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*Identity and Coherence in the Structure of Postmodernism*

*The paper explores how Virgil Nemoianu cuts the dispute with the the extra-aesthetic invasions of literature and the assaults on the canon, considering that great literature is not imposed by ideological norms and dogmas, canonical authors being, on the contrary, authentic, those who do not meet the rules, be them ethical or political, of any age. Or, in the terms of Romanian literary critic Titu Maiorescu, Aesthetics cannot be "held" to assert the claims of the "ethical". An analysis of major attacks on canonical culture describes conflicting polarities – of East-West, male-female type all invalid, in Nemoianu's view, since they descend from the dialectics of "suspicion and hatred" derived from Marxism. The purpose of canon analysis is thus an analogy between the "fundamental values of humanity" in the swirls of Postmodernism and the "functions of literature". The canon and literature contain in their core the same Brownian motion that encompasses the entire Postmodern reality but at the same time, fail to maintain consistency and "indisputable harmony". This while Literature remains a mediator that tempers the "convulsions in its environment", "mirroring and opposing them simultaneously".*

The last book published by Virgil Nemoianu [1], *Postmodernism & Cultural Identities. Conflicts and Coexistence*, is a plea for defining persuasive solutions of consistency, stability and identity in the fragmented, random and relativized structure of postmodernism. An impressive intellectual odyssey, accurately mapping the agitated substance of the turbulent modern world, is run through a series of revealing immersion into the deep relief of Western cultural discourse. Counting on comparative and socio-cultural criticism, replacing the diachronic analysis with synchrony, the critic identifies a sort of unfailable algorithm of continuity and order, of fundamental stability, the recurrence and resistance of which in previous eras (transgressing moments of crisis) is systematically demonstrated. The author predicts a paradox: the existence of spaces of identity and coherence in the core of the postmodern paradigm whose plurality, diversity and unpredictability would be unthinkable without them. The book assumes the nature of intellectual, cultural, personal stability of these spaces, metaphorically calling them "islands" or "philosophical gardens". "Fortresses" in which identity can survive the assault of the contemporary world, and that the author proposes as solutions for a full reconsideration of postmodernism. They are made, in Nemoianu's model, of the "walls" of humanist sciences (occupying a privileged place are Aesthetics and literature), while their core is the religious, whose archetypal feature assures communication between the epochs of history.

Because Nemoianu Virgil's approach is one of cultural philosophy, Part I of the book, devoted to *General Cultural Value*) tries to determine the place and role of culture in the present day. The author wonders, from the very beginning, if major explanations that provide systematic perspective on the historical evolution of human culture can be applicable in an era seemingly dominated by anarchy, when mankind entered the post-history and history, as understood in the classical sense, allegedly disappeared. In Nemoianu's perspective, in this ongoing hazard surviving fragments are continuing to work consistently, "parts" of various

kinds that are integrated in the multiplicity and variety defining postmodernism. Their lack would compromise, as the critic points out, the random principle of the whole system, which would become uniform, fixed, predictable, ie its own opposite. That's why Nemoianu concludes: "*continuity and identity are not only designed in a postmodern existence but they are absolutely necessary its survival*" [2]. Once the thesis of continuity fragments is argued, it remains to determine their nature and Nemoianu immediately identifies two such "terra firma", two islands whose fertility and stability is undeniable: *the religious* and the *aesthetic*. None of them lacked from the foundation of any society or culture, recording diverse and contradictory metamorphoses, even substitutions by secular ideologies. The argument of an end of history argument is then removed by globalization, and it had, after Nemoianu, a genuine substance, indicating a quantitative rather than a qualitative development. The underlying idea of the book is that postmodernity is neither the end of history, nor that of humanity. Rather, it is just a new historical stage, bringing with it new challenges. Therefore, a process of cultural philosophy applied to postmodernism has its legitimacy and may prove fruitful.

A discussion of the "substance of Postmodernism" (*Does Postmodernism Have Substance?*) reviews nine key points of Postmodernism. As most are already known and have attracted some convincing theorizing in recent years, the most interesting are the nuances the author proposed. Thus, Nemoianu speaks of the *comunicational-mobilo-centric world, post-industrial society, transfer from Gutenberg-type representations to the visual, virtual reality and computer interaction, changing of gender relations, tensions between globalism and multiculturalism, the changing of global policy scenarios, the rise of relativism and scelticism, substituting innocence and spontaneity, self-analysis and the exacerbated consciousness of the self, ironic and parodic revitalization and investigation of the past and memory*, as opposed to the *permanence of religiosity, a new Stylistics* (the southern hemisphere characterized by syncretism, pantheism and light mysticism).

The next chapter dedicated to *conservatism as a branch of liberalism*, ends with a series of nuanced conclusions, reflecting on analogies with the resistance factors of Western culture when it was threatened in the early nineteenth century, factors that are currently tested. The informational "Avalanche" spoken about feverishly today was perceived similarly and thought to have the same effect, leading, as the author notes, to the "*psychological anguish, very real trepidations, distorsions, and A Whole range of old and new types of violence*" [3], while "*the same consciousness of change mobilized that sociopolitical and intellectual forces that wanted to withstand accelerated evolutions and to tame tornado-like, destructive, developments*" [4]. What eventually prevailed was dialogue, the harmonious reconciliation of tradition and innovation accomplished, believes Nemoianu, especially through the contribution of what he calls "*genuine and articulate conservatism*" [5], configured as a partner for dialogue with liberalism and utopias of the time. Of course, in this model are to be found solutions to "tame" cultural radicalisms of any crisis, including the one in the present or that created the Red East European totalitarianism.

### **1. Canon as "island of coherence". A walk through the "inner garden"**

The second part of the book is devoted to *General Literary Valu*, the foray into literature being an exploration of postmodernist symptoms, and of the reaction mechanisms of literature

to external pressures. As custodian of social memory and preserving cultural traditions, literature is the victim of numerous attacks aimed at the continuity and identity of a culture. It is also the best medium of understanding and the reflection of multiculturalism. The Particular points of discontinuity, the seemingly irreconcilable and destructive conflicts destructive, are especially interestin in the kind of comparative analysis proposed by Virgil Nemoianu. He looks at times that were "apocalyptic", like the sequence Classicism - Romanticism in European 18th and 19th centuries, the proposals to replace a set of values with another that was considered modern. The Proposed analogy works if, for the end of the twentieth century we attribute the posture of the Classics to "*canonical Eurocentric culture*" and that of "Romantics" to "*more popular forms of literature, consumer literature, marginalized forms of narrative (often authored by women), past or present extra-European literatures, and so on*"[6]. For Nemoianu it is undisputed that, although currently these two cultural forces seem totally irreconcilable, the future will bring the necessary harmonization of positions. Otherwise, the land would be flooded by exclusive rigid literary ideologies, doctrines and counterfeit perfect doctrines, signs of a cultural disease that culture as system instinctively avoids and becomes immune to. A suggestive anatomical analogy of genuine literature vs. ideological literature is presented by the author as the first denunciation of the invasion by ideology in Postmodern Aesthetics: „*the heart may be said to be healthy when it displays tiny chaotic variations in its beat: perfect order, by contrast, raises the suspicion of an approaching heart attack. This, in my opinion, is a very apt emblem for the distinction between the ltierary and the ideological*" [7].

The capital section of the book is devoted to the concept of literary canon - *Literary and Social Value Options* - in the functioning of which Nemoianu reveals a principle of coherence and stability of authentic values, independently of the extra-Aesthetic nature of different pressures of the age. This principle of resistance is essentially functional in all sustainable fragmentsm in all "islands". This survival of the authenticity of a culture transcends any dismantling challenge. Moreover, the text of this chapter, which appears to be the best written in the entire book (also the often memorable phrases and images are superior to other parts of the book) is at the conjunction of the Nemoianu's teaching areas of expertise: cultural philosophy, comparative literature and literary criticism.

The concept of canon is preferred because it satisfies innercommunicating nature of the two "islands of stability" the landscape of which is charted by the book: it is a literary concept derived from religion. In this respect, Nemoianu immediately notices the differences: two canons, the religious and the literary, are radically different in nature and implications. An example of virtual substitution with an alternative Christian official canon by the young radical Marcion of Sinope (first century AD), which brings the Christian community in Rome the proposal to replace Scripture passages from the Gospels, is sufficiently relevant to convince. If the long-term effects of this success were overwhelming and could change the cultural landscape of the Western world, changes in the literary canon just bring disputes surrounding nuances, color, says Nemoianu, to a literature that was moving anyway. In addition, the victory of one or another of the parties (the victory of the 1659-1700 classics from the famous quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns) were irrelevant, because the canons always suffered renewals, updates with the purpose of enriching the cultural experience of the new.

A fine distinction, operated from the very beginning in this text, is that between the canon and the curriculum. The curriculum is the teaching version of the canon, one that supports the

most dramatic and visible operations, a selection of the taste and trends of an era. The author gives several examples as teaching canons of the past - from the Middle Ages to the canon of Romanian Communist Proletcultism - showing the facility by which the curricula is the manipulation of different orders. What remains essential is that it reflects a *"forma mentis of a given epoch"*, namely *"the prevailing prejudices and sensibilities, writing styles and Aesthetic tastes"* [8]. On the other hand, the canon is composed of masterpieces of every age, authentic works, the Aesthetic criterion being illustrated at the maximum, resulting in a unique expression of Aesthetic value. Canonical works are long lasting, unshakable in structure and offer a potentially inexhaustible canon and updateable meanings at different times. Nemoianu offers 5 basic elements of canonical works, emphasizing that they are selected through a process that is ultimately unpredictable and chaotic, natural, although it is *"set by a number of parameters"*. Thus, we speak about *the preference of most of the public, multiplicity of meanings, live interaction and compatibility of values and discourses with various fields, ability to establish durability and Aesthetic transcendence* and, finally, *the ability to mediate between high culture and commercial consumption*.

The most interesting feature of the literary canon lies in its very paradoxical structure. Although it is virtually immune to external pressures that are not critical to its anatomy, the canon goes, however, through continuous internal changes. Resetting, resizing, changing of order, all are taking place in their own pace and according to a logic that can only be speculated from the outside. But still, despite this inner dynamic, the canon's center is constantly absolutely stable. This means, says Nemoianu, that a certain set of personalities - Homer, Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Goethe and Kafka are immutable, ensuring consistency and homogeneity of the axiological mechanism which is at the core of Postmodernism. The canon is thus probably the most convincing of models, the "island of coherence" that the book describes, and not incidentally the text referring to it is placed right in the core of the book. In fact, the canon offers the most revealing allegory of the resistance of identity and coherence, of the survival of values inspite any external aggression. Virgil Nemoianu exemplifies Dostoevsky's transition to index during Stalinism and shows how, after 1956, after 20 years of prohibition, the author of *Brothers Karamazov* kept firm position in the Western canon. Political aggression did nothing else than to strengthen the public perception of literary value. Another example is the canon of Communism in Romanian literature, replacing genuine canonical authors, like Blaga or Eminescu, with writers who were convenient to the political line of the party (examples include S. Bodnarescu and A. Toma). With a plastical expression of Nemoianu, *"As soon as the artificial barriers were removed, the canon snapped elastically back into position – indeed the authors earmarked for elimination may be said to have gained in authority"* [9].

The dispute with the extra-aesthetic invasions of literature and the assaults on the canon is categorically cut by Nemoianu: great literature is not imposed by ideological norms and dogmas, canonical authors are, on the contrary, authentical, those who do not meet the rules, be them ethical or political, of any age. Or, in the terms of Romanian literary critic Titu Maiorescu, Aesthetics can not be "held" to assert the claims of the "ethical". An analysis of major attacks on canonical culture describes conflicting polarities – of East-West type, male-female, all invalid, in Nemoianu's view, by their descent from the dialectics of *"suspicion and hatred"* derived from Marxism.

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Finally, the *Epilogue* of the book is a space of subjectivity where Virgil Nemoianu exposes both the nostalgia and innocence. The text "*The philosophical garden*", a subjective version of defining and preserving individual identity in contemporaneity, is a confession of disarming sincerity of the author's personal solution of spiritual continuity through culture. A summary of an intellectual initiation diary, containing the fascinations and revelations of the years of youth, as well as warm evocations of a vanished cultural world - the Sibiu Literary Circle. A statement here seems absolutely remarkable "*The 50s were then, and remained until now, a kind of Political Golden Age for me.*" However, this assertion proves, in fact, the function of 'inner fortification' of the "philosophical garden". From its shelter, away from the absurdity of new impulse proletcultism, yes, it is possible that the 50s have been the years of discovery of the American politics, the European Christian Democrats or of Pope Pius XII. The personal example, which Virgil Nemoianu uses generously, is what authenticates the subjective existential themes discussed and sets the book in a decisive and persuasive militant strategy.

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[1] Virgil Nemoianu, *Postmodernism & Cultural Identities. Conflicts and Coexistence*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2010

[2] Virgil Nemoianu, *op. cit.*, p.7

[3] Virgil Nemoianu *a p cit.*, p 60

[4] Virgil Nemoianu *a p cit.*, p 60

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Virgil Nemoianu, *op. cit.*, p 149

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] V. Nemoianu, *op. cit.*, p 173

[9] V. Nemoianu, *op. cit.*, p 182

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