poetics, ascertaining a full creative strength, allowing any person and national soul to express freely.

So, the Symbolist movement does not comport "the universal character of Romantic movement; having a purely aesthetic essence, without either a nationalist contingency or an attitude on life, it could not have had a consistent influence on large areas." [my translation, A. P.]<sup>22</sup> But, by importing Symbolist manner, the Romanian landscape comes to witness—the critic remarks—the outstanding birth of 'the aesthete', a species rather queer than apt to be admired, "a type which is able to perceive the aesthetic values as such." [my translation, A. P.]<sup>23</sup>

To separate what belongs to the aesthetic field from the other values seems to be also the Symbolists' great aspiration: what they used to call beauty concerns mainly the way the human sensibility changed in contact with a growing cosmopolitan life, slightly losing its grasp to the ethnic grounds. Here, Lovinescu makes an exquisite remark on Romanian minorities. It is not irrelevant—says he—that the Jewish authors acted a dramatic role in the process of modernisation or Europeanisation, along with the other writers born in the urban regions and bred as middle-class offsprings; this group seems to be more dynamic and prone to an easy acculturation. In effect, the plea for modernity does not hint at dropping one's nationality (as in the formalist theories); it implicates nonetheless that Romanians should assert their national character in a more tame or refined manner, adequate to the spirit of the age.

Little wonder that, charged with the assessment of avant-gardes, Lovinescu rejects their aesthetic radicalism whereas hails the launching of innovative writers such as Rebreanu, Nichifor Crainic, Ion Pillat, and Blaga, all of them authors that succeeded to create in a modern fashion (as "expression"), preserving at the same time their 'specificity' (as



'contents'). In a nutshell, Lovinescu's modernism and theories on synchronization appear to be formal and rather shallow imperatives, whilst what it is presumed as literary 'content' roots invariably in 'tradition', defined and explained as 'race psychology'. Henceforth, one can understand easily Călinescu's paradoxical sentence on how 'traditionalism' could sometimes be translated plainly as a form of modernism.

#### 4. Romanticism, Romanian-ism and the impurity of aesthetics

AS WE might have noticed, Lovinescu denies the existence of traditionalism only on a formal and rather superficial level. As imitation of past models, it is despicable; as psychological reaction, compatible with the race's spirit, it represents a reactionary attitude distinguishing nations among each other, a fashionable literary gesture, perfectly accorded to Western patterns. Psychologically speaking, let us subscribe to the idea that national literature works as "the expression of collective soul, in his innermost and enduring side" [my translation, A. P.],<sup>24</sup> therefore, related to social ideology and progressist trends, it stands as a reactionary force.<sup>25</sup> This way, Lovinescu anticipates Virgil Nemoianu's theories on the relationship between literature (namely, what has been called 'the secondary') and ideology, getting really close to Antoine Compagnon's 'anti-moderns' (which stand for the 'reactionary' side of modernity as well). To boil down the matter, let us all agree that only theoretically the historian of modern Romanian civilization champions 'the strong values' of modernity and the necessity to catch on reality. In his inner world, in the deep recess of the critic's psychology, there is a strong conservative bias, 'anti-modern' to a point (in the same way the French scholar designates it).

Furthermore, the 'anti-modern' Lovinescu distrusts Symbolism in an obvious manner: its decadence does not meet with our race's vigorous metabolism. Minor Romanticism, classically shaped and folklore-inspired, rests the only form of art proper to the Romanian people, to this shepherd soul unspoiled by the taste of relativity and self-diffidence. Only once with the rise of bourgeoisie—a social phenomenon correlated to the modern lifestyle—the emergence of Romanticism virtually becomes a characteristic form of sensibility, which shall find later a proper artistic expression. Notwithstanding its development, the Romanian bourgeoisie acquired pretty late a class consciousness, apt to enhance its historical action. However, things did not proceed as elsewhere and our middle-class flourished in 'specific,' let us say, typically Romanian, conditions. Paradoxically, the first mediators of integration into the Western world came from the Orient: the Phanariote fry and the Russian officers (see also Kiseleff's reforms) are believed to be the most eager agents of Europeanization. The thesis is confirmed by several authors among whom we should mention Pompiliu Eliade's *De l'influence française sur l'esprit public en Roumanie* (1898), D. Popovici's *La littérature roumaine à l'époque des lumières* (1945), and, last but not least, Neagu Djuvara's delicious book entitled *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne* (1995).

For that reason, 'the taming' or what can be properly called 'the classicization' of Romanticism by means of ethnic adequacy follows the line of a natural process which implies either getting close to folk creation, or borrowing (in the first place, on Greek channels) from foreign canonical forms. Opting for either the national folklore or the lettered European tradition generates all the same a real gap between what is being written 'for the common people' and what for the urbane, cosmopolitan and cultivated public. In Lovinescu's opinion, the typological differences between the two approaches shall extinguish once surpassed the social disparities and once the literates are able to render the nation's soul under a modern guise. The Romanian critic resorts to Durkheim in order to prove that, unless our society will open to a collective international life and accept the bourgeois values, this scheme is not likely to come true.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, in spite of its necessity in times of national constitution, nationalism sounds obsolete and reactionary in the context of modern times; Lovinescu refuses to call it 'patriotism' and considers it an expression of psycho-mental inertia.<sup>27</sup> As the educated people from towns embrace more hastily the non-national tunes, it follows that the folks in the countryside stick to nationalist art because this is the particular manner to show off the rural mind inertia. By traditionalism one must read, in Lovinescu's own way, a rural soul's reaction to the progressist ideology and novelty imports; what makes it a real identity brand of our people's psychology and ethno-type is only the proportion.

## 5. Nationality, rurality, primitivism

**A**S ALREADY proved, the traditional society in Romania was split into two classes, namely the landowners (who were also those acceding to education), and the labouring peasants (in their majority, illiterate folks).<sup>28</sup> Between boyars and peasants, things adjust to each other according to feudal customs, preserved in order to shed legitimacy unto their natural co-habitation and welfare, which resembles the family-life patterns. In this respect, the most authorised experts bring arguments that this is precisely the best society-model which fits us best: the archaic and pastoral civilization, together with an assumed minor culture, built on ethnographic premises. Lovinescu thinks nonetheless differently. For him, our oldest identity landmark, in plain words, the Latin trait itself, recalls the process of modernization.

Otherwise, the critic does not utter a thing about trauma caused by mentality displacements. In effect, the Romanians seem to be naturally predisposed to adopt evolved forms of culture and civilization. Consequently, when the Romanian writer resorts to traditional forms, his virtual fallacy is due to unfriendly historical conditions and to an acquired religion (the Orthodoxy) which has inhibited creativity. Wherefrom the ruthless criticism against traditionalism (claiming a similar reaction against subjacent social forms) and the apology of modernization as a stirring agent for race's creativity.

The traditionalist writers' distrust regarding modernity becomes heavier as, under the pressure of foreign factors, the social mutations grow more and more brutal. On the first place, the Romanian economy falls under the incidence of foreign capital instead of mee-

ting with the market requirements and of becoming truly functional. By that, the society splits dramatically and witnesses a phenomenon called by Gherea '*neoiobăgism*' (*neo-serfdom*), which implies that the breach between the rich and the poor, as well as that between the countryside and town, grows bigger. This being the case, 'neo-serfdom' leads to the fact that "the land-property belongs to the bourgeoisie, whereas the labour rests on a feudal basis;" [my translation, A. P.]<sup>29</sup> thus the burgeois and liberal institutions (the empty patterns of Western civilization) run over the "half-feudal production relationships." As a matter of fact, during feudalism the peasant's (the serf's) situation was considerably better than the rude exploitation of modern landholders; it is interesting that, among old boyar families, there are some who get ruined and, subsequently, tilt down to their former serfs, joining their war against their common bourgeois enemies.

Literature accommodates well this new social and economical reality; the interaction between aristocrats and peasants is presented quite idyllically, without major frictions, whereas the face of the merchant (whether landowner or pawnbroker) casts out hellish and rather grotesque accents both in the negative sense of their profession, and in the psychological quarter, totally unsuited to our race's temper. Further on, it is not surprising at all that, within our literary space, 'the foreigner' becomes the main destructive agent for the Romanian national soul. In all likelihood, Lovinescu receives here some echoes from Eminescu's theories on the superposed social layer. If the writer (brought up either among peasants or aristocrats) aligns to this ethic conformism by a correspondent psychological reaction, then he vouches a negative attitude towards bourgeoisie, and implicitly towards modernity.

Likewise, the '*sămănătorism*,' the '*poporanism*' and the rest which comes out from the dough of traditionalism, irrespectively of their ideological nuances, must be understood as temper moods *sui generis*, reactionary to modernity, yet specific for the race's psychology (unless one ignores the Latin sediments!). If we take for instance the intellectual's compassion for the peasant's hard life, Lovinescu believes that this is not an attitude socially justified, like the so-called 'pay-back' (*datorii uitate*), frequently mentioned by the '*poporanists*.' It is, in actual fact, an emotion which belongs to the ethno-type composition itself. Contrary to all that, the lyric and emotional excess shaped by a particular Orthodox vein, regularly evinced by younger nations, can be converted in a creative product only by giving up the traditional means of expression for much innovative and flexible ones.

## 6. An inaccurate concept: Lovinescu's 'modernism'

**O**N A closer examination, Lovinescu does not present himself, as handbooks have usually taught us, as a rough 'aesthete' or 'formalist', a tireless apologist of modernity. As we have shown above, modernization should be made with due care and quite moderately. Symbolism, for example, is commended as the only 'aesthetic' alternative as such, yet, in spite of that, it is punctually slaughtered. After a keen critical exam, Romanticism gets more brownie points: its aesthetic impurity seems to have encouraged

the assertion of both the national soul and race's genius; it is fair to add that this happened through sheer imitation of foreign models and assiduous re-visiting of folklore. Romanian Romanticism—it should be expressly and emphatically said—puts together tradition and modernity within heterogeneous aesthetic forms, proving by that an amazing ability to cope with foreign borrowings and clip them according to the race's spirit. Originality, we are lead to believe, does not count on the number of inventions and patents; it is though accounted by a particular talent to assimilate and accommodate new things, which proves that our literature actually crystallized as a homogenous matter, with a distinctive identity, branded under the star of Romanticism. Briefly, it appears that between modernism and traditionalism (both of them inheritors of the great Romantic upsurge), the critic settles a polar relation, reflecting on the ideological scale a few temper moods of the Romanian psychological pattern. Moreover, beyond the proper similitude with couples of notions such as '*muntanism*' vs. '*moldovenism*' (allegedly, the old fight between the North and the South), the opposition brings into the open the writer's temper on society matters, ideologically expressed either reactionary or progressively.

It is obvious that such an imponderable cannot stand as a valid criterion for accurate aesthetical evaluation. In any case, when he delivers articulate aesthetic judgements, Lovinescu is prone to jumble things and, blinded by his own affective drives or only by his specific 'accomplice-receptivity', he gets to a point where a new meaning to progress and novelty is added. So, in spite of potential modern devising, the rural theme in literature cannot raise to top-level expectations because "it lacks intellectuality and complexity."<sup>30</sup> Such drastic verdict is not determined by any objective or formal criterion; the critic's motivation is rather empiric, presumably dictated by the militant and polemic rhetoric of his critical discourse. However, the same theories aver that rural literature conveys the race's collective soul; in this case, if the Romanian soul could be caught in a modern form and elude the eternal patterns of folk culture, then it has all chances to illustrate, through the process of 'differentiation,' a genuine value.

Furthermore, if the creator's freedom should manifest itself within the boundaries of race's coordinates—one must have always bear in mind that our race is considered chiefly primitive and rural—then it follows that either the Romanian writer is doomed to his race's primitivism or the theory which presumes a certain ethnic determination on the aesthetic factor is false. Can individual creativity assert itself freely, beyond race's limitations? We might expect that Lovinescu does not clear the matter. Nor can we find our whether 'the rural soul' falls under the head of the writer, of fictional characters or of lyrical voices. Such distinctions are mighty useless since everything lies on psychological waters.

When dealing up with the traditionalist literature, the critic blasts neither its specific figures and techniques, nor its braggart modernism. He has always in mind 'the rural soul', now virtually unable to express anything on a high-scale aesthetic level. On the other hand, Lovinescu must have forgotten what he used to say about psychological categories that cannot be converted into an aesthetical category. Arguable enough, the hypothesis that the rural soul would be inferior was dismissed by Călinescu right away:

he claimed the peasant did not lack spiritual complexity, nor spirituality in general, yet it appears he lacks it because of a distinct type of conformism, related to the popular tradition canons. As both the unpredictable element and the will to individualize failed to occur, it was widely assumed that the peasant's soul resembles the void, where no events happen (after Duiliu Zamfirescu issued it, the phrase raised in its career, being reiterated not only by Lovinescu, but also by Camil Petrescu, Mircea Eliade and so on). If the countryside people are used indeed to live automatically, the intellectual (carrying a more differentiated and individualized soul) needs to resort to manifold ways of existential expression (yet, not the most valuable, as Lovinescu used to believe). Subsequently, intellection would represent only a spirit's movement or language, which the rural folks (and literature as well) could dispense with. Călinescu also added that perhaps literature relies not on psychology, but on human soul in general.

Subscribing to Călinescu's warning, I would like to round the argument by saying that, in spite of its opaqueness to analysis, the human soul does not comport qualitative mutations derived from the virtual fluctuations of life-conditions. It might bear on only structural modifications. In a word, the distinction between 'rural' and 'urban' is not relevant in the process of aesthetic judgement. Therefore, the presumed necessity of thematic change and re-branding, that is, rural-urban substitution, seems to be challenged merely by sociological conditions, as a signal of a pragmatic projection touching on reality-nearness and expression diversity. However, not even the sociological grounds back up Lovinescu's 'law'; instead, Pierre Bourdieu considers that the lot of literature does not consist of reality reflections, because "at the basis of the functioning of all social fields, whether the literary field of that of power, there is the *illusio*, the investment in the game."<sup>31</sup> Thus, it seems that literature estranges from reality when one expects the less: at all rates, the *mimesis* does not allow the writer a space to break through, but on the contrary, a space to break into reality.

Lovinescu is not that shrewd as we might imagine if he commissions literature to faithful and objective reality-reflection, on the course of modernization, while the Romanian society capsizes from tradition to modernity. For a highly esteemed cultural figure, this looks like an amateurish and rather journalistic approach. Obviously, the reputed synchronic criticism grows more and more biased and dogmatic: the critic slants his own aesthetic formula and abusively appreciates it as the one and only modernist sample.

This way, helplessly twisting the threads of theories he himself is now unable to disentangle, the master from "Sburătorul" circle ends by asserting (and also theorizing) his bare right to err. He is, the same as in his former heydays, the impersonated image of those common-lot reviewers, who are allowed to be carried away by short-lived enthusiasms since they are accustomed to check their intuitions within a set of hornbook principles which have at least the merit to accredit, under way, the evolution of literary forms. As such, Lovinescu discovers that, notwithstanding its unsteadiness, the critic's exercises should have at least a moral legitimacy. Leastwise.



## Notes

1. G. Călinescu, "Masca apolloniană a lui E. Lovinescu," in *E. Lovinescu interpretat de...*, introd., anthology and ed. Florin Mihăilescu (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1973), 199: "e un act de adâncă deliberație critică ... o victorie a spiritului științific asupra amorului propriu scolastic, având un merit considerabil, căci face din adevărul critic, ca și din cel științific, o funcție a creației în permanentă activitate."
2. E. Lovinescu, *Memorii. Aqua forte*, ed. Gabriela Omăt (Bucharest: Minerva, 1998), 141: "o prefigurație a mutației valorilor estetice, în care formulele expresiei sunt variabile după epoci și concepții momentane."
3. See Angelo Mitchievici, *Mateiu I. Caragiale. Fizionomii decadente* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Institute, 2007).
4. E. Lovinescu, *Opere*, vol. 6 (Bucharest: Minerva, 1988), 24: "De aproape un veac, nu facem decât să visăm."
5. E. Lovinescu, *Opere*, vol. 8 (Bucharest: Minerva 1989), 152: "Ne lipsește o bună orientare morală."
6. E. Lovinescu, *Opere*, vol. 7 (Bucharest: Minerva, 1988), 211: "căci în aceste clipe supreme pentru existența neamului nostru, trebuie să ieșim din apele stătătoare ale contemplativității. Trebuie să ne schimbăm personalitatea" (*my emphasis, A. P.*).
7. *Ibid.*, 41: "ar răspunde instinctului de conservare și de unitate."
8. *Ibid.*, 55: "în vremuri normale pana artistului trebuie să meargă spre artă"; "în timpuri de mare cumpană pentru ființa neamului, ea trebuie pusă în slujba altor datorii, mai sfinte."
9. Lovinescu, *Opere*, vol. 6, 10: "părăsind seninătățile artei, literatura noastră ar trebui să joace și un rol național."
10. *Ibid.*, 184: "trăim într-o țară de imitații—și nu de imitații organice, ci de imitații exagerate și fără nici un rost."
11. *Ibid.*, 195: "civilizația română, având așadar o structură cu necesitate revoluționară, aplicațiile tradiționalismului se limitează numai la datele generale ale sufletului românesc și nu la instituțiile trecutului; sincronismul vieții contemporane ne-a impus formele vieții sociale și culturale cu o identitate nivelatoare" (having an implied revolutionary structure, the Romanian civilization restricts the applications of traditionalism to the general data of the Romanian soul, and not to the institutions of the past; the synchronism of modern life impressed the social and cultural life-forms with a levelling identity) [*my translation, A. P.*]. Lovinescu draws the attention that P.P. Panaitescu, Sextil Pușcariu and Cartoian speak in similar terms.
12. E. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, vol. 2. *Evoluția criticii literare* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981), 135–140: "Tradiționalismul nu poate fi decât sau un fenomen de istorism, explicabil prin pasiunea cu care specialiștii studiază formele trecutului, sau de romantism social și poetic, prin prisma căruia scriitorii privesc de obicei formele vieții revolute"; or "tradiționalismul nostru se reduce numai la conformism etnic, adică la o acțiune în spiritul rasei; în acest sens de conformism, în literatură el este rezultatul fatal și al psihologiei individuale, integrate în parte în psihologia colectivă, și al materialului lingvistic ce nu poate fi prelucrat decât după legile latente ale geniului rasei."
13. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, vol. 1. *Evoluția ideologiei literare* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981), 144: "etnicul este așadar limbă și fond sufletesc, vizibil numai uneori—in care se realizează valorile estetice, și a cărui însemnătate se precizează pe măsura realizării acestor valori."
14. *Ibid.*, 79: "o categorie psihologică nu se poate converti într-o categorie estetică (s.n.): specifice, cântecul din fluiet și injurătura națională nu devin și valori estetice; cât timp specificul nu e un prin-

- ciپیu de valorificare estetică el nu rămâne decât în funcția sa psihologică*” (“a psychological category cannot turn into an aesthetic category [my emphasis, A. P.]; notwithstanding their specificity, reed playing and national swearing would not convert into aesthetic values; as long as the national soul is not a principle of aesthetic valorisation it sticks to its original psychological function”).
15. William Marx, *Rămas-bun literaturii. Istoria unei devalorizări (sec XVIII-XX.)*, trans. Liliana Dragomir, Ana Stan, Carmen Habără, Diana Coman and Alexandra Gheorghe, coord. Alexandru Matei, pref. Alexandru Matei (Bucharest: România Press, 2008), 125. Lessing was the first aesthetician who created an un-crossable gap between the visual arts and poetry, by invalidating the traditional dictum *ut pictura poesis* so as to replace it with the musical pattern; in his train the musical pattern and art’s autonomy, irreducible to paraphrase principle were upheld, as Marx notices, by Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Eliot, and also Bergson.
  16. I found similar accents in a conversation held between Schiller and Goethe: “... in my case, the emotion starts without having a determined and precise object. It is as if my soul fills up with a musical disposition. The poetic idea comes only after” [my translation, A. P.] (“la mine, sentimentul începe prin a nu avea un obiect determinat și precis. Mai întâi sufletul mi se umple de un fel de dispoziție muzicală. Ideea poetică nu vine decât după aceea,” see Jean Marie Guyau, *Problemele esteticii contemporane*, trans. Mircea Gheorghe, pref. Victor Ernest Mașek (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1990), 126); the same passage is quoted by Tudor Vianu in *Armonia eminesciană (Eminescu’s Harmony)*, a paper published in his collection of studies, *Mihai Eminescu*, pref. Al. Dima (Iași: Junimea, 1974), 102.
  17. Ion Negoitescu, *E. Lovinescu* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1970), 103. On the same topic, a brilliant analysis is brought by Ligia Tudurachi in her book on Lovinescu, *Cuvintele careucid. Memorie literară în romanele lui E. Lovinescu* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2010). See also Adrian Tudurachi and Ligia Tudurachi’s paper, *Moartea unui personaj literar*, in *Mihai Eminescu. “Poet național român,”* ed. Ioana Bot (Cluj: Dacia, 2001), 178–206.
  18. E. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, vol. 1, *Evoluția ideologiei literare*, (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981), 89: “o reacțiune împotriva intelectualismului,” “nu are nimic comun cu concepția energetică a universului.”
  19. *Ibid.*, 111: “mai mult de domeniul fiziologiei decât de al psihologiei.”
  20. *Ibid.*, 125: “produsul sincronic al unei atitudini literare răspândite prin contagiune.”
  21. *Ibid.*, 143: “o valoare autonomă realizată prin limbă și fond sufletec într-un material etnic.”
  22. *Ibid.*, 127: “caracterul de universalitate al mișcării romantice; de esență pur estetică, fără contingențe cu naționalismul, fără o atitudine față de viață, ea n-a putut avea nicăieri o influență pe suprafețe mari.”
  23. *Ibid.*, 144: “capabilă de a percepe valorile estetice în sine.”
  24. *Ibid.*, 145.
  25. E. Lovinescu, *Istoria*, 325: “expresia sufletului colectiv, în latura lui cea mai intimă și mai permanentă.” In the same manner, Virgil Nemoianu (*A Theory of the Secondary. Literature, Progress and Reaction*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) understands literature as a manifestation of „the Secondary,” that is, the reactionary and disturbing element, liable to distort ideology. Shortly, this signifies that literature has always been a punch in the eyes of progress. Yet, the aesthetic Secondary and the ideological Primary stand in terms of ‘recession’. Nemoianu’s notion comes from a paper signed by Mircea Florian and designates a sort of non-Hegelian synthesis, which preserves the identity of implied terms. For a fresh approach on the matter, Antoine Compagnon’s book should be considered (see *Les Antimodernes, de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes/ Antimodernii. De la Joseph de Maistre la Roland Barthes*, trans. Irina Mavrodin and Adina Dințoiu, pref. Mircea Martin, Bucharest: Art, 2008).

26. Lovinescu quotes here a sociological principle belonging to Durkheim, which states that “there is no national life which is dominated by an international collective life” [my translation, A. P.] (“nu există viață națională care să nu fie dominată de o viață colectivă de natură internațională,” see *Istoria...*, 366).
27. *Ibid.*, 414–415: “all superior classes are prone to lose their nationality because preserving one’s nationality does not imply an enlightened and brave national consciousness. In this specific case, nationality means passivity and inadequacy.” (“clasele superioare ale tuturor popoarelor sunt dispuse la deznaționalizare”; “păstrarea naționalității nu izvorăște dintr-o conștiință națională luminată și dărză. Naționalitate, în cazul acesta, se confundă cu pasivitate și cu incapacitate de adaptare”).
28. *Ibid.*, 237–245: “The history of contemporary Romania can be summed up, without any exaggeration, to the close fight stirred by the rural estate” because “the Romanian people’s social structure presents itself as two layers: the former is formed by landlords, and the other, by their serfs... Starting from Michael the Brave’s reign, freemen raise their heads, this being a sign of change in fiscal conception. The collective responsibility is replaced by the direct, individual responsibility” (“Istoria României contemporane s-ar putea rezuma, fără exagerare, la lupta încinsă în jurul proprietății rurale”; “structura socială a poporului român se prezintă alcătuită din două strate: una liberă, formată din proprietari, și alta neliberă, compusă din țărani de pe moșiile lor. . . . Numai de la Mihai Viteazul începem să găsim și oameni liberi, semn al schimbării concepției fiscale. Răspunderea colectivă e înlocuită cu răspunderea directă, individuală,” see *Ibid.*, 245).
29. *Ibid.*, 269: “proprietatea pământului a devenit burgheză pe când munca a rămas feudală.” And, further: “Prin apariția neoiobăgismului, structura societății noastre a luat un aspect dublu: la suprafață, instituții burgheze și liberale, dedesubt, relații de producție semif feudale” (By neoserfdom, the structure of our society developed a double-folded structure: at surface, there are bourgeois and liberal institutions, while deep down lie half-feudal production relationships).
30. *Ibid.*, 340: “prin lipsă de intelectualitate și complexitate.”
31. Pierre Bourdieu, *Regulile artei: Geneza și structura câmpului literar*, trans. Bogdan Ghiu and Toader Saulea (Bucharest: Univers, 1998), 33. I met with the same idea in Theodor Lipps’ works, more precisely in his lines about *Einfühlung* (*the aesthetic sympathy*): “The agreement with the laws of reality is by no means the positive ground of aesthetic illusion as, bound to set in agreement the two, we tend to assign the represented things with a greater authenticity instead of underlining the negative grounds of illusion; a slight disruption of correspondence should carry us away from illusion, that is, from the pure contemplative consecration to things represented” [my translation, A. P.] (“Concordanța cu legile realității nu este temeiul pozitiv al iluziei estetice în sensul că, de dragul acestei concordanțe, noi luăm reprezentatul drept real, ci ea este temeiul negativ al iluziei, în sensul că tulburarea conformității cu realitatea ne-ar îndrepta spre realitate și ne-ar smulge din iluzie, adică din pura consacrare contemplatoare față de reprezentat,” see *Estetica: Contemplarea estetică și artele plastice*, I, trans. Grigore Popa (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987), 89). Further, Lipps reads as follows: “even if the subject of a literary creation is extracted from history, its content rests always abstract, namely a world completely remote from historical reality” [my translation, A. P.] (“chiar dacă subiectul unei creații literare este extras din istorie, conținutul ei este întotdeauna o lume abstractă, absolut străină de realitatea istorică,” see *Ibid.*, 91).



### **Abstract**

#### **E. Lovinescu's Doctrinarian Crystallization. Before and After the First World War**

The present essay endeavours to throw a glimpse into the genesis of Eugen Lovinescu's train of thought, chiefly into those keynote critical ideas currently known amongst scholars as "modernism," "synchronism," "the mutation of aesthetical values" and so forth. Some of them apparently had already crystallized before the First World War and yet gained real ascendancy only in the inter-bellum period and only as a reverberation of the Liberal doctrine circumscribed by "Sburătorul" circle and by the modernist critic's great synthesis, *Istoriei civilizației române moderne* (*The History of Modern Romanian Civilization*). Therefore, a consistent part of our analysis focuses on Lovinescu's paradoxical and, most of the times, wry definitions and understandings of "modernity" and "modernism." They bespeak not only the critic's attempt to find and neutralize, throughout convincing explanations, the real source of these contradictions—that is, the particular traits of Lovinescu's own psychology and somehow "in-between" personality—, but also a similar process of relocation and neutralisation which can be traced in the Romanian society itself. Our psychological assumptions on both transitional society and its prominent figures led to a mirrored scheme: the theoretical and doctrinarian inconsistencies (a certain blending of Liberalism and Conservatism in Lovinescu's own discourse on "the necessity of revisions") cannot be perceived but as a system of communicating vessels which senses the deep social convulsions worked out after either World Wars.

### **Keywords**

Modernity, Modernism, Tradition, Traditionalism, Liberalism, Conservatism, Theory of Revisions, Mutation of Aesthetic Values, Transition, In-between Personality