

ION IANOȘI. BETWEEN LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

Iulian Boldea
Prof., PhD, UMFST „G.E. Palade” of Târgu Mureș

Abstract: The critical method practiced by Ion Ianoși is based on the passion of associations and dissociations, in which the pleasure of austere, pregnant definition meets the pleasure of drawing necessary delimitations in the context of the object of study. The reconstruction of one's own destiny therefore has the appearance of a rigorously articulated approach, based on evidence, on proofs, with implicit or explicit motivations, with statistical situations and the inventory of bibliographies, without directly assuming a problematic stance, of a profound reflection on one's own philosophical or ethical options. Chronicle of a life and an era, Ion Ianoși's book holds attention by gathering documentary data regarding the communist bureaucratic apparatus, ideological and political mutations, the genealogies of activists, etc.

Keywords: literature, philosophy, motivations, method, ethical options

Ion Ianoși's place in the post-war cultural landscape is marked by a certain ambiguity, regarding the domains explored, so that aesthetic concerns combine with philosophical reflection on various themes (Dialectics and Aesthetics, Sketch for a Possible Aesthetic, Humanism, Vision and Embodiment, Aesthetics, Hegel and Art, The Sublime in Aesthetics, The Sublime in Art, The Sublime in Romanian Spirituality, etc.) or with meticulous studies dedicated to literature (The Monumental Novel and the 20th Century, Thomas Mann, Dostoevsky, "The Tragedy of the Underground", A Tale of Two Strangers: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy). To these are added a series of books in which philosophy and literature are programmatically joined, explained one through the other, interpreted with meticulousness and associative verve (Nearța – Arta, Literature and Philosophy, A History of Romanian Philosophy in Its Relations with Literature). In this regard, the scholar himself recognizes this ambivalent posture, not without epistemic risks: "I have assumed this uncomfortable position since I kept slipping between literature and philosophy, in books for writers that are insufficiently writerly, and for philosophers – too little philosophical. However, I have set up my observation post in this no man's land, with an opening in both directions. It belongs to me intimately, along with other "extraterritorialities"". Ioana Em. Petrescu considered humanism to be Ion Ianoși's dominant trait: "With a humanist structure (the monograph Thomas Mann, 1965, is a very interesting experience of humanist interpretation by this parody of the humanist Settembrini, an ironist aware of the crisis of bourgeois humanism crystallized in the Renaissance), with a firm and explicit option for Marxist philosophy, with a rhetorical temperament, which spectacularly dramatizes ideas (be they commonplaces), discovering in them, through participation, a classical inner vibration – of balance (which the author calls «equity» or «a supple point of view»), I. Ianoși is not a creator of ideas or systems, but he is a spirit capable of pathetically experiencing the dilemma – often staged – of the pre-existing Idea".

The critical method practiced by Ion Ianoși is based on the passion of associations and dissociations, in which the pleasure of austere, pregnant definition meets the pleasure of drawing necessary delimitations in the context of the object of study. Blaga and Camil Petrescu are thus interpreted through the parallel mirrors of an informed, rigorous, plastic and relevant critical discourse, which stands out through uninhibited, firm writing: "The 'subjective' Blaga has a greater power of objectification, he is a better organizer, constructor, edifier – although

the result does not waste the original subjectivity, but only transfers it into a distinct 'ideal reality'. Camil is obsessed with the concrete, the real, the objective – and remains subjective. He seeks mathematically verifiable rigor – as if it were a chimera of his poetic fantasy. Against his will, Camil re-inscribes himself in philosophy as an artist. Out of scruple towards the autonomy of each form of consciousness, Blaga follows a calmly dissociative strategy, within which he does not restrain his instinctively inverse, re-associative impulses. He, the lyricist par excellence, has learned more philosophy and more thoroughly than Camil. Carried away by the wave of momentary inspiration, Camil is – from this point of view – a more «poetic» nature than Blaga. But science, intellect, intellectualization are his saving creed. The lucid in everything created incessantly to save man, the country, the world. On the contrary, raised in faith, Blaga sublimates it in attachment to myths of any origin in order to regain certainties in a century shaken to its foundations. A villager - a city dweller. An archaic (in modernity) - a modern by definition. An intuitive - an intellectual. A romantic - a «realist». A dreamer - a lucid. But the lucid sometimes appears to us more fantastic than the dreamer who converts the fruit of his imagination into coherent and rigorous structures.

In the first volume of *Authors and Works*, with the subtitle *Western Cultures* (2007), there are present, alongside essays dedicated to philosophers and aestheticians (Friedrich Nietzsche - *Genealogy of Morality*, Martin Heidegger - *Letter on "Humanism"*, Immanuel Kant - *Three Critiques and Several Dualities*, Wilhelm Worringer - *the Antinomies of a Nordic or Nietzsche and Marx - Assonances, Dissonances*) and five substantial essays on the work of fundamental writers in 20th century literature. Moreover, commenting on works such as *Henri Quatre*, by Heinrich Mann, *Forsythe Saga*, by John Galsworthy, *Zeno's Conscience*, by Italo Svevo, *Metamorphosis*, by Franz Kafka or *Man Without Qualities*, by Robert Musil, Ion Ianoși proceeds through contextualization, placing literary creation in the ideological climate of the era, suggesting filiations or correspondences between literary works, writers and trends, establishing pertinent analogies and operating dissociations with finesse and tact, without interpretative abuses or methodological exacerbations

Even if the texts are not new, constituting prefaces or introductory studies of reference books from the prose of the last century, they are read, in their new layout and architecture, with pleasure and interest. In the case of Galsworthy, for example, Ion Ianoși uses some categorical-typological classifications ("*School of Images*", taken from Balzac) to designate the originality of the epic in the *Forsythe Saga*. In the same chapter there are memorable formulations, in which the essayist captures, through concise, seductive statements, or through suggestive critical metaphors, the capacity of writing to revive a world, to restore mentalities, customs and a particular vision of history: "Galsworthy combines narrative and plastic, epic and lyric, drama and idyll, tragedy and comedy, classical precision and the play of impressions. In his retort, however, the contrasts dissolve, in the final dough the extremes are neutralized. The result is a specific "aurea mediocritas". The initial material is not devoid of strong colors, combining them the artist obtains intermediate, pastel shades (Irene, the "lady in gray", has hair "couleur de feuille morte"). Galsworthy is a master in dosing, mixing, offering semitones. His gaiety is also sadness, laughter is accompanied by sighs. "Pure" tragedy-comedy is replaced by bitter irony. The colors, the shades, the tonalities, "play" suggestively, but difficult to decipher. The reader intuits many things, but formulates them with difficulty. The allusions, widely used, blur some passages. The art is veiled, indefinite, also influenced by Flaubertian "impassibility". In Galsworthy's era, traditional realism was in decline. However, he explored it with tenacity. His conservatism kept him away from many innovations, and immunized him against easy experiences. Traditionalism places him in the continuation of the 19th-century novel". In this way, the observations regarding Galsworthy's "classical realism", the contrast between feelings and their way of fixing in writing, the austere lyricism of the epic pages are relevant for his way of interpreting a work, a writer, a creative style.

By identifying the meanings of Italo Svevo's work, the essayist reveals the importance of the theme of memory, in conjunction with the theme of time, another major topos of contemporary literature. Ion Ianoși thus observes that "for Svevo, the past is permanently new, it changes through the prism of the years that have passed. The value of present events is measured by their capacity to reveal from a novel angle the sedimentations of the soul of the past. The faculty par excellence of humanity seems to him to be memory, the ability to continually recall, always differently, what once happened. A man's life is composed of the memories of this life. But, in the free play of recollections, time loses its well-known characteristics, it becomes reversible, it flows towards the sources, it dilates or condenses, it is subject to the most capricious whims. Consciousness, the past, subjective time - these are the pillars of the modern analytical novel, apparently fragile, but which have supported an edifice like Marcel Proust's, erected from so many volumes". Emphasizing Svevo's ability to capture subtle psychological nuances, in a writing of remarkable mobility, Ion Ianoși suggests, in fact, the relativity of the statements through which the Italian writer captures the effigy of the characters, refusing too strict typological classifications or categorical epic determinations.

The commentary on Kafka's short story *Metamorphosis* starts from the preliminary study of the biography of the Prague writer, revealing the psychoanalytic complexes that support the epic edifice, insisting, rightly, on the dominating symbolic figure of the father. A drama of the abysmal loneliness of being, of alienation and the absence of communication with others, *Metamorphosis* is also an insoluble tragedy of the artist who wakes up, at a certain moment, isolated from others, of the artist who feels his own condition under the sign of a culpable otherness. This, in fact, is the net originality of the interpretation proposed by Ion Ianoși: in revealing the meanings of Kafka's short story under the sign of this archetypal figure of the artist, whose exceptional condition is not an ascension one, but a degraded one, oriented subliminally towards the areas of the monstrous and the formless: "As for the *Metamorphosis*, it is based on a deliberate, programmatic confusion: it is directed downwards, not upwards, as an inverse representation of the usual ones and their traditionally romantic exploration. The artist's condition is perceived as degrading, not at all uplifting, and not accidentally, but according to his essence; in any case, according to the reflections of this essence in the existence of normal people, but also in the consciousness of the creator himself. Kafka's diary and writings attest to how deeply rooted the artist's association was not with the superman, but with the subman. Kafka did not at all mimic the horror of the food finally discovered; more rather damned than savior. The utmost seriousness with which he questioned the condition of a writer, of uncertainty, of refusal, may have led him to ask Max Brod to burn all his unpublished manuscripts after his death".

The interpretation of Musil's masterpiece *The Man Without Qualities* stages credible observations about the relationship between man and work, between the era and creation, but also relevant remarks regarding the narrative architecture of the work, or the destiny of the central characters. Suggestive through the acuity of observation, the critical statements stand out for their firmness, methodological openness and ideological availability: "The enormous canvas of *Penelope* was metamorphosed into a great novel. A psychological and intellectual one. A philosophical one: ontological, epistemological, semiological. Is such a thing possible, the novel as a complete symbiosis between art and philosophy? Musil knew how to problematize everything, to elevate it to the rank of a "problem", including in the sense of German for «fragwürdig», worthy of doubt. Man now has the right to doubt anything, especially himself, his own constancy. Nothing is univocal anymore, everything is equivocal. The affirmation contains the negation, the plus sign is in complementarity with the minus sign. Doubt tears man in two. But, each time, the two presences, the thesis and the antithesis, do not alternate, but are concomitant, concrescent; and they neutralize each other. Space is aspatial, time – atemporal, becoming – freezing, or at most a rotation in a circle. Good is bad, and vice

versa. The real is a dream, the fantastic – palpable. Lucidity finds absurdities, fantasies offer minimal self-confidence. However, the dualities of the past, symmetrical through antinomy, are not taken into account: not a traditional dialectic, but a self-devouring playful relativism – taken seriously precisely as a game! "Attracted by geometry, by systematicity" (Ștefan Borbely), Ion Ianoși is, at the same time, fascinated by analogies, captivated by connections and aesthetic correspondences, in the ever-renewed attempt to grasp the essence of a creation, the secret architecture of a novel, the human and stylistic relief of a creator. Between the rigor of the statements and the relativism of the method lies, in essence, the specificity of the scholar's entire approach, attracted equally by literature and philosophy, by the history of ideas and by the structures and forms of literature.

Ion Ianoși was attracted to autobiographical writing in several volumes, in *Our Century of All Times* (1980), but also in two other books, in which the confessional tone seems dominant, namely *Options* (1989) and *Idei inoportune* (1995). An atypical memoir book is *My International* (2012). Atypical in structure, vision, purpose, but also in the novel articulation of facts and events delivered by the inevitably subjective meanders of memory. The avoidance of verdicts, of conclusive assertions is programmatically assumed: "It seems useful to me to follow, in the course of time, especially, facts, incidents, situations and destinies. When recording them, I comment on them only rarely. I avoid, as much as I can, apodictic statements. I leave the verdicts to the evidentiary material". What is surprising in this massive autobiographical enterprise is the will to authenticate certain dates, facts, incidents, circumstances and contexts, the legitimization of memory through documents (certificates, bibliographical references, older notes, biographical landmarks) that have the gift of conferring objectivity and authenticity to the text. Biographical avatars are marked by the author's multiple minority condition ("Through the professions I have practiced, the language used should define my identity. In fact, I continue to be - to varying degrees - an outsider. All the more so since I have remained attached to the typically minority utopia of both social and ethnic equality"). In the Foreword, the author motivates his approach, nuanced by his conception of the necessity of acutely reconstructing certain events, dates, and historical figures ("With rare exceptions, the deaths of recent decades have also taken their lived experiences to the grave. They either could not or did not want to reveal them. Manipulation was added to amnesia. Thus, the past was and is presented in a jagged manner, alternately frustrated by other and other components, diverse and inverse. The victors in wars, revolutions, restorations settle their accounts with the defeated, as always").

The reconstruction of one's own destiny therefore has the appearance of a rigorously articulated approach, based on evidence, on proofs, with implicit or explicit motivations, with statistical situations and the inventory of bibliographies, without directly assuming a problematic stance, of a profound reflection on one's own philosophical or ethical options. Chronicle of a life and an era, Ion Ianoși's book holds attention by gathering documentary data regarding the communist bureaucratic apparatus, ideological and political mutations, the genealogies of activists, etc. The portraits are brief, and the self-portrait touches have, beyond the balance and honesty of the representation, ironic and self-ironic reflexes. The author's genealogy, which can explain, beyond his Marxist options, the title of the book (*My International*) leaves its mark on his early destiny, the condition of "mongrel" being keenly felt ("My grandparents and parents were Jews of Austro-Hungarian origin. They spoke Hungarian and, helpfully, German. In childhood, adolescence, youth, I was a mongrel, an allogene, a minority multiple for the majorities around me. My native language was Hungarian, I knew German and, defectively, Romanian; I learned Russian. Janina, a Bucharester by birth and destiny, changed my trajectory. I opted for the Romanian language: at university, in journalism, in my own family, with friends"). The left-wing political options, the ethical landmarks of the scholar derive, one could say, from this genealogical fatality, the acceptance of integration into

the communist apparatus, for almost nine years (at the Science and Culture Section within the Propaganda and Culture Directorate of the Central Committee), being recorded without reservations or reservations ("I accepted. I still had no reservations about political positions. Anyway, my pride was comforted by the call to the "Holy of Holies", even among ordinary instructors. I received the offer as an erasure of the blame that had hung over me because of my "bourgeois origin"). The fact that, alongside activists with a negative or even evil conformation (Mihai Dulea or Eugen Florescu) there were also activists like Ion Ianoși, who sought to facilitate the access of authentic, valuable cultural acts to the light of the press or the stage is as eloquent as it can be. This is, as G. Dimisianu emphasized in a commentary, a "relative good, indeed, an insular good in the midst of evil that overwhelmed the era. A good obtained, it is true, through concessions, through compromises made by both sides."

Of course, during the years he was an activist, Ion Ianoși witnessed the persecution of Romanian intellectuals, the witness of purges or exclusions that the autobiographical text carefully records, emphasizing the lack of involvement of those from the "literary sector": "Did those from the Literary Sector have any role in these shameful ideological or criminal trials? None. We watched from our isolation the executions of Bucharest intellectuals. We were not consulted about any of them. We were not among the "elected" people sent to the public meetings at the CCS Theater or the Law Faculty. Personally, I only went through the "Földes file" and witnessed his exclusion from the party in Cluj. We were the officials of a Kafkaesque "Castle". We would appear in the "village" at the foot of the castle, meet with a resident, usually receive him at the Information Office, sometimes in the premises locked under seven locks. But I had no idea about what was happening in the high spheres of the CC (i.e. in the cabinets on the lower floors), who was issuing what orders, to be promptly executed. I understood the reasons why 1956 gave birth to the bloody replicas in 1958-1960. However, we learned their details indirectly and vaguely, to the extent that they slipped into the press, were mentioned in meetings, and were told to us by some eyewitnesses. The chance of not having been involved in this mess did not exempt me from anguish; many will think that neither from responsibilities".

Ion Ianoși's book thus assumes a predominantly documentary purpose, renouncing unnecessary explanations, abbreviating some evaluations, suppressing digressions and shifting the focus of the autobiographical narrative to the situations, contexts, events and people involved in the evil mechanisms of communism. Of course, from the multitude of details, from the mass of factology that makes up this book of balance sheet of a life and a destiny, there is no lack of the author's relevant options, closely linked to his plural identity formula (the option for the left, for Romanian culture, for Marxism, for philosophy and aesthetics, for a cult of value and performance, etc.). Even if it is less evident in this autobiographical chronicle, the vibration of ideas is, more everywhere, assumed, implicit and implied. The memorialist cannot be suspected of amnesia - more or less guilty - or of manipulating his own memory. Considering that "memories are personal" and that he cannot help but be subjective, the author hopes "that the mosaic he has created will correspond to the world" he has known. But he also argues that "the man of the left (...) is needed, including among intellectuals, to maintain that state of fertile discontent outside of which the apologists of the right, of capitalism, of free competition, of the unlimited accumulation of property, would find themselves somewhat lonely", the memoirist demonstrating balance and ethical sobriety in judging and weighing the two political levels: the right and the left. By proposing to reconstruct facts, events, characters, historical contexts and human destinies, without commenting on them apodictically, without pronouncing moral verdicts, Ion Ianoși offers us fragments of lived history, extracting, from the alluvium of the past, a large fresco, with a well-contoured drawing, of an entire era, with its unmistakable relief, with its dramas and tragedies, with its cowardice and moral resignations, in an alert, suggestive and plastic style.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Iulian Boldea, *Teme și variațiuni*, Editura Europress Group, București, 2013.
2. Iulian Boldea, *Ion Ianoși și fragmente de istorie trăită*, în revista „Contemporanul. Ideea europeană”, nr. 3, 2016.
3. Iulian Boldea, *Raționalitatea ca interogație*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 9-10, 2017.
4. Marin Diaconu, *Estetică și moralitate*, omagiu profesorului Ion Ianoși, Editura Crater, București, 1998.
5. Vasile Tonoiu, *Mereu cu omul, mereu cu filosofia*, dedicație pentru Ion Ianoși, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2013.
6. *Ion Ianoși, O viață de cărturar*, ediție îngrijită de Vasile Morar, Editura ALL, București, 1998.
7. *Ion Ianoși – 80* (coord. Aura Christi și Alexandru Ștefănescu), Editura Europress Group, București, 2008.