

II. THE LITERARY CRITIC

ON THE “CULTURAL HERITAGE” OF LITERARY CRITICISM IN EUGEN SIMION’S WORK: BETWEEN “COMPREHENSIVE CRITICISM”, “DIRECTIONAL CRITICISM” AND MILITANT CRITICISM (1965-1971)

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to examine the theme of “cultural heritage” in the light of Eugen Simion’s work (1965-1971). Although this intellectual coordinate was promoted by the ideologues of the communist regime, it was approached in an aesthetic manner by the growing literary criticism of that period. Our main contribution is to observe how the public discourse changed because of the political interferences from the “socialist democracy” program. We will try to explain the strategies through which ideology functioned as Procrustean bed to literary criticism, focusing on the case of E. Lovinescu’s work, which became one of the central points of debate, thanks to a certain relaxation of the political control. Throughout the research, we will propose a few answers about E. Lovinescu’s status in the general context of those years.

Keywords:

Cultural heritage, communist ideology, aesthetic values, E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, Eugen Simion.

This article represents an attempt to analyse the theme of “cultural heritage” in the work of Eugen Simion (1965-1971). The theme itself was proposed by the ideologues of the communist regime but it was approached in an aesthetic manner by the ingravescient literary criticism of the time. I have compared this dispute to a polygon whose sides were adjusted during Romania’s “socialist democracy” era. I will try to explain the mechanism through which ideology functioned as Procrustean bed to literary criticism, focusing on the case of E. Lovinescu’s work, which returned to the centre of attention, thanks to a certain relaxation of the political control. Throughout the research, I will attempt to answer the following question: which aspects of E. Lovinescu’s public image corresponded to the reality of those years?

One readily available answer would be that he, as an intellectual who served the library until his death, upheld the dignity of literary criticism as a legitimate occupation: “*In conclusion, being a critic is not the pursuit of people without any other serious occupation, of unsuccessful artists*”¹. This sentence demonstrates a contradictory opinion to that of G. Călinescu which, over time, became popular through high school or even university education². The argument can be analysed on several levels. Therefore, we will only focus on isolating one plea *pro domo sua*. E. Lovinescu strived, even in the most delicate and private moments towards the end of his life, to protect the civic status of the activity he had pursued selflessly, without any material gain, and which was, therefore, invaluable:

“I am a critic, nothing more, nothing less. I use the materials gathered and published by others to build something. From the clay and water they provide, I try

¹“E. Lovinescu, 1969, *Cariera mea de critic* [a radio lecture held on February 3, 1942, as part of the “Confessions about My Career” series], in *Scrieri. I. Critice*, Edition and Introductory Study by Eugen Simion, Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, p. 508.

² “If he cannot be a good artist himself, the critic must at least fail in as many genres as possible. Failure is an active participation in the creative process, a guarantee of comprehensibility. The critic who has never written a verse in his life, and even takes pride in it, who has never attempted to write a short story or a novel, is a false critic, a doctor, a professor”. *Tehnica criticeii și a istoriei literare* [1938], in: G. Călinescu, *Opere. Publicistică. III*, (1936-1938), Coordinated Edition by Nicolae Mecu, edited text, notes, and comments by Alexandra Ciocârlic, Magdalena Dragu, Nicolae Mecu, Oana Soare, and Pavel Țugui, Preface by Eugen Simion, Bucharest, Romanian Academy, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2007, pp. 1361-1362).

to shape living people, animated portraits, and - in this case - to establish relationships between them in order to create the atmosphere of «Junimea»...; As a matter of fact, all the information is subject to my own critical analysis”³.

His architectural vocation focused on durability and against the fragility of one’s own existence accompanied him without interruption, so much so that it would have been appropriate for him to declaim or adopt as his personal motto the first verse of Horace’s Ode XXX: „Exegi monumentum aere perennius”. G. Călinescu also shaped enduring things but he grew weary of portraying a different intellectual persona⁴, remaining faithful to himself even during the “people’s democracy” period (1948-1965)⁵. The dramatic tone of Lovinescu’s testimony included in the preface to the second volume of *T. Maiorescu și contemporanii lui* [T. Maiorescu and his contemporaries] primarily comes from the biographical detail that this book was published posthumously, in 1944. Secondly, the year 1944 transformed every sector of public life in Romania into an ideological battleground. It took almost two decades to bring the literary criticism - artistic creation binary back into focus, by ignoring the constraints of Marxist-Leninist ideology. In 1964 Tudor Vianu passed away (May 21), followed by Mihai Ralea (August 17). In the same year, Decree 411/1964 granted amnesty

³ E. Lovinescu, *T. Maiorescu și contemporanii lui* [vol. II, 1944, posthumous], in *Ciclul junimist. II. T. Maiorescu și contemporanii lui, P.P. Carp, critic literar și literat, T. Maiorescu și posteritatea lui critică*, Edition Coordinated by Nicolae Mecu, edited text, notes, and comments by Alexandra Ciocârlie, Alexandru Farcaș, Nicolae Mecu, and Daciana Vlădoiu, Introduction by Eugen Simion, Bucharest, Romanian Academy, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2018, p. 357.

⁴“For those who know us closely, we are not a failed writer who turns to criticism and, in old age, takes up novels and poetry, but a writer with a leaning (whether talented or not) toward lyricism and epic construction, who also writes literary reviews, much like Mr. Perpersicius” (G. Călinescu, *Eusebius Camilar, P. Stati, Al. Dima, Lucia Demetrius, Perpersicius, si Stănică*, in *Viața românească*, Year XXX, No. 7, July 1938, quoted in the aforementioned source, p. 1493).

⁵ But I am not a professional critic; I lack the vocation for this genre, although I probably have the critical spirit” (G. Călinescu, Critique and Creation, in *Viața românească*, XI, No. 4, April 1958, quoted in *Opere. Publicistică*, Vol. IX [1958-1959], Coordinated Edition by Nicolae Mecu, edited text, notes, and comments by Alexandra Ciocârlie, Alexandru Farcaș, Nicolae Mecu, Pavel Țugui, Daciana Vlădoiu, Preface by Eugen Simion, Bucharest, Romanian Academy, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2010, pp. 107-108).

to a significant number of prisoners who had been incarcerated for what the regime considered offenses of opinion (philosophical, religious, partisan, etc.) or for being part of various movements contesting the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. G. Călinescu and the first secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (P.C.R.), Gheorghe Georghiu-Dej, passed away in the first part of 1965. The former on March 12, the latter on 19 March. These were symbolic losses. The public space had lost two of its key actors. Literary criticism, literary history, and literary theory were experiencing a crisis of authority. The encyclopaedic intellectual endowed with providential attributes had disappeared. Without delving further into the repression and privations suffered especially by Vladimir Streinu and the marginalization of Șerban Cioculescu, it should be noted that G. Călinescu was the most prominent figure of the 1956-1965 period, thanks to his weekly column in the magazine *Contemporanul* [The Contemporary] (“The Optimist’s Chronicle”). There, he managed to display anti-dogmatic attitudes, demonstrate lexical and associative imagination, show the ability to integrate works into a typological series, and illustrate richness of information. However, perhaps above all, his creative spirit had gained an intangible aura through his imposing work *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [The History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present] (1941), which was only available in its first edition, printed by one of those *nomina odiosa* for the communists: the Publishing House of the Royal Foundation for Literature and Art.

Alongside “directional criticism”⁶, which we will revisit in a different section of this article, the term “comprehensive criticism”⁷ was one of the

⁶See the proposed systematization by Andrei Terian: “As long as literature functioned as a refraction of society, all Romanian critics supported their own literary 'directions' through works of socio-cultural orientation: Maiorescu through *În contra direcției de astăzi...[în cultura română]*, Gherea through studies on 'deceptionism,' Iorga through his actual historical works, Ibrăileanu through *Spiritul critic în cultura românească*, Lovinescu through *Istoria civilizației române moderne ș.a.m.d*” (*Teorii, metode și strategii de lectură în critica și istoriografia literară românească de la T. Maiorescu la E. Lovinescu: o abordare comparativă*, Bucharest: Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2013, p. 48).

⁷ “An opus is defined by its characteristics, and a writer by the characteristics of all their works. The study of these characteristics is aesthetic criticism. For this, aesthetics is sufficient. The cause of aesthetics lies in the psychology of the writer; therefore, if we want

clichés promoted by ideology representatives. By the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (P.C.R.), in July 1965, “socialist democracy” had relaxed to allow for the emergence of a movement that reintroduced certain aspects that had been forcibly removed from the sphere of current reception. Some of the writers who were about to receive sustained editorial attention were, in fact, landmarks of the cultural landscape. While G. Călinescu, T. Vianu, and Mihai Ralea had the right to sign their own works, it was not self-evident that they enjoyed privileges. Intellectuals, despite some concessions, were viewed by the authorities as “temporary comrades” as members of a social stratum, not a class, unlike the working class or the peasantry. This was proven by the fact that G. Călinescu and Mihai Ralea were only accepted into the Romanian Workers’ Party (P.M.R.) in 1962, after the “collectivization campaign” had been declared “completed”:

“The recent surge in historiography and literary criticism in our country, aimed at filling in the gaps and continuously improving the scientific re-evaluation of our entire literary heritage, naturally leads literary historians to study perhaps the most neglected aspect of the past: the formation and development of literary ideology, the history of Romanian literary theory and criticism. It is easy to see that very little work has been done in this area of Romanian literary history and it was done unsystematically, without continuity, and without an overarching vision.”⁸

The assessment of so-called successes or achievements, entirely assumed by the state, was followed by a long series of discussions – some cordial, others vehement – about the status of literary criticism in Romanian culture. Circumstances meant that the discussions included even the most challenging issues of the interwar period, such as the inseparable connection

to delve into the cause, we must engage in psychology. In turn, the cause of the writer's psychology lies in their heredity and the environment in which they developed. So, if we want to delve into this cause as well, we will study the writer's biography and the environment in which they lived. Only now, through the study of the environment, do we reach sociology. All these activities form the comprehensive criticism of a writer” (G. Ibrăileanu, *Complectări, in Viața românească*, Year XVII, No. 4, April 1925, quoted in Works. V. Publicistică (1918-1933), Edited by Victor Durnea and Lăcrămioara Chihaia, Introduction by Eugen Simion, Romanian Academy, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2020, pp. 742-743).

⁸ George Ivașcu, *Începuturile criticii literare românești*, in: *Viața românească*, year XVIII, no. 4, April 1965, p. 58.

with the concept of creation. In this respect, E. Lovinescu and G. Călinescu's views were similar to an extent, but also contradicted each other. In the debate organized by the *Steaua* [The Star] magazine (issue no. 12/1965)⁹, Eugen Simion oscillated between these masters, agreeing with E. Lovinescu on a fundamental question:

*“However, [criticism] can also live through its own expression. Lovinescu and G. Călinescu create, in criticism, a literature of ideas. Lovinescu's Memoirs and G. Călinescu's History of Romanian Literature can give an idea of the high spirit and expression of this genre, which some are inclined to consider very facile.”*¹⁰

It is common knowledge that G. Călinescu intended to distinguish himself as much as possible from E. Lovinescu. The style of the interwar period continued during socialist realism when the former could neither defend himself nor have an intellectual defending him.¹¹ In the context of the control imposed on literary creativity, these attacks subordinated literary criticism¹². In 1965, Eugen Simion had not yet come to avoid official language, but he benefited from the change in the tone of the ruling party, which gave him the courage to make forthright statements at the end of that year:

“Marxist criticism is comprehensive criticism: it operates with multiple criteria and views the literary phenomenon from various perspectives. G. Ibrăileanu used the notion of comprehensive criticism in the sense of sociological and

⁹ *Critică și creație*, in: *Steaua*, XVI, no. 12 (191), December 1965, pp. 44-63. They participated in discussions in the order of the publication of their responses: Vladimir Streinu, Al. Dima, Paul Georgescu, Adrian Marino, D. Micu, N. Manolescu, Eugen Simion, L. Baconsky, V. Felea, and Mircea Tomuș. These were the questions posed by Aurel Rău: 1) Do you consider literary criticism a form of “creation,” and for what reasons?; 2) If you define literary criticism as “creation,” what is the specificity and “technique” of this creation in your view?; 3) What does the creative personality of the critic consist of?; 4) What are the causes and conditions that can stimulate or hinder the creative activity of our current critics?¹⁰ Eugen Simion, in *Steaua*, nr. 12, 1965, p. 55.

¹¹“Can I afford to play the frivolous game of creating a work of morality and literature based on ongoing existences? E. Lovinescu attempted this and he couldn't help but make mistakes.” (G. Călinescu, *Critică și creație*, in *Viața românească*, XI, no. 4, April 1958, apud *Opere. Publicistică*, vol. IX (1958-1959), p. 108).

¹²“In the beginning, many on saw that socialist art promotes a tendency, with a pronounced educational character, and therefore, the artistic aspect takes a back seat, with ideology remaining essential.” (Idem, *La 15 ani*, in *Studii și cercetări de istorie literară și folclor*, year VIII, no. 1-2, 1959, apud *op. cit.*, p. 987).

psychological criticism. For us, the condition of comprehensive criticism presupposes a harmonization of all criteria, from the ideological to the stylistic, under the decisive banner of aesthetics."¹³

These statements were meant, among other things, to mobilize all those interested in reviving the names of those who suffered from *damnatio memoriae* due to their lack of adherence to Russian civilization, to the dialectical and scientific materialism, and to the USSR totalitarianism. It is true that in his report, the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu, did not make any reference to literature's obligation not to deviate from the Marxist-Leninist line. Furthermore, instead of imposing a certain creative mechanism, the dictator emphasized the need to illustrate "a profound socialist humanism,"¹⁴ while also insisting on the specific individual traits of each creative personality, thus opening up a generous space for exchange of opinions: "any tendencies of exclusivism or rigidity manifested in this field must be eliminated."¹⁵ Through the voice of its representative, the regime decreed the end of state literature, suggesting that it would allow for debates to take place, while continuing its strategy of purging undesirable elements through an extensive press campaign, as had unfortunately happened to Tudor Arghezi. We can even say that Nicolae Ceaușescu's statements provide the ground for literary criticism to emerge from under the cloak of ideology imposed by the Party-State. On the other hand, the statement made by the leader of the Romanian Communist Party justifies Eugen Negrici's choice:

*"It is pointless to consider an allegedly natural literary process since it has evolved from one plenary session to another and from one political act to another (internal political acts of the PMR/PCR or external acts of the CPSU) ."*¹⁶

The possibility of maintaining a dialogue among various literary adversaries was, therefore, a struggle for anyone striving to justify a creative

¹³ Eugen Simion, in: *Steaua*, no. 12, 1965, p. 55.

¹⁴ *Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party*, București, Editura Politică, 1965, cap. VIII. 6, p. 846.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 846-847.

¹⁶ Eugen Negrici, *Iluziile literaturii române*, București, Editura Cartea Românească, 2008, pp. 129-130.

conception liberated from the constraints of the context. The incorporation of these cardinal points was still just an aspiration when George Ivașcu pointed out the discrepancies in how different editorial projects were started, in 1968. The setback was obvious and against this backdrop, we understand why E. Lovinescu could not be repositioned either ideologically or critically. The type of modernism he had theorized was considered “cosmopolitan” because, in terms of the progress of civilization and the synchronization of literary art, it could only have emerged from the influence of Western Europe:

“A beginning - still modest – represented by the way in which literary criticism and history are harnessed through the volumes in the Minerva collection by Maiorescu, Gherea, which await editions from their legitimate successors, G. Ibrăileanu, E. Lovinescu, M. Ralea, G. Călinescu.”¹⁷

Disinformation through the extrapolation of a certain detail was a daily occurrence in communist media. At that time, the focus was on the points through which E. Lovinescu accused himself. Self-revision, necessary in the work of any humanist, synonymous with the path to clarifying one’s conception, was not seen as a quality between 1965 and 1971. Furthermore, by consulting E. Lovinescu’s published work (1969-1970), we notice that reviews, views on literary criticism, and memoirs were tolerated. *Istoria civilizatiei romane moderne* [The History of Modern Romanian Civilization] (I-III, 1924-1925) was a stumbling block, and *Istoria literaturii române* [The History of Romanian Literature] (I-IV and VI, 1926-1929) contained some things that the official doctrine would have distorted. One of these is impressionism or the impressionist method applied in aesthetic criticism. When rereading a passage from *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1900-1937* [The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature 1900-1937] (1937), it strikes me to see how a self-characterization became the subject of accusation, through sheer ill will:

¹⁷ George Ivașcu, *Conștiința de sine a criticii literare*, in *Contemporanul*, no. 23 (1180), 7 June 1968, p. 1. Actually, Eugen Simion had made it his mission to bring Lovinescu’s work back into the public eye. (1969-1970): E. Lovinescu, *Scrieri. 1. Critice*, Eugen Simion, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969; *Scrieri. 2. Memorii*, Eugen Simion, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1970; *Scrieri. 3. Aqua forte; [Anexa]*, Eugen Simion, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1970.

“All these theories are set forth in extensive arguments in his volumes of generally recognized architectural order and stylistic clarity. If we add to this aptitude for lucid expression a tendency toward moral portraiture – we have said the essential about this critic, who, starting from an ostentatious and minor scepticism, has come to organize it into a system similar to dogmatism, at the base of which – more than theory – lies perhaps the aesthetic gesture and, certainly, professional honesty.”¹⁸

Dogmatism was seen as an uncompromising attitude towards any attempt to sacrifice the autonomy of aesthetics and it outraged those who, sheltered by the political regime, reversed the meaning of what E. Lovinescu considered a guarantee of freedom of opinion. The authorities had all the means necessary to construct a distorted image. Critical spirit was not limited by the truth but by the ideological norms imposed by the authorities through the mechanisms of institutional censorship. Interpreting E. Lovinescu’s condition during that ingravescence phase in literary criticism in the impressionist sense of the term, in the foreword to the reissue of the doctoral thesis he had defended under the guidance of Șerban Cioculescu, Eugen Simion states:

“Lovinescu had barely escaped the ideological quarantine in which he had been placed after 1944. «Aestheticism» was an ideological peril for the artisans of proletarian culture and socialist realism, and the autonomy of aesthetics was still considered heresy, in the mid-1960s, and was systematically resurrected and penalized.”¹⁹

Taking into account subsequent events, Eugen Simion’s response in *Steaua* [The Star] magazine (No. 12, December 1965) remained isolated, “avant-garde,” outspoken but lacking any resonance. The critic worked diligently to promote E. Lovinescu’s model, mentioning it only tangentially without going into details regarding his vision. The monograph *E. Lovinescu*,

¹⁸ E. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1900-1937*, in: *Opere. II. Istoria literaturii române contemporane [1926-1929], Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1900-1937*. Edition coordinated by Nicolae Mecu, edited text, notes, and comments by Alexandra Ciocârlie, Alexandru Farcaș, Nicolae Mecu și Daciana Vlădoiu, Introduction by Eugen Simion, București, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2015, p. 581.

¹⁹ Eugen Simion, *E. Lovinescu, scepticul mântuit*, 2nd Edition, reviewed, vol. I, București, Editura „Grai și Suflet – Cultura Națională”, 1996, p. 6.

scepticul mântuit [E. Lovinescu, the Redeemed Sceptic], puts forth a welcome proposal for any era: the promotion of dialogue. It is true that impressionism, prominent in literary reviews, gained authority as it succeeded in establishing the poetry of the 1960s generation. The concept of “aesthetic centripetism”²⁰ showed that, by drawing a circle around art, Eugen Simion was protecting a utopian fiefdom, practicing a militant criticism, engaged in parapolitics. E. Lovinescu’s prophecy about the role of critics confronted with ideological and political pressures had come true. Despite his illness, he remained at his desk, writing some of the most significant pages on the Romanian culture, reflecting on the tragedy of the Second World War and its inevitable dire consequences:

*“I will not summarize the struggles of these past forty years in a few lines. As they have not yet ended; young critics may, perhaps, face even more hardships than we did, so it would not be right to complain now. The attacks, the injustice, the cruelty to the point of annihilation is inherent to the militant mission of the critic; therefore, we must accept it with resignation, not only from legitimate adversaries but also from those with whom we fight from the same ideological positions.”*²¹

Eugen Simion’s determination to express the meaning of the phrase “comprehensive criticism” will help him present E. Lovinescu in symmetry with G. Ibrăileanu, adapting the language of “Sburătorul” literary society leader to the ideological melange of 1971:

*“As there is still a debate today about whether criticism should be partial or complete, it is worth noting Lovinescu’s consideration for whole criticism, which implies the existence of two traits and, more than that, the ability to unite them in analysis.”*²²

Eugen Simion’s ingenious arguments are obviously polemical, if we analyse them at chronological extremities. If cohabitation with communist

²⁰ *Idem*, *Scepticul mântuit*, București, Editura Cartea Românească, 1971, p. 218. See also E. Lovinescu *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1900-1937*, in *Opere. II. Istoria literaturii române contemporane [1926-1929]*, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1900-1937*, 2015: I once referred to the characteristic feature of this type of criticism as impressionism; today, I would call it aesthetic centripetism, which means moving directly toward the center of the work of art, toward the creative idea, toward the blueprint of the ancient geometer.”

²¹ E. Lovinescu, *Carierea mea de critic*, in *op. cit.*, pp. 512-513.

²² Eugen Simion, *Scepticul mântuit*, 1971, p. 197. E. Lovinescu talks about whole criticism in: *Mutația valorilor estetice* (1929), cap. VI, last paragraph; in: E. Lovinescu, *Opere. II.*, 2015, p. 364.

postulates had endured, then any book review would have included at least a small reverence to the Marxist-Leninist ideology. A talentless poet would have become a journalist rather than a professional commentator of literary texts, had he embraced without reservations G. Călinescu's thesis from *Tehnica criticei și a istoriei literare* [The Technique of Criticism and Literary History]" (see above, footnote 2):

"Thus, criticism is a comprehensive form of creation: it implies vocation, like any other art, and the most blatant lie is that it can be served by those who fail in other art genres. I do not believe, frankly speaking, in the possibility²³ of a failed writer becoming a critic."

In a nutshell, by placing himself in the wake of E. Lovinescu, Eugen Simion had the necessary clarity to protect literary criticism against accusations of both ideological and literary parasitism. However, remaining in the aesthetic estuary, literary criticism had reached a predicament. The pathway to gaining autonomy passed through the terminological mill. Book review was in need of allies, even if only temporary, in order to justify its role in a pluralistic system protected by the authorities. A turning point was the publication of Adrian Marino's book *Introducere în critica literară* [Introduction to Literary Criticism] in 1968, an event which Eugen Simion did not let go unnoticed:

"I admit, Introduction to Literary Criticism was satisfying, even if my preferences may differ. I may have different views on structuralism in literary criticism, I can bring (and have brought) other arguments in favour of synthetic, complete, total criticism. No matter how different the understanding of a concept may be, I cannot help but notice the critic's spiritual mobility, his creative intelligence, his great and impressive work ethic."²⁴

The 1960s generation felt compelled to occupy the vacancies as quickly as possible. There are several clarifications arising from the combination of

²³ Idem, in: *Steaua*, no. 12, 1965, p. 54. See E. Lovinescu's confession in *Cariera mea de critic* note 1.

²⁴ *Critica sintetică, totală, completă*, in *România literară*, no. 21, 21 May 1969, „Fragmente critice”, p. 9.

biological and political causes. This unrest meant the torch was being passed. G. Călinescu's words carried the weight of an epochal mission:

*“Each generation creates its own critics, who, even when they make mistakes, are closer to the heartbeat of their contemporaries, just as they hear more clearly the pulsations of what has remained alive from the past. If I were a critic, I would latch onto them to avoid breaking away from the present, flying too high.”*²⁵

Although direct contact with the models was lost, the intention to promote an organic vision was preserved. We can identify arguments that were fully adopted by the emerging generation: Eugen Simion, Matei Călinescu, G. Dimisianu, Vladimir Streinu, Lucian Raicu, and Nicolae Manolescu. G. Călinescu traced three essential directions: he placed literary criticism in the category of spiritual creations, freeing it from the sterile subordination to social sciences and from the determinism of *class struggle*; he relieved contemporary literature commentators from the danger of ideological attacks; instead of positioning himself as the authority, he empowered emerging critics, asking them to analyse both debut authors as well as writers censored to varying degrees, gathered under the euphemistic label of “cultural heritage”:

“In what the literary phenomenon is concerned, literary criticism is generally at its observation post. Control has not passed into the hands of young critics, with only few exceptions. They continue stylistically in the footsteps of Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, M. Ralea, T. Vianu, with different talent and possibilities. Despite being in its early stages their activity has already made its mark both through their exegesis of classical texts as well as their determination to promote a young generation of poets and prose writers, who are now universally recognized. I do not foresee future criticism abandoning the fight against literary mediocrity, in more explicit and direct forms than before, of fight against the confusion of values. In my opinion, the consistent demystification action that criticism must carry out will increase the authority of those who, having the necessary vocation and training, are

²⁵ G. Călinescu, *Critică și creație*, in: *Viața românească*, XI, no. 4, April 1958, apud *Opere. Publicistică*, vol. IX (1958-1959), Edition coordinated by Nicolae Mecu, edited text, notes, and comments by Alexandra Ciocârlie, Alexandru Farcaș, Nicolae Mecu, Pavel Țugui, Daciana Vlădoiu, Prefață de Eugen Simion, București, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2010, p. 108.

able not only to select and promote values but also to create favourable conditions for the emergence of great literary works.”²⁶

It is worth noting three characteristics from the paragraph quoted above. In 1965, critics were aware of their actions. So, we must emphasize the public nature of literary criticism, a profession practiced in the written press, namely at the epicentre of the media. This probably led to the conclusion that visibility brings credibility. Professional authority was influenced by magazines being published at regular intervals and some authors signing a plethora of articles. Although they were philologists in the broad sense of the term, literary critics were rather associated with journalists or cultural journalists. Clearly, this semantic overlap is somewhat forced:

“In my generation, criticism still had a militant character, inherited from the previous generation and the epic duel between T. Maiorescu and C. Dobrogeanu Gherea; critics (N. Iorga, M. Dragomirescu, G. Ibrăileanu, H. Sanielevici, and E. Lovinescu) fought for certain principles and directives; they established ‘schools’ and magazines. For three decades they clashed ideologically and, as it usually happens, personally, rallying writers around them, defending them but also exposing them to various unjust allegations. Today’s criticism has moved beyond the militant phase; despite the national and social turmoil of the past years, the new generation of critics (T. Vianu, Perpessicius, Șerban Cioculescu, G. Călinescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Vladimir Streinu, M. Sebastian, etc.) has remained in the realm of pure aesthetics; there are no longer schools, but one school; there are no more magazines, no more opposing ideological views.”²⁷

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

²⁷ Ion Velicu, *Convorbire cu d. E. Lovinescu. Recolta literară de toamnă*, in *Curentul. Magazin literar*, seria a II-a, anul II, nr. 79, 6 octombrie 1940, p. 9. Let's add here the systematization proposed by Andrei Terian: “As long as literature functioned as a reflection of society, all Romanian critics supported their own literary 'directions' with the help of socio-cultural works: Maiorescu through *În contra direcției de astăzi... [în cultura română]*, Gherea through studies on 'deceptionism', Iorga through his genuinely historical works.” Ibrăileanu through *Spiritul critic în cultura românească*, Lovinescu through *Istoria civilizației române moderne ș.a.m.d*” (*Teorii, metode și strategii de lectură în critica și istoriografia literară românească de la T. Maiorescu la E. Lovinescu: o abordare comparativă*, București: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2013, p. 48).

The inconsistent reception of *E. Lovinescu, scepticul mântuit* [E. Lovinescu, *The Redeemed Sceptic*] (1971) proved even more delicate than the extra-aesthetic intrusions in literary discussions. For example, Nicolae Manolescu, the most important literary critic of the time, did not comment on the book. We might explain the rather reserved tone of the discussion by the fact that Eugen Simion had left Romania in 1970 and moved to the Sorbonne (Paris IV) as a professor or Romanian. It would have been a terrible political mistake, had he remained abroad. He would have been praised nationally but, after that, the censorship would have eliminated his works from public libraries and would have forbidden any mentioning of his name and his professional activity. Despite this atmosphere which we characterize as “resistance through culture”, as other commentators do, there was a sense of reticence toward the substantial effort to recover an author who had not been republished for over 25 years given that the last book signed by E. Lovinescu was the second volume of *T. Maiorescu și contemporanii lui* [T. Maiorescu and His Contemporaries] (posthumously published thanks to Pompiliu Constantinescu, Bucharest, Casa Școalelor, 1944.). Literary critics, regardless of the inevitable uncertainties and hesitations regarding judgments of value, respected national interest, their work being akin, *mutatis mutandis*, to that of Nicolae Bălcescu and Mihail Kogălniceanu to print medieval chronicles. Even though less than three decades had passed since E. Lovinescu’s was neglected, Stalinism had created some harmful reflexes, such as the reticence towards innovation or journalistic superficiality, avoidance of historiographical contextualization (due to lingering Marxist-Leninist sociologism), or avoidance of risky topics. *E. Lovinescu, The Redeemed Sceptic* was of significant importance, tipping the balance in favour of a denser rehabilitation of Romanian literature between the Two World Wars.

“The final reviewed version of Opera lui Mihai Eminescu [The Complete Works of Mihai Eminescu] by G. Călinescu (the best Romanian monograph!) and E. Lovinescu, The Redeemed Sceptic by Eugen Simion were received in a cold, very distant, and sometimes downright presumptuous manner (with two notable exceptions: Valeriu Cristea and G. Dimisianu) which seems revealing of what could be called the ‘childhood disease of feuilleton criticism’: an excess of ‘essayism,’ ‘new criticism,’ ‘open readings,’ and ‘validities,’ and, above all, a blatant crass lack

of intuition of immediate realities, of the real, not faked, hyper-synchronized, needs of current literary criticism and history. [...] What is the real state of Lovinescian studies? Firstly, there was an (embarrassing) phase of total denial, followed by one of ambiguous 'reconsideration,' not without equivocations and gaps (Ileana Vrancea), and then the first sketch of true aesthetic re-evaluation (I. Negoïtescu). What was still missing was an in-depth, methodical, exhaustively oriented exploration of the complete works of E. Lovinescu. This is what Eugen Simion does (and succeeds in). Someone had to come to describe and organize, to carefully and meticulously explore and catalogue a very extensive and controversial body of work and critical activity. This led to Simion's insistent, applied, and meticulous style which irritated some of the reviewers, who can only tolerate 'essays' and 'open readings' nowadays. Eugen Simion analysed a vast amount of work and has given us the most complete and solid study about Lovinescu to date, a true index of issues and themes. This is no small feat. His monograph paves the way for future synthesis, which, liberated from the weight of basic documentary investigation, will soar."²⁸

Adrian Marino saw *E. Lovinescu, sceptical mântuit* [*E. Lovinescu, The Redeemed Sceptic*] as a rite of passage for a disoriented culture, which lacked a conclusive map, despite its search for stable reference points. We could say that the reviewers of this book were surprised by the scope of the subject of study, lacking Eugen Simion's comprehensive perspective. Through the laborious dimensions of this study, the author implicitly illustrated the difference between a conscientious reading consistent with the axiom of the autonomy of aesthetic value and a reading inclined towards system-building. Adrian Marino argued that withdrawing into the "literary review" formula, devoid of the prestige of being placed within an evolutionary sketch, disadvantaged projects with broader scope. Tacitly, this observation was addressed to Eugen Simion himself, who practiced this concise genre, confined to a few columns or even half a page in a newspaper. At the same time, these accusations could potentially undermine one of the strong arguments for the posthumous but essential role played by E. Lovinescu in refreshing the attitude towards literary art and the conscience of criticism. E. Lovinescu had elevated book reviewing to the level of a

²⁸ Adrian Marino, *Etape necesare*, in: *România literară*, nr. 26, 24 iunie 1971, p. 18.

discipline that ordered values. During the second world war, his disciples, those whom he grouped into the “third post-Maiorescu generation,” dedicating an entire chapter to them in *T. Maiorescu și posteritatea lui critică* [T. Maiorescu and His Critical Posterity]²⁹ had turned “criticism into a profession of public utility.”³⁰ But it was precisely this image with a strong media impact that threatened the autonomy of this activity, transposed into a method of educating the public. This is where Eugen Simion perfectly captures the essence of his great model, implicitly highlighting the fact that his actions cannot be repeated in the socialist present:

*“In essence, the influencer of modernism is a critic who judges literary work first as ideology and then as aesthetic value. He is the last great directional critic in the Maiorescu tradition.”*³¹

The emphasis in the text belongs to the author. By invoking Maiorescu, Eugen Simion was probably also referring to E. Lovinescu’s conclusion in his *T. Maiorescu* monograph (2 volumes, 1940), in which he pointed out the idea that the figure of the “mentor” characterised cultures in their infancy. This situation had become anachronistic. Instead, the need initiated by T. Maiorescu to separate literature from false patriotism remained relevant. The initiative to recover the “cultural heritage” had started from an ideological impulse, masked by a pseudo-spirit of respect for national interest. The type of literary criticism conducted by Eugen Simion between 1965 and 1971 detached itself from any political “directive,” proved to be militant in the spirit of respect for literary truth, and aimed to recover the great interwar tradition.

²⁹ In alphabetical order as done by E. Lovinescu: G. Călinescu, Șerban Cioculescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Perpessicius, Vladimir Streinu, T. Vianu” (*T. Maiorescu și posteritatea lui critică* [1943], in: E. Lovinescu, *Ciclul junimist. II.*, p. 931).

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 933-934.

³¹ Eugen Simion, *Semicentenarul „Sburătorului”*, in: *România literară*, no. 17, 24 aprilie 1969, p. 5. Participants: Șerban Cioculescu, Vladimir Streinu, Edgar Papu, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu and I. Negoïtescu.

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