

EUGEN SIMION – THE FIGURE OF THE LITERARY CRITIC IN DIARIES AND DIALOGUES (OUTLINES OF A SELF-PORTRAIT)

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Abstract:

In most of his books (*Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii. Jurnal parizian, Sfidarea retoricii. Jurnal german, Fragmente cririce, Ficțiunea jurnalului intim, Genurile biograficului*), Eugen Simion focused on the essential theme of the ideal critic and that of the aesthetic criticism. How did he managed to get closer, as time passed, to what he understood of these notions, to what he wished, first from himself, as an author, we find, as well as from his books, also from few interviews and also from his volumes of *Dialogues with Petru Dumitriu* and *Dialogues with Andrei Grigor*. This way, we find out from the confessions of his journals, but also from the dialogues with other writers, how the critic Eugen Simion sees/analyses himself, how he looks at himself in relation to the others and, especially, what he understands by the critic’s mission/the destiny of the literary critic, into an outline of self-portrait that mirrors *the profound self* versus *the biographical self*.

Keywords:

Diaries; autobiographical essays; interviews; diary; metamorphosis on the way of the act of work; the deep self vs the biographical self; the mission of the writer/literary critic.

If at the beginning (the period of the first books, from *Proza lui Eminescu* to *Scriitori români de azi I-II*), Eugen Simion did not seem very interested in the theme of biographical genres, nor in the confessions of others or his very own as a form of subjective literature, the radical change in his discourse occurred after his experience in France - *Jurnalul parizian*, the notes from 1970 to 1973; it was a first milestone in which he revised his

opinions, which up to that point had been in line with Roland Barthes or G. Călinescu, who did not believe much in this category of the intimate journal, considered somewhat outside of literature. The “French traineeship” modified his perspective and critical style, as he admitted, bringing him closer to literary theory and diary writing. E. Simion would “open up”, one by one, through *Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii, Întoarcerea autorului, Ficțiunea jurnalului intim* and *Genurile biograficului*, another theme and “another way to access my criticism”.

Here, for the chosen subject – a few sketches of Eugen Simion’s (self)portrait –, we have addressed the two actual journals as well as the two volumes of *Convorbiri* (i.e., conversations) (with Petru Dumitriu and Andrei Grigor), but the research - and implicitly the search for confessions for an extensive critical (self)portrait - may also be extended to some interviews (those with George Arion or Viorel Cacoveanu are eloquent and considered by Eugen Simion to express, in specific intervals – 1981, 1989, 1990 – his moral and aesthetic position for different moments of our “complicated history”), prefaces/afterwords to almost all reissued books (including those dedicated to confessional literature/biographical genre), round tables/The Symposia of Young Critics under the auspices of FNSA, relaunches of magazines – “Caiete Critice”, “RITL” etc., therefore everything even remotely related to the confessional genre. In order to sketch a model of the ideal critic in general and of Eugen Simion himself in particular, we have addressed some of these books, especially *Jurnalele (Parisian Diary and German Diary)*, for the “first” Eugen Simion, the still young writer, around the age of 40-50; then *Moartea lui Mercuțio, Fragmentele critice, Genurile biograficului*, as well as prefaces/postscripts to revised editions, but also various interviews (for the intellectual who reached the full maturity of his creation, between 50 and 70 years old); and, most importantly, *Convorbirile* with Petru Dumitriu and Andrei Grigor – a kind of conclusive programmatic writings, which bring together themes and obsessions of a life devoted to literature, for the writer who reached old age and implicitly his apogee, at 70 years old and beyond, still active, but sometimes contested because of his classicization (he, of all people, perceived as an old-school/traditional/

conservative critic and so on, he who, among other things, had discussed autofiction in our literary market even before it became a favourite topic of debate of the young 2000 Generation). Rereading fragments or entire chapters from books that we had previously read during our college years and later, the conclusion would be that Eugen Simion himself becomes an integral part of the diaristic genre in our country, writing about it as a theorist - somewhat of a “pioneer” in the native territory, at least through his work *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim* - but also of his own discourse, practising the confessional style, which he discusses in his books of criticism. Probably after his Parisian experience, when he became familiar with the fashionable diaries of French and European authors, Simion was to be irreversibly drawn to this genre, which he had not resorted to until *Timpul trăirii...*; he would write about the journals of others and kept his own journal, researching the issue of diary writing, of confessions, from both the outside and the inside of the phenomenon. The biographical theme became, over time, a priority in Eugen Simion’s work, manifested through several predominant sub-themes, true obsessions of creation: the image (myth) of the father/grandfather, the fear of death, the censorships from within me/from outside me, the (vice of) truth, the worship of friendship, the moral relationship between the work and the one who writes it, *le moi profond*/the deep self vs *le moi superficiel*/the biographical self, *le dedans* vs *le dehors*, the myth of Femios - the symbol of the creator/artist who fights by any means to survive, etc.: “*I am a good reader of intimate journals, memoirs, autobiographies, correspondences. The biographical genre... fascinates me. A good reader, because I have patience and, while reading the confession, I meditate on it. A thoughtful reading. Diligent, because I read a lot, not indiscriminately, but I don’t go by the author’s celebrity either. Sometimes I am greatly surprised. Simple people who put their lives on paper and are interesting. It is a justification for their existence, it is a structure of existence, as Barthes says, who, however, makes the mistake of emptying this structure of what we could call its destiny*”.¹

¹ E. Simion, 2003, *Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii*, in: *Manual de trudire a cuvântului*, p. 26.

From these thoughts, the preamble is born for what would become *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim* trilogy. Like other colleagues of his generation, including Marin Preda, Octavian Paler, and Nichita Stănescu, Eugen Simion's literature is also marked by confession - even if not from his first books:

*"The late Papu once reproached me (in the early 1970s) that I am too withdrawn in my critical discourse, that I do not expose myself, I avoid confession. Maybe he was right, I wouldn't know. Anyway, his curses have reached me. I have written a study, Ficțiunea jurnalului intim, of over 1000 pages about confession..."*²

The dialogues with interlocutors such as George Arion, Viorel Cacoveanu, Caius Dragomir, and especially Petru Dumitriu and Andrei Grigor explore this space of the critic's disclosure, the departure from the ivory tower and his descent into reality, practically the transition from the objectivity of studies to a desired unleashing of subjectivity:

*"When I start a book, I have a vague idea about its structure. Writing it, the structure establishes itself. In recent years, while writing about biographical genres (including the intimate diary), I have given great importance to the fragment and the subjective element. The critic no longer wants to be outside the equation. He then introduces his own discourse into the critical discourse. It is probably also a reflex of immediate history. The Revolution (of 1989) provoked in us the revolt of an overly oppressed subjectivity..."*³

CRITICAL MOTIVATION.

Critical models, Strategies

The author makes several confessions about his approach to this difficult and demanding territory of literary criticism, about the call he felt in college and immediately after, when E. Simion had not yet turned 30:

"I began to feel the taste of criticism when George Ivașcu gave me a column in 'Contemporanul' in the early '60s, and Paul Georgescu invited me to collaborate with 'Gazeta literară'; in 1962, I joined the editorial team of 'Gazeta Literară'. I

² E. Simion, 2004, *În ariergarda avangardei. Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor*, p. 217.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 347-348.

*had the feeling that our task was Romanian literature. The young generation was, as they say, entering the fight”.*⁴

Eugen Simion was part of a new critical generation of the 1960s, alongside Nicolae Manolescu, Matei Călinescu, Lucian Raicu, Valeriu Cristea, true commentators who counterbalanced the already outdated team of Proletkult critics from the 1950s: I. Vitner, M. Novicov, S. Toma *et tutti quanti*:

*“We all defended back then, in the mid ‘60s, the cause of creative criticism because we wanted to overthrow the authority of dogmatic, sociologizing, ideological criticism... I still believe today in the power of creative criticism, but I no longer easily believe in the idea that good, intelligent criticism can justify a serious error in judgement. Călinescu says that a penetrating, intelligent critic, a recreator of works (as any literary critic worthy of this name should be), cannot be unjust - even when he deliberately wants to be. More precisely: when, for subjective reasons, he wants to challenge an aesthetically valid work [...] A great critic cannot destructively criticise a great work for strictly subjective reasons. No matter how uncomfortable the individual who wrote it may be or how foreign the writer’s ideology may be to him, the true critic yields to aesthetic truth [...] A critical project based solely on ‘creative errors’ cannot be viable over time. Analysing 10 books, we may be mistaken once or twice, but if we are mistaken 9 times and judge correctly only once, it means we are not perceptive, intelligent critics and recreators of works. Creation cannot cover, in all cases, the deficiencies of taste and the immorality of the spirit”.*⁵

The assumed critical models are the well-known native classics - Titu Maiorescu, E. Lovinescu, Tudor Vianu, G. Călinescu -, to whom the French ones would be added later: Jean-Pierre Richard, Roland Barthes, Jean Rousset:

“I know very well that I wanted to do literary criticism and my readings have been oriented in this direction from the beginning. G. Călinescu and Tudor Vianu were my models. [...] There is another important moment in my intellectual life: the preparation of the study on E. Lovinescu... I have read Lovinescu in its entirety and I have read, so to speak, his era and intellectual sources. It was a revelation. Writing about him, I adopted a moral model. A transfer that was half voluntary, half imposed... Imposed without me knowing it by contagion. I have discovered, by following his work, a man who sacrificed everything (social career, emotional life) for literature. [...] A strong character, a writer of class. I came out of this adventure

⁴ E. Simion, 1998, *Sunt un sceptic care caută motive să se mântuiască*, în *Fragmente critice II*, p. 13-14.

⁵ E. Simion, 2004, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-247, pp. 250-252.

*a different person from the one I was when I entered. I am sure of this fact. I believe I have developed my own style and set my model”.*⁶

From the confrontation with Lovinescu, the critic admits, he managed to understand himself and establish a moral and intellectual model that he would not abandon until the end of his life; it is the **consciousness of critical vocation**. In a dialogue with Caius Dragomir about literature models (in *Modelele literaturii* from *Fragmente critice*), he responds to the classic formative question, “What role has literature played in your life?”; practically, a primordial role:

*“I owe literature several things: a) it saved me, literally; in the early ‘60s, when I started to write, I had no identity; literary criticism gave me an intellectual and social opportunity; b) literature has become a way of life; it may be an inflated statement, but that is how things happen; c) literature moulds you, it forces you to have a vision of the world, to assume the burden of the world, whether you want to or not; d) I would like to say: literature pushes the world forward; I still don’t know if it’s true; e) the bad part is that, if you take it seriously, literature prevents you from doing anything else; and what is more curious and serious: you no longer want to do anything else, always doing literature. When I am asked: What is your hobby? I look at the person who asks me in amazement: What do you mean? Can I do something else? [...]”.*⁷

The author then shares some of his critical strategies. He first highlights the strategies of his predecessors – Maiorescu’s criticism of aesthetic identification, Lovinescu’s aesthetic centripetalism, and then his own strategy of approaching the work as a whole/from the rearguard of the avant-garde:

“Maiorescu’s criticism is based on the aesthetic identification of the work and, in this sense, his concern is to establish clear boundaries, to remove ambiguities surrounding the work; Lovinescu has a different strategy: he called it aesthetic centripetalism... the concept suits him as well: the critic positions himself from the beginning at the aesthetic heart of the work and shuttles back and forth between the centre and the edges of creation (external causes, models etc.). Interpretation goes hand in hand with aesthetic identification, or perhaps the order of the terms is: I

⁶ E. Simion, 1998, *În dialog cu Caius Dragomir, despre modelele literaturii*, în *Fragmente critice II*, p. 384.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 382-383.

identify (recognise the work aesthetically, say yes or no), and as I justify it aesthetically, I analyse it [...] Keeping proportions, what is my technique? I like to view and receive the work as a whole. And I want the work to present itself as a whole, in its fullness and complexity. For this, any method is, in principle, acceptable if it leads me towards what is essential in the work, that is, towards its symbols [...]"⁸

In a way, following Barthes' line, "a spirit situated in the rearguard of the avant-garde", Eugen Simion chooses a good place for observation, i.e., not far from the battlefield, but not too close either to waste his time with "street fights" (read: café gossip, polemics in newspapers, malicious notes etc.). He "sets up his tent" in the rearguard of the avant-garde:

*"Skipping stages and models: I participated in the battle of the 1980s writers with my own critical means and from the perspective given to me by the study of European modernity. I knew where this resurgence came from and surely where it was heading. The critic is not an infantryman, he is a strategist and an enlightened chronicler"*⁹

THE MOTIVATION OF CONFESSION

Contemporary Mythologies. Weaknesses of Romanian culture.

Spiritual dilemmas

Returning to "the confessor" Eugen Simion, the author declares himself *a restless individual who aspires to a state of contemplation* and argues for his openness to confession, the motivation for confession:

*"Why does a person need to confess? To discover their identity in a world that tends to destroy it, and to defend their identity in a society, such as the modern one, where, according to Sartre, everything is a relationship of relationships. What is my place in this relationship of relationships? And above all, who am I? I who thinks and experiences all of this... As for me, I have a special reason (others probably have it too, but they do not confess it): after being a literary critic for a long time, always talking about others, I realised at some point that I systematically sacrifice myself, my voice only indirectly and cautiously enters my discourse. The diary is a form of escape from criticism. It is the revenge, the protest of my subjectivity"*¹⁰

⁸ E. Simion, 2004, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-219.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁰ E. Simion, 1998, *Sunt un sceptic care caută motive să se mântuiască*, in *Fragmente critice II*, pp.11-12.

In his journal, E. Simion configures conversations or interviews that revolve around all obsessions of creation. He then discusses the mythologies of contemporaneity, fantasies that become myths or replace old models: the myth of the teacher is replaced by that of the scientist, literature is replaced by technology; the fantasy of travel; the dramatic decline of intellectual professions; the fantasy of quick enrichment; the model of the resourceful individual; the consequent diminution of the myth of the moral and religious individual; the age of intolerance, and so on:

*“Memory is inhabited by fantasies. And these fantasies come from somewhere, from a social and essential experience; kindness exists, and without it, we could not live. Kindness, tolerance, human solidarity, Christian mercy. When you think everything is lost, you come across a stranger who encourages you through their kindness, their decency and common sense. The three B’s [T.N. – from bunătate ‘kindness’, bunăcuvîința ‘decency’, bun simț ‘common sense’] that probably constitute the formula of this vitamin of common existence”.*¹¹

Somehow, the author believes, we replace our own biography with the fantasies of literature, or “perhaps the other way around”. In his confessions and conversations, Eugen Simion often points out several typical flaws of Romanian culture/generic weaknesses of Romanians: Adamism, the complex of inertia; vegetative spirit; anomie (incivility); exaggerated individualism; skepticism and proverbial prudence, lack of trust in the future; *transactional spirit*, according to a formula by M. Ralea; criticism; the complex of discord; cultural cloning/culture in leaps/working in small spaces; Balkanism; the complex of our historical delay and identity, marginality; ideological/politicised evil (the writer should neglect politics, stay away from it - by getting into politics, they will neglect or parasitise their work etc.); the untranslatability of our great poetry (and implicitly, the tragedy of restricted circulation of our language); the lack of a philosophy of existence in the Romanian novel; the complex of having too many complexes and not being able to get rid of them, and so on. Moreover, the dilemmas and essential questions raised by Eugen Simion in his discussions (with Petru Dumitriu, with Andrei Grigor, even with Aurora Cornu) are inevitably spiritual: *Where*

¹¹ E. Simion, 1998, *Convorbiri cu Petru Dumitriu*, p. 189.

*do you think the current world is heading?, What has humanity lost in this century?, What has it gained?, What should it recover?. Then, the critic practises the Barthesian I like, I don't like game; How do you see the destiny of Romanian culture? (caught between the two extremes of identity obsession, the frustration of minor culture in the face of the West, and the post-Protochronist arrogance of Mioritic pride); What chances does it have, caught between nationalism and globalisation, to be accepted in Europe?; Is there a new crisis of culture? etc. Finding himself at the time of confessions (*Timpul Mărturisirii*), the still young critic (40 years old in 1973, having completed *Jurnalul parizian*) considered Paris a "time of knowledge" (and leaving it means mythologising, "moving from the time of experience to the time of confession [...] from nonfiction to literature, in fact, the literature of nonfiction") and admitted that the idea of a second doctorate in France with Jean-Pierre Richard seemed an unacceptable affectation, because he already had a doctorate in Romania; the Sorbonne stage actually helped him clarify himself, find himself, realise that his destiny would not be fulfilled there, in Paris, but in Romania:*

"I am therefore 40 years old, an age at which in the previous century women were already grandmothers and men were preparing to retire to the countryside. And I have not yet written the great work, the fundamental projects are ahead of me, only now, after the French experience, do I see more clearly and understand better my Romanian destiny [...]"¹²

This symbolic statement was explained 30 years later, in *Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor*:

"It was then that I realised that youth (which can excuse many things and can promise a lot) is starting to fall behind. And I had not yet written my essential works. France changed something important in my mentality. It was, in fact, a fundamental experience for my intellectual and moral formation. [...] I never seriously considered giving up Romanian culture. Because that is what it is about. Nor other elements related to my nature and roots. Needless to say, I love the Romanian world, I feel good among Romanians, even when Romanian intellectuals exasperate me. And this happens almost every day. In the 1970s, an intellectual had

¹² E. Simion, 2003, *Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii*, în *Manual de trudire a cuvântului*, p. 22.

many reasons to lose hope. He also had reasons to return. Subjective and objective reasons: belonging to a culture, the feeling of identity, family etc. [...] What saved me? Perhaps the belief that evil is not eternal and that my vocation is not failure”.¹³

In 1998, Simion emphasised, in a conversation with Caius Dragomir, that the French moment had come in time, as a “fundamental experience” at the age of 37, in Paris, understanding the *new criticism* and especially embracing his condition as a Romanian man of letters, but with openness and European recognition:

“Paris washed away my prejudices and gave me a genuine European taste; then I healed from all the complexes of the Romanian intellectual [...] I returned after 3 years... with a great peace in my spirit. If I can do anything, let me do it here, in Romanian culture. The rest is no longer up to me. I do not regret my decision”.¹⁴

In 2004, in a dialogue with Andrei Grigor, the critic concluded that his time in France had altered his perspective and even his critical style. By its fifth edition in 2006, *Timpul trăirii...* had already become a classic in the field of creative diary writing:

“Perhaps no other fictional literary genre is as diverse in reception as confessional literature, which spontaneously or memoiristically records events [...] When I started this Parisian journal, somewhat reluctantly, I did not realise that the theme of biography would become a permanent theme in my criticism. An obsessive metaphor, as thematic criticism calls it, a phantom that has haunted me ever since, constantly confused me and ultimately determined my critical programme”.¹⁵

The diaristic genre is also fiction, according to the strong conviction expressed by Eugen Simion, commenting on a statement by Valéry: every confession inevitably contains fiction; every intimate journal is a *fiction of nonfiction*. Challenging rhetoric, the author’s second journal, the “German” one from 1985, came as a logical continuation of *Timpul trăirii*, almost a decade later, dissecting favourite themes - the Myth of Femios, the myth of Scheherazade, speaking about Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, or the young Eugen Ionescu and about cultures of modesty, like the Romanian

¹³ E. Simion, 2004, *op. cit.*, p.272.

¹⁴ E. Simion, 1998, *În dialog cu Caius Dragomir, despre modelele literaturii*, în *Fragmente critice II*, p. 385.

¹⁵ E. Simion, 2006, *Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii, Cuvânt înainte* la ediția a cincea, pp. 20-21 and p. 509.

one, opposed to guilt cultures. The fragments from a journal - *Semne și sensuri* (which implicitly become literature, upon the departure of his father, Dragomir Simion, to whom this book is dedicated) and *Jurnalul german*, which concludes the volume are more important for the present topic:

*“But I realise that I have started to make literature. And my mind isn’t on literature; my spirit is suspicious and my pain refuses to be put into words. So many famous sentences about death come to my mind, but no sentence can encompass and reconcile the feeling of a son losing his parent... I have feared this separation since childhood. My childhood nightmares were always about the inexplicable disappearance of my father [...] I do not understand people who, in such circumstances, become philosophers and find arguments to justify the evil that occasionally strikes us so brutally, leaving us alone and desperate in front of an empty world. Because one thing is certain (and particularly grave): when someone close to us dies, the world becomes emptied of signs and meanings. We fumble around, powerless, in a desert of shadows and cling to words of smoke”.*¹⁶

The author returns to the parental image in *Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor*, confessing that, loving his father immensely, practically everything he wrote, in a certain sense, he wrote for him and his memory. Another recurrent nightmare would be reiterated at the end of the same *Convorbiri*: that fear that he cannot take or pass an exam, which always appears to him as failed in his dreams. Otherwise, following in the footsteps of R. Barthes, in *Moartea unui mit*, he delves into what he had previously signalled in *Întoarcerea autorului*:

*“Culture produces texts, not creators, today’s theorists state. Authors are systematically swallowed up by the texts they produce and, if during reading, the author returns to the text, he can only be a grammatical being, a paper person. He does not have a proper biography, but, if necessary, an ergograph. [...] Therefore, the myth of the great writer disappears, his place in the logosphere being taken by the writer/producer of texts”.*¹⁷

Moartea lui Mercuri (1993, 2nd edition in 2002) adds a few other significant chapters for a critical self-portrait - *Revoluția morală, Incitarea la toleranță, De ce nu polemizez, De ce fac critică literară*; we note here *Fragmente de jurnal/portrete/mici narațiuni subiective*, and especially *Tradiția este progresul care tocmai s-a înfăptuit* and *O lume nouă nu se poate*

¹⁶ E. Simion, 1985, *Sfîdarea retoricii, Semne și sensuri - fragmente dintr-un jurnal*, p. 376.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

construi cu o ură veche, interviews given to George Arion in “Flacăra” magazine in 1981 and on 1 March 1990. In 1994/1998, he challenged the novelist Petru Dumitriu to a series of discussions, often touching on the same literary themes and obsessions in their end-of-century dialogue, often the one asking the questions - Simion changing places on the go with his interlocutor and trying to give solutions to the dilemmas. *Convorbiri cu Petru Dumitriu* may be his first book of this kind; there were two more in manuscript, a spoken book with Nichita Stănescu, *Bolile profesionale ale artistului*, and a book about the young Marin Preda. The book about Preda was to be reshaped through the ongoing series of dialogues with his first wife, Aurora Cornu. In the conversations with Petru Dumitriu, reference is also made to the need for cultural educators/trainers (which Simion himself is, through his notebooks, *Penser l’Europe*, and other projects, always carried through to the end and not abandoned halfway, with the critic practically opposing the traditional Mioritic Adamism). If the volume by Florin Mugur, *Convorbiri cu Marin Preda*, serves as a model for these *Convorbiri cu Petru Dumitriu*, in turn, the 1998 volume becomes the starting point for *În ariergarda avangardei*, where Andrei Grigor is the one asking the questions - some identical to those asked by Simion to Dumitriu - and E. Simion is the one confessing, going outside of himself. In 2001, *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim* appears in three volumes: *I Există o poetică a jurnalului?* - with various deliberations on a genre seeking its literary status, *De ce ținem un jurnal intim?* its functions, *Le dedans și le dehors*; *Mituri fondatoare, fantasme, imagini ale interiorității*; *Tipologia jurnalului intim/bolile profesionale ale diaristului*; *Evoluția unui gen subversiv: Jurnalul Intim sfârșește prin a deveni o ficțiune. Ficțiunea nonficțiunii*; *II Intimismul european* (which includes 24 classic diaries, from A. Gide to W. Gombrowicz); *III Diarismul românesc* (an analysis of 50 Romanian diaries, from T. Maiorescu to M. Zăciu):

“Contrary to Călinescu’s opinion (the diary is nonsense), Romanians have shown early interest in this kind of ‘drawer’ genre and have produced a large number of intimate journals that can be read not only for their documentary interest but also for themselves,

as subjective literary writings... I am trying to determine the forms that 'diarism' takes in a culture of modesty/decency/shame/prudence, such as Romanian culture".¹⁸

E. Simion proposes here a ten-point *Programme* for Romanian diarism, making the necessary distinctions between journal genres. In *Genurile biograficului* (2002), the author completes a thematic cycle: *Întoarcerea autorului* (1981), *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim* (2001), and, "if I cross the border between literary theory and diary fiction a little", the two journals, the Parisian and the German.

"As I have confessed many times, the idea of writing about these unclassified genres (intimate diary, memoirs, autobiography) came to me while keeping a journal myself. As I noted daily in my notebooks, I wondered about this type of literature that Romanian criticism had long refused to accept and, in some cases (such as Călinescu), had completely rejected. Relying on the theoretical writings of reference in this field and on the known diaristic works - both foreign and Romanian - I tried to prove that there is an incipient fiction in the intimate journal (a writing that deliberately rejects the conventions of literature) and, where we least expect it, we are surprised to discover a true literature. The intimate writing has, I wanted to show, its clauses, its particularities, in short, its poetics, which claims to spring from an uncertain notion: spontaneity. [...] The theme of the critic/biographer passes from one commentary to another. Reading these analytical pages in order, I realised that whenever I approached this type of literature (subjective, intimate, documentary), my older questions about the dissociation made by Proust and resumed by Valéry and other aesthetic theorists of the 20th century regarding the biographical self and the deep self would resurface. How can we separate them... doesn't the biographical self, that is, the dismissed person, deserve our interest in his fate? And then, who writes the memoirs, the autobiographies... whose work is the nonfiction work, the confessional work: the deep self (the pure self) or the despicable biographical self? [...] The question is not whether we should return to biographical criticism and try to explain the literary work through the incidents of the writer's life. However, another issue arises in this complicated case (of the author sent into exile for 100 years): what happens when he, without thinking too much about the pure self and the biographical self, starts writing about himself and the world he has experienced? By what criteria do we judge these writings and who is the author hiding in these confessions? The deep self or the biographical self? Could it be that memoirs, biographical essays, autobiographies as such represent a revenge of the author eliminated from the equation?"¹⁹

¹⁸ E. Simion, 2001, *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim*, III, *Diarismul românesc*, pp. 7-20.

¹⁹ E. Simion, 2002, *Genurile biograficului*, *Prefață*, pp. 7-9, *Pactul cu istoria* pp. 11-39 and *Jurnale, jurnale...*, pp. 221-225.

Two chapters from *Genurile biograficului* are of interest to our theme (the critic turned diarist/the diarist disguised as critic): *Pactul cu istoria*, a digression on the theme of subjective/confessional literature (memoirs, autobiography, the space of biography, related genres) and *Jurnale, jurnale*, with references to *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim*. After urging Petru Dumitriu to open up in depth to the reading public, Eugen Simion himself revealed his thoughts to Andrei Grigor in 2004, revisiting his favourite themes and motifs (also see the preface of the volume *În ariergarda avangardei*). The dialogue highlights the author's models and advice to his disciples, as it represents the image of the author at the full artistic maturity of his creation, at 70 years old, not much different from that of the (still) hopeful young writer of 1973/1977. However, in the 30 years since *Jurnalul parizian*, the one who had then feared that he would not be able to achieve the goals of his great work had in the meantime marked off all the stages and challenges, reaching, as a scholar, the peak of its construction:

"I am a literary critic, that is, a person who believes that truth exists: the critic, if he still maintains traces of innocence, is destined to comment on the effects of innocence in literature. Not directly, but through writing. First, writing of the poet or prose writer, and, finally, one's own writing. After passing through so many mechanisms, what remains of poor innocence? In any case, it ends up, right before the critic's eyes, already pregnant with the meanings that writing gives it. I think the only form of innocence that is left for the critic is the innocence of believing that one day, a new Eminescu will appear and, thus, his fidelity to literature will not seem in vain. E. Lovinescu had this belief. Perhaps it exists in any authentic critic. Otherwise, why would he spend his whole life with his eyes on books and pencil in hand, if not with the obscure hope that, who knows, one day he will discover a masterpiece. An unknown masterpiece, the chimera of those who strongly believe that literature is a superior form of existence".²⁰

The literary critic - Simion reiterated the idea in 2004, in *Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor* - is, from the starting point, a Mercutio destined to fight for a foreign cause (which does not belong to him).

"I have elaborated a book on this topic, I won't dwell on it. I only say that, by defending and justifying someone else's texts, the literary critic cannot remain outside the subject. Or maybe he can, if he wants to, but he does it to his own detriment. It has been said so many times that objectivity in literary criticism is the

²⁰ E. Simion, 2004, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-353.

highest form of subjectivity. G. Călinescu launched the justified statement. We put something of ourselves in our comments, our justifications. Whether we want to or not, we enter the texts we write”.²¹

HOW THE CRITIC VIEWS HIMSELF/ HOW OTHER CRITICS VIEW HIM

The mission of the critic

In 1981, E. Simion granted an interview to George Arion in “Flacăra” magazine, upon the release of *Dimineața poezilor, Tradiția este progresul care tocmai s-a întâmplat* (‘Tradition is progress that has just happened’):

*“I am by no means a tranquil spirit; tranquility, if it exists, is the result of great inner effort. Contemplation, the state we all aspire to, is achieved with great difficulty. Contemplation does not imply a paralysis of the mind, but rather its maximum vibration. According to my perception, great contemplatives are those restless spirits who possess the strength to master themselves”.*²²

E. Simion is challenged here (about his personality traits, whether he opposes the Balkan spirit, his desire to exert influence in the literary arena and to dominate it etc.) to outline his portrait as a critic in the early 1980s, at the age of almost 50:

*“I am a restless spirit striving to be a balanced one. If there is tranquility in my books, it is a slow and arduous conquest. I dislike spirits that cannot be controlled and I detest the spectacle of reckless vanities. I cannot love nor esteem the manifestations of the so-called Balkan genius - I suspect it of imposture (by Balkanism I mean cursing, slander, laziness of mind, excessive talk/ endless babbling) [...] I have examined myself at length: I do not know the feeling of domination. I do not like to manipulate weak consciences. I do not like to be surrounded by flattering spirits. [...] I do not like fanatic spirits, and I certainly do not love corrupt fanatics. These are the most despicable and dangerous individuals. [...]”.*²³

E. Simion identifies himself as a sceptic with moments of silence (silence countering weak or ideological works that he does not wish to discuss) and is considered by others as a stylist of criticism:

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 216-217.

²² E. Simion, 2002, *Tradiția este progresul care tocmai s-a întâmplat*, în *Moartea lui Mercurișo*, pp. 329-339.

²³ *Ibidem*.

“My main achievement is my criticism, in its entirety, with its ups and downs. I consider it a success that I could become a literary critic and practise this profession for decades, in difficult times, without major moral and aesthetic compromises. When I could not say what I truly believed, I kept silent. Silence - I have said this before - is not a good mark for a literary critic, but I have sometimes chosen to remain silent rather than say what should not be said”.²⁴

Another interview, given in 1989 to Viorel Cacoveanu, *Sunt un sceptic care caută motive să se mântuiască* (‘I am a sceptic who seeks reasons to redeem himself’), was reprised in *Fragmente critice II* from 1998, echoing the same ideas and authorial fantasies as mentioned above. Regarded as a stylist of criticism, he replied, “the beauty of the critic’s style lies in the precision of language and the power to imagine ideas”, an idea similar to that about Lovinescu himself in the study *Scepticul mântuit*. The critic believed, however, that his style had not remained the same as in its origins, but had evolved from one decade to another:

“And then, my style has changed recently [...]. I had a dialogue - published in ‘Caiete Critice’ - with Serge Fauchereau about this subject, and, without consulting each other, we reached the same conclusion: the postmodern critic no longer wants to stay outside his discourse. They refuse to use the third-person singular or the first-person plural. I predominantly write in the first-person singular. Mercutio (the critic) starts fighting for his cause, while Romeo (the writer) must solve his own entanglements...”.²⁵

When asked about the theoretical landmarks that can overcome the limits of subjectivity, E. Simion admitted that they only exist in his mind and that he had never simply conformed to methods:

“Clarity and common sense prevent me, I hope, from going crazy. I have a method, but I do not blindly submit to it. I do not emphasise it, nor do I force the poem or the novel to justify the method. On the contrary, the method should help me, if possible, to aesthetically justify the work. I do not repudiate the ‘methodologists’ in literary criticism, but I do not always follow them. The critic should ensure a space of freedom. The limits of subjectivity? Yes, there is the possibility of mastering the explosion, not so much of subjectivity, but of subjectivism, which is an inaesthetic malady. You can be a great subjectivist in literary criticism, like G. Călinescu, but it is not advisable to cultivate subjectivism, which means resentment, personal

²⁴ E. Simion, 1998, *În dialog cu Caius Dragomir, despre modelele literaturii*, in *Fragmente critice II*, 1998, p. 391.

²⁵ E. Simion, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

*interest, literary favouritism, intolerance, party spirit... We are all subjective, but those who want to be critics must cut the nails of hatred, as Călinescu put it*²⁶

The qualities of an excellent critic, apart from talent, are reduced to continuity, amplitude, volume of work, magnitude, and above all, “a mystical trust in literature”; the critic should not have a vocation as a prosecutor or judge, but rather as a guide, an educator, even a priest, because they “serve an unknown god”, which “appears out of nowhere and reveals himself only through the work”.

The mission/destiny of the critic lies somewhere between the apostleship/prophethood of criticism and simply the consistency of a hardworking, honest, professional writer. The “apostleship” of criticism could be defined as follows:

*“The critic is indirectly a guide, orienting and educating the taste of their readers. The critical action is based, as Lovinescu proved, on a critical imperative. Its moral mission is implicit and is conditioned, it should be emphasised, by the aesthetic factor. Only someone who knows how to educate well can educate. A bad book is never moral. It is rather immoral, because a lack of talent is truly immoral in art [...] The critic lives not only through the values they discover, defend, and impose in literature. They live, after all these become textbook goods, through the creation within their own work. See the case of Maiorescu [...] ; you [...] see a prophet in me... And I am only a literary critic, nothing more, but nothing less”*²⁷ (Interview with V. Cacoveanu, “Steaua”, no. 11-12/1989, an idea repeated in the 2004 Conversations with Grigor).

E. Simion respects the notion of a “good” critic, a friend of authors, but never that of a home critic who accepts the compromise of always writing praise about the books of those in their own camp. The friendship between a critic and writers can be affected by the critic’s integrity, who at a certain moment can write less eulogistically about a qualitatively weak work by a writer friend:

“I have often wondered: how should a critic be? What is the ideal behaviour? I don’t have a solution in this regard. It is certain that I do not love cynics, I do not believe that a critic needs to be feared in order to be respected, nor that they need to be loved by everyone. The reputation of the ‘bad’ critic is very vulnerable (see the cases of Al. George, Gh. Grigurcu). I did not want and, frankly, I could not live isolated from the literary life, nor did I spend the whole day in the company of the writers whom I valued. A critic needs friends and always feels

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

²⁷ E. Simion, 1998, *Sunt un sceptic care caută motive să se mântuiască*, in: *Fragmente critice, II*, pp. 16-18.

the need to be accepted and respected by the important writers of their time. Otherwise, why would they write? What would Maiorescu be without Eminescu, Creangă, Caragiale?”²⁸

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Eugen Simion remains both a mentor and a coach for critics, through his *caietism* and more, always addressing the master-disciple theme from the perspective of the relationship between Professor and students. The critic “recommends” the E. Simion model without asking anything in return from the young people who approach him, suggesting only that they believe in truth and not cheat with ideas, but also that they should not be afraid; in literary criticism, fear is “a paralysing feeling’ that ultimately leads to “disastrous compromises”. Referring to G. Călinescu’s witty remark, Simion desires that anyone who loves him should strategically distance themselves from him, along with his ideas, in order “to throw them into fertile ground for them to bear fruit” (see also *Sfaturile pentru tinerii critici*, from *Fragmente critice III*, 1999, *Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor* and “Caiete Critice”, No. 3-5/2007). The critic’s legacy is ongoing, successors exist and will continue to exist, preserving the *caietism* as a state of mind. In the pages of “Caiete critice” (i.e., critical notebooks), he launched, promoted or rebranded some of the important critics of the last 25 years: Andrei Grigor, Daniel Cristea-Enache, Nicolae Bârna, Răzvan Voncu, Lucian Chișu, Paul Cernat, Bogdan Crețu, alongside of writers like Bogdan Popescu, Ioan Lăcustă, Nicolae Iliescu, and essayists such as Nicolae Corbeanu, Virgil Tănase, prominent figures like Dumitru Țepeneag, and then the younger generation of researchers at the “G. Călinescu” Institute of Literary History and Theory, and the list could go on. And the *caietism*, promoted by Eugen Simion for over 30 years, means nothing more than a perpetual struggle to preserve the *aesthetic autonomy* and the spirit of great creation, in the midst of the post-communist era of revisions. Through these principles, on which he based his entire activity, the critic understands *the rightful position towards a work of art, the effort of objectivity, the aesthetic justification of the work, the friendly spirit in relations with writers, the avoidance of insults, a spiritual family, an intelligent pedagogy, permissive towards the young (but not lacking in demand and an ethics of freedom of opinion)*. At the relaunch of the new series of the

²⁸ E. Simion, 2004, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

magazine of “G. Călinescu” Institute, “R.I.T.L.”, a single issue in 2007, the man of total projects (such as *DGLR*, *CVLR* or the series *Opere fundamentale*) outlines a new programme with optimism, hoping for continuity through reinvention, but wishing to follow the classic *Călinescu tradition* as much as possible for that year (2007), betting everything on communication, a collaboration between the old and the new generations, between *Cei ce sunt* (i.e., those who are here) and *Cei ce vin* (those to come).

Eugen Simion fully fulfils his vocation through creation, his micro-biographies ultimately completing not just the identity of some intellectual, but a biography that becomes destiny, following all the essential stages of creating and establishing a critical standard, a systematic criticism, from predecessors, influences, and its formation to the peak of determining his own creative school, disciples and legacy, i.e., the classicization of a model. Eugen Simion is, without a doubt, beyond his other facets (President of the Romanian Academy, Director of the “G. Călinescu” Institute, clear head of accomplished massive projects, cultural seed, pedagogical catalyst), the most important Romanian critic after the passing of G. Călinescu, covering with his work - which is complex and arouses envy - the period from 1965 to 2022, from *Posteritatea lui Eminescu*, 1964, to the “swansong” of the book published shortly before the critic’s physical demise, *Recurs la natură*, a true testament of an aesthete, literary theorist and historian who, after almost six decades of fruitful creation, had become an encyclopaedic mind, an internationally recognised scholar and, even during his lifetime, a phenomenal institution.

*“I am a literary critic - nothing more, but also nothing less - so the sense of the epic is not lacking in me. I want to be a writer of ideas, a portraitist who works with illustrious models... My luck was that I was part of a powerful generation. I wanted to be the critic of this great generation of poets, prose writers and literary critics - a generation that caught the moment of political thawing (1960-1971) and took advantage of it... It would please me to believe that I have succeeded...”*²⁹

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