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THE IDEA OF BIOGRAPHY IN G. CĂLINESCU' S WORK

It is not at all surprising that Călinescu's first book was actually a biography. Pre-eminently classical, the biographic genre availed itself of a millennial tradition due to its ethical and pedagogical stake which, according to the changing spirit of ages, practically established a set of behaviour specimens such as the "Hero" and the Saint (during the Antiquity and Middle Ages), followed by the epitome of the "Artist" in the aftermath of the Renaissance, at once with the resurrection of old-school humanist scholarship. Now, to speak the truth, the Romanian critic had taken in the Renaissance art and literature pretty early, from his high-school age, when he had started paying visits to the Classics in an obstinate manner and, forever in between extreme patience and writing urge, got through his own apprenticeship. Thus, it is likely that his option to come out with a biography (understood as an exemplary narration) should have been determined by the precocious fascination toward Humanism and, implicitly, toward the ideal of *uomo universale*; otherwise, in the trail of the famous catchword attributed to legendary Pico, Călinescu stated several times his bold intention to know everything and, perhaps, a bit more. And, as he had already decided to introduce himself with a biography, it goes without saying that, except for Eminescu's figure, none of the Romanian writers could have ever hoped to figure in the first rank of characters chosen for such a courageous enterprise.

In spite of its poor and rather reserved reception, the first biography that Călinescu published, *Viața lui Mihai Eminescu (Life of Mihai Eminescu, 1932)*, was nonetheless an exceptional moment in Romanian culture because it really set a landmark within the local tradition of the biographical genre, which Călinescu reconfigured from scratch. As a matter of fact, as Adrian Marino suggests in his *Dicționarul de idei literare (Dictionary of Literary Ideas, 1973)*, only with Călinescu alone "the biographical issue starts being diligently debated within the Romanian literature"¹. However implicit, the critic's particular way to cast aside a whole historiographic heritage drives him to a series of interesting remarks, though scattered in the miscellaneous articles he published over the years, themselves lacking a real "theoretical core". These observations would be emphasized and

¹ Adrian Marino, "Biografia" ["Biography"], in *Dicționar de idei literare I [Dictionary of Literary Ideas I]*, București, Eminescu, 1973, p. 255: "problema biografiei începe să se pună cu seriozitate în literatura română".

channelled into a text coming in the rear of his career – *Despre biografie (On Biography)*, 1958), a sort of synthesis to which I shall refer largely below.

Altogether, from everything that Călinescu has ever delivered on the topic, it appears that the first and foremost condition for turning a good biographer is to score even with the subject on focus. Therefore, while writing about Eminescu's life, the young critic claimed a similar status for himself, thence, the posture of a genial creator and of an intellectual endowed with a quenchless thirst for everything that is presumed as "knowledge". His pretension was fully legitimate since he had already argued in an early article that, between criticism and creation, "there is no difference of essence, but only one of process"². Over a decade, in his well-known article called "Tehnica criticii și a istoriei literare" ("The Technic of Criticism and Literary History"), which is also included in the volume *Principii de estetică (Principles of Aesthetics)*, 1939), the author of *Life of Eminescu* would define still clearer the nature of the relationship between (literary) criticism and creation.

Even if we are speaking now about things commonly referred to, perhaps it is not utterly useless to repeat that, considering his genuine intention to differentiate himself from other biographers, Călinescu used to state his creative superiority rather unambiguously, this quality being averred by the ability to imagine plots, to breathe life into documents, and to weave them into a convincing narrative or scenario. Similarly, after he had published the "lives" of Eminescu and Creangă, the same text (*The Technic...*) enlarges upon the specific means in which literature relates to history and life. Călinescu used to sweep over the matter we are here concerned with, by maintaining that "a good biography, i.e. substantially scientific, is that which treats all moments as a hero's coherent moments"³. As well, he added that "not the facts that ground a study form the essence of the study, but its point

² G. Călinescu, "Simțul critic" ["The Critical Sense", 1927], in G. Călinescu, *Publicistică I, 1920-1932 [Collected Articles I]*. Edited by Nicolae Mecu, București, Academia Română – "Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă", 2006, pp. 105-109. Subsequently, Călinescu goes on, the critical sense, which is not the same with intuition, is nothing less than "a failed creative act", more precisely, "the form of our own creative faculty, from whose angle we receive and valorise only that which presents to us as observing the creation norms of our own spirit [the critic's emphasis]" ("forma propriei noastre facultăți creatoare, sub unghiul căreia primim și valorificăm numai ceea ce ni se prezintă ca urmând normele de creație ale spiritului nostrum [s. a.]"). In a nutshell, "to understand is to create again, that is, to re-produce the initial moment of the work of art" ("a înțelege înseamnă a crea din nou, a reproduce în tine momentul inițial al operei", Ibidem, p. 107). Refer also to "Critică și creație" ["Criticism and Creation", 1927], in G. Călinescu, *Collected Articles I*, pp. 89-93.

³ G. Călinescu, "Tehnica criticii și a istoriei literare" ["The Technic of Criticism and Literary History"], in *Pagini de estetică [Pages of Aesthetics]*. Edited by Doina Rodina Hanu, București, Albatros, 1990, p. 78: "o biografie este bună, substanțial științifică, atunci când toate momentele ei apar ca momente coerente de manifestare a unui erou".

of view, its cohesion and formal principle, its structure”⁴. Two are the results that follow from the critic’s remarks: 1. the so-called “scientific” dimension of biography must not be confused with pure archivist work, with academic composure and gestures (namely, footnotes, references, and so forth) because the biographer’s “knowledge” and “scientific” skills reveal themselves entirely in his ability to create people as alive as those in epical texts and novels; 2. the subject/character of the biographical endeavour must be, beyond the shadow of a doubt, a “hero”, an exceptional individual, and not just a guy from the ordinary rank.

Therefore, we can notice that Călinescu’s idea of biography cuts the bonds with either of the two approaches: on the one hand, with the presumed “scientific” or scholarly works written by all sort of document-servants, who could not frame a brand new point of view (that is, proposing an original structure), and, on the other, with the embellishing attempts of those scribblers who come with romanced lives that, following the base spirit of melodrama, are prone to falsify the basic document by imagining all sort of unattested situations and dialogues. It comes all naturally that, willing to give sanctions to the former as well as to the latter, Călinescu chooses, completely free from any obligation, not to mention his references – in order to provide an easier reading, he argues – and professes that his own biographic accounts do not betray, by any means, the spirit of the documents he had consulted. Coming close to the end of his monographic study on Creangă, we could fall back on a fragment that surely defends better our issue under debate: “As is Eminescu’s case, I have tried to make Creangă’s portrait by interpreting the documents. I have not made outstanding discoveries, except for some (because, from now on, one can only come with a greater precision of dates), but the real connoisseur of the matter will discern, we trust, between our own way to read and the others’... When striving to create in a literary manner, except for the means provided by composition, removal of prolix references, and avoidance of anachronistic narrative sequences, we cannot stand on anything. The dialogues are actually quotations, the descriptions ground on strict observation and reliable sources. Yet, in order to serve Creangă’s memory, we endeavoured to make this book as pleasant as possible for the reader, and dismissed the critical paraphernalia that certainly puts on airs of erudition but, in concerns of literary history, is pure mystification”⁵.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83: “nu faptele care stau la baza unui studiu formează studiul, ci punctul de vedere, principiul formal coagulator, structura”.

⁵ G. Călinescu, *Ion Creangă. Viața și opera [Ion Creangă. Life and Work]*, București, Minerva, 1978, pp. 209-210: “Ca și în cazul lui Eminescu, am încercat a face portretul lui Creangă interpretând documentele. N-am făcut descoperiri noi, afară de puține (de acum încolo nici nu se mai pot afla decât doar precizuni de date), dar pricepătorul în materie își va da seama, credem, de felul nostru de a citi și de al altora. (...) În sforțarea de a crea literar, nu ne folosim decât de mijloacele pe care le oferă compoziția, înlăturând de pildă din text discuția izvoarelor, neintroducând în narațiune elemente

It is obvious that, for Călinescu, the biography needed to import the catchy expression of critical literature, hence the “simple” form of a portrait upon which, by applying himself to documents, the critic amplifies and expands his ideas. In his welding synthesis on Călinescu’s critical system, Andrei Terian enhances the same topics and notices that, leaving aside the fictionality criterion, the Romanian critic discriminates between biography and novel by taking into account chiefly the main character’s nature⁶. Thus, whereas the biography is a critical-narrative species, centred on a single exceptional hero (that is, “the genius”), the novel only hints at the generic everyman, at the canonical humanity that should be illustrated typologically. Operating with these precise meanings and definitions, our champion of creative criticism makes sure to allow low scores for E. Lovinescu’s novels inspired by Eminescu’s life, and his keen verdicts count on Thibaudet’s principles; it is disputable that a pedestrian author could write a genius’ novel unless he vitiates the historical reality – and this has been always sacrificed, though boasted of, in the romanced biographies of Lovinescu’s sort – to the point that “truth is in conflict with the necessity of fiction”⁷. Diverging from the “substantially scientific” biography, the *romanced biography* appears thus a hybrid genre, a “writing – says further the Romanian critic – in which, within the frame of chronological landmarks that are relatively precise, one can resort to invented situations and dialogues”⁸. It is for this reason that E. Lovinescu, Călinescu believes, would have made a slip when inventing a character and a set of situations

anacronice. Dialogurile sunt citațiuni, descripțiile sunt bizuite pe observație și izvoare. Spre a folosi amintirii lui Creangă, făcând cartea atrăgătoare pentru cititor, am înlăturat așa-zisul aparat critic, care dă un aer de mare erudiție, dar care în materie de istorie literară e o mistificație”.

⁶ Andrei Terian, *G. Călinescu. A cincea esență* [*G. Călinescu. The Fifth Essence*], București, Cartea Românească, 2009, p. 208.

⁷ G. Călinescu, “C. Ardeleanu, ‘Domnul Tudor’” [“C. Ardeleanu, Mr. Tudor”, 1935], in G. Călinescu, *Publicistică II, 1933-1935* [*Collected Articles II*]. Edited by Nicolae Mecu, București, Academia Română – Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2006, pp. 836-841: “adevărul e în conflict cu necesitatea ficțiunii”. Then, the critic emphasises upon this idea as follows: “Romanced life is an absolutely fake genre, in which no one either has been ever able or will ever be to carry out anything of a certain literary merit, just because the truth is always in conflict with the reality of fiction. But the historical novel is a distinct matter” (“Viața romanțată este însă un gen cu desăvârșire fals, în care nimeni n-a izbutit și nici nu va izbuti să facă ceva cu merit literar, deoarece adevărul e în permanent conflict cu realitatea ficțiunii. Cu totul altceva este romanul istoric”, p.837). But, as in many other instances, Călinescu’s opinions on “romances” have not been always so negative. For example, we can refer back to his article entitled “Vieți romanțate” [“Romanced Lives”], in G. Călinescu, *Collected Articles II*, pp. 636-637), where the Romanian critic praises Al. Rosetti’s coordination of the new series of Royal Foundation Publishing House and qualifies it as an admirable cultural act, a tribute to all those “interesting personalities from the Romanian past, that deserve to be restored” (“personalități interesante din trecutul românesc, care trebuiesc reactualizate”).

⁸ G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*The History of Romanian Literature from Origins to the Present*], București, Fundațiile Regale, 1941, p. 688: “o scriere în care pe un cadru cronologic relativ exact se inventează situații și dialoguri”.

that, honestly, are a bit “more Eminescu-like” than the poet’s reality should have been. But is this not the manner in which, up to a point, Călinescu himself proceeds? Of course it is!

For the moment, let us bear in mind that, by placing the “romanced biography” at the antipodes of “biographical romance” (that is always falsifying the truth), the critic defines the biographical account as “Realist work”, that is – we are already clued in – a work of “concrete generalisation”, and not one of “Naturalist jotting”. Naturalism represents, in Călinescu’s original language, the mimetic compliance with reality; on the contrary, Realism is something about transfigured hypostases of reality, an artistic expression customized in order to catch a glimpse of “the world as idea”⁹. Needless to replay it, Călinescu thought that a writer’s biography does not reflect ordinary life (as it might be recorded through the empirical vision of the Naturalist novel, for instance), but a life which grows into a spiritual transfiguration or, as he himself phrases, a life “in the greatest sense of the word, the succession of the soul’s superior moments, which *are meant to explain the artistic work* [emphasis added], the ideological synthesis of lived days, as projected on the canvass of the artist’s times”¹⁰. Briefly, for Călinescu, the perfect biography is, before anything else, a “work of archaeology” collated with fiction, hence, a “work that is both mythological and dialectical”¹¹. Just because he had challenged the letter of documents and dared to fancy a myth, the critic’s take of Eminescu’s life was found with exactly the same fault, namely, that Călinescu himself actually gave a “romanced” version of the poet’s existence. On the same grounds, Adrian Marino (Călinescu’s apprentice, among other things) defies the theoretical legitimacy of the genre labelled as “romanced biography”¹², bringing forward as counter-examples Maurois’s rigorously documented “lives”, which were unfairly included in this mixed-up category.

⁹ In the article entitled “Poezia realelor” [“The Poetry of Realia”], Călinescu discriminates between two types of writers; the first is formed by the “Realists”, the second, by “Idealists”, of whom he speaks, in his utterly articulate manner, by deliberately baffling the commonsensical understanding of things: “The Realist writer is in fact a Fatalist, as he believes in the clockwork structure of the world; the Idealist is, contrariwise, a guy who delivers himself to accidents, who acknowledges determinism within the contingency” (“Realistul e un fatalist, crezând în exactitatea de ceasornic a lumii, idealistul e un accidentalist, recunoscând determinismul prin contingență”, refer to G. Călinescu, *Universul poeziei [The Universe of Poetry]*. Edited by Al. Piru, București, Minerva, 1971, p. 278. Refer also to “Sensul clasicismului” [“The Meaning of Classicism”], in G. Călinescu, *Publicistică V, 1940-1946 [Collected Articles V]*. Edited by Nicolae Mecu, București, Academia Română – “Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă”, 2008, p. 689.

¹⁰ G. Călinescu, “Despre biografie” [“On biography”], *Contemporanul*, an XIII, 1958, nr. 4 (590), 7 februarie: “în sensul cel mai înalt al cuvântului, *succesiunea de momente superioare sufletești explicând opera* (s.n.), sinteza ideologică a zilelor trăite, proiectată pe tabloul epocii”.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20: “operă de arheologie”; “o lucrare mitologică și dialectică totodată”.

¹² Adrian Marino, “Biography”, p. 276.

Beyond theory, we can notice that the first biography the Romanian critic produced closes with a chapter entitled *The Mask of Eminescu*, where the portraiture lines dispersed all over the book aggregate into one single face. Maybe it is worth discussing about the suggestion contained in the critic's choice of title: the artist's personality, unlike that of the ordinary people, gets, at the end of the day, something from the impersonal, sketchy, and almost anonymous profile of the "mask". Nevertheless, once accepted the transfer to and fro, Eminescu's work undergoes the ascendancy of the impersonalisation process, being engrafted, as any other classical masterpiece, with a "tendency toward the abolishment of genial features, towards the reduction of biographical reliability and of inner diary notations"¹³. This is the reason why, while undertaking the analysis of Eminescu's work, Călinescu hints at "the lack of a high personality-awareness", a default which can be revealed chiefly in his love poems. It is interesting that, by defining the Romantic poet's personality on grounds of erotic vision (here we have to concede Freud's influence on Călinescu, as well as on the transparencies of Lovinescu's prose writing), the critic considers that Eminescu's visions come down, eventually, to sheer instinct, i.e. to a "maximum remoteness from the geometry of personality"¹⁴. Conclusively, the interpreter appreciates in the poet's erotic lines "the hypothesis of a perceptible nothingness", which can "get down to the folkloric mode of expression", and actually become "anonymous" by touching that "sublime impersonality that only the folk people can have"¹⁵. In all likelihood, Creangă is interpreted as a specimen of the (Romanian) people's personality, which makes the "biographical" details – particularly, the precise documents – almost pointless.

With regard to Călinescu's theoretical presumptions, we have already indicated his definition of the biographical genre under the angle of Realist fiction (again, all rolls back to a question of mythical and symbolical Realism, viewed in opposition to Naturalism), but also the main feature of biography as a true "ideological synthesis", as a particular and individualised form of historiographic account – wherefore, the writer's life explains and has to be "projected" on the canvass of his times – which is meant to explain the artistic product. But literary history, Călinescu says further, is a history of values, which means that the historiographic inquiry (implicitly, biographic research) compels for innate critical abilities. For this, the biographer must divert his attention toward exceptional

¹³ G. Călinescu, "The Meaning of Classicism", p. 694: "o tendință de abolire a geniului, de reducere a biograficului, a jurnalului interior".

¹⁴ G. Călinescu, *Opera lui Mihai Eminescu [The Work of Mihai Eminescu]*, III, București, Minerva, 1985, p.232: "lipsa unei conștiințe tari a personalității"; "o depărtare maximă de geometria personalității".

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, IV, București, Minerva, 1985, p. 155: "ipoteza unui nimic reprezentabil"; "coborâtă la modul folcloric"; „sublim impersonalism poporan”.

writers, whose works, more than those produced by mediocre authors, are apt to convey with greater authenticity the times they lived in. In *The Technic...*, Călinescu rejects bluntly the idea that second-shelf writings can bear a greater importance from a documentary point of view: “It is a false standpoint, which derives from a wrong presupposition on the relationship between life and art”¹⁶. Thus, the more a work of art is relevant from an aesthetical perspective, the higher its documentary value, because the most important document is represented, Călinescu believes, by the artist’s work alone. The mistake that he is particularly pointing at refers to the raw understanding of art as a mimetic reflection of reality; art is nonetheless a process of transfiguration (such being the case of biography) which chases after “the cerebral life of the artist”, and whose chapters represent “either implicitly or explicitly a chronology of the artistic work”¹⁷.

All in all, if we stick to his theoretical assumptions, Călinescu discredits anecdotes and gossip, as well as, taken on the whole, confession literature and the things of the heart. In his opinion, neither the letter nor the testimonies provided by contemporaries are “reliable documents”; the same goes with the ones that “speak about the man’s mechanical life, about his stereotyped existence, and about tangent facts”¹⁸. Being a work of “ideological synthesis”, it is also true that biography “explains the masterpiece”, but not in a determinist and causal manner as we might expect; in defiance of the common opinion, “barely can we demonstrate, through the means of biography, the value of an artistic work whereas, if we go the other way round, we can often clarify, through the means of the artistic work, a series of biographic points”¹⁹. Reflecting on these particular issues as well as on a set of examples extracted from the critic’s work, Andrei Terian draws the attention to Călinescu’s overall Organicism and Vitalism, inspired, in their turn, by Dilthey and Gundolf; assuming this point of view, life and work are nothing but “derivatives” of a primary experience, such being the case of Goethe’s demonism. Matter of factually, even though from a certain viewpoint it looks like Călinescu metabolized Hippolyte Taine’s determinist and historicist method, truth is that the author of *The History of Romanian Literature...* (he himself, a declared Croce fan) suspends causality in order to bring out a bunch of “biographies without biographical approach”, actually, a set of mono-graphs²⁰.

¹⁶ G. Călinescu, “The Technic”, p. 79: “Este o pozițiune falsă, ieșită și dintr-o greșită opiniune despre raportul dintre viață și artă”.

¹⁷ G. Călinescu, “On Biography”, p. 18: “viața cerebrală a artistului”; „implicit sau explicit o cronologie a operei”.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 20: “nu e un document credibil”; “care vorbesc despre viața mecanică a omului, despre existența lui stereotipă și despre fapte tangențiale”.

¹⁹ G. Călinescu, “The Technic”, p. 89: “prin biografie nu putem demonstra valoarea unei opere, dar prin operă putem adesea clarifica unele puncte de biografie”.

²⁰ Andrei Terian, *G. Călinescu*, pp. 196-197.

The most illustrative example is to be found in the study on Creangă's literature (1938) that we have already referred to. Călinescu himself tries to clear things up in the closing chapter: "I have chosen to unify in a holistic portrait both the judgements on his work and the biographical narration, because, for as Creangă is concerned, the work is closely tied up to his existence"²¹.

Parting with the perspective alleged by the author of *The Life of Eminescu* – who did not understand biography outside its creative and Romanesque features, Adrian Marino identified instead three major types of biography: the first is built on documents and historical information, therefore insists on a rigid inventory of external facts; the second is one centred on portrayal as main technique, hence it focuses on the individual's inner, sometimes hidden, life; the third enhances the spiritual side, because it follows both the genesis of art and the personality of the artist. Even if great references such as Goethe, Dilthey and Gundolf are called as witnesses to his case, Marino considers that Călinescu's specimen of biographical account borrows too much from novel techniques (it is chiefly indebted to anecdote) and from an obsolete psychological thinking, prone to reduce personality to unity. Anyway, "a biography that is truly modern" must take into consideration the discontinuity of the Self, hence, its tedious and multi-layered structure, which might leave the impression of endless mutations and inconsequence²². Bidding farewell to his ex-master, Marino believes that the biographer should re-create life thorough the lens of the modern narrative and not by mimicking the 19th century Realist novel, as Călinescu would argue. More to the spirit of modernity, then, the biographies published by Cioculescu – *Viața lui I.L. Caragiale (The Life of I.L. Caragiale)* and Adrian Marino himself – *Viața lui Alexandru Macedonski (The Life of Alexandru Macedonski)* spring, in the first place, from an overt affinity between the biographer and his character; also, it is the affinity that secures the reader's proper understanding. But, according to Dilthey, understanding represents the royal way of knowledge, which leads to the presumption that biography is not only the most popular critical genre, but also the most "philosophical" among all forms of historiographic research. Henceforth, says the author of Macedonski's biography, "not just anyone can write anyone's life": few are the biographies that really triumphed (as Călinescu's own did), and they succeeded only because the encounter of two spirits akin had caused them to exist²³.

²¹ G. Călinescu, *Ion Creangă...*, p. 290: "Judecățile asupra operei le-am unit cu narațiunea biografică într-un portret totalitar, deoarece opera se află, întrucât îl privește pe Creangă, strâns legată de existența lui".

²² *Ibidem*, p. 268: "inevitabil stufoasă, condusă pe mai multe planuri, plină de inconsecvențe și mutații, dosar cu numeroase compartimente, care tind să rupă unitatea construcției".

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 274: "nu oricine poate scrie despre viața oricui".

As we have said before, Călinescu's monographs spread a pregnant impression of novel-like narratives. The analysis of the artistic work is permanently faced with the reality of worldly life, the latter being carved, in turn, into a fresco as large as the prose writer's imagination and humour. Nevertheless, the Romanian critic used to banish out the modern "heresies" (like segregating literature from life, for instance) and insisted on the point that only the "the writer's human personality" is really "essential": "Without any human perspectives, the artist's monograph is like a starfish into a fishbowl or like the bird of Paradise into a cage"²⁴. Consequently, his appeal to the monographic approach must account for Călinescu's well-known attempt to conciliate literary criticism and literature within the integrative frame of a humanist discourse; unless it slides into literature's robe, literary criticism cannot acquire authentic "human" perspectives.

However, if the Romanian critic really produced – on the level of his statements, at least – a cluster of "biographies without biographical approach", one can discover that, in real terms, the causal explanation does not lack from the range of Călinescu's arguments; take for instance his bold way of adding aesthetic value to a score of minor writers on reason that their lives could stir a literary interest and maintain it just for themselves.

Now, it is time for a short recap. Even though he considers the artistic work as the most important document that could bring evidence on a writer's way of living (which is, nevertheless, against Adrian Marino's own perspective²⁵), Călinescu does not hesitate to assume a dogmatic standpoint and judge the artist's product on its most biographical lot, that is, by making high use of elements from psychology and physiognomy²⁶, by calling dates of the social and historical environment and, sometimes when these would not do, by invoking astrology and zodiac signs (see, for example, Creangă's personality as an expression of his "Pisces" sign)²⁷.

Likewise, the diffuse intimations – as shown by Eugen Simion's version of Călinescu from *Fals jurnal (False Diary)* can assemble, in spite of the critic's discretion, into a species of diary. Well, it is also true that our greatest literary historian used to say the "intimate" diary is nothing else but childish nonsense or, anyway, the most "stupid thing" to do since, but for few exceptions, it does not

²⁴ G. Călinescu, "Între portret și anecdotă" ["Between portrait and anecdote"], in G. Călinescu, *Collected Articles I*, p. 531: "Monografia artistului fără perspective omenești este ca o stea de mare în borcan sau ca pasărea paradisului în colivie".

²⁵ Adrian Marino, "Biography", p. 274: "În foarte multe împrejurări, opera nu spune nimic despre autor". După cum nici viața nu e un document care să furnizeze totdeauna informații utile.

²⁶ An illustrative example is the following quotation on Napoleon, Hugo and Arghezi: "the poets, a sort of people with an imagination that is both fiery and edifying, are usually short, with round faces, and almost obese" ("poetii, oameni de imaginație înflăcărată și constructivă, sunt mai ales scunzi, rotunzi la față, aproape obezi"), v. "Fiziognomie" ["Physiognomy"], in *Collected Articles V*, p.714. It is no secret that the same psycho-somatic profile fitted perfectly to Călinescu's own frame.

²⁷ Andrei Terian, *G. Călinescu*, pp. 203-204. Călinescu's interpreter mentions graphology as well.

raise to the standard of real literature; literature, in exchange, needs a translation into the subjective language of autobiographical confession; squarely, it is the work which explains the biography and not the other way round. By reversing the poles and the common causality – from individual existence towards artistic work, Călinescu reinstates the guidelines of Benedetto Croce's aesthetics. The Italian scholar denied the existence of literary genres too, and reduced any artistic expression to mere lyricism, understood as the direct expression of personality. Following the line of Croce's Idealism, Călinescu's essay entitled *The Universe of Poetry* defined the symbol as "something that relates to my destiny as human being" and established a clear-cut distinction between prose (that does not enable symbolical transfiguration) and poetry (that encourages symbolical transfiguration and, therefore, must be admitted as art). The critic's definition of poetry assumes, thus, the following idea: whereas poetry is "an animism that reduces the world to my own person", it truly bears a poetical meaning just "any thing that speaks about me"²⁸. Poetry (literature, in general) can welcome in nothing but "elements of biography", simply because it cannot work on "anything dumb and lacking significance"²⁹. For this matter, "the whole work of a real writer is actually a diary from which it is almost impossible to tear any page without also interrupting the soul's timeline"³⁰.

However, Călinescu's marked loathing of confession is not pure casualty. This might turn in a certain psychological trauma, a prominent "complex" that has been named, among the critic's own biographers, "the bastard's complex". It is neither the place nor the time to insist on psychoanalytical clues; yet, this type of approach could bring out a cluster of interesting inferences, including the proper solution for Călinescu's lifetime vehemence against Freud's theories.

Nevertheless, the critic's temptation to spill tears and, if permitted the license, to let the cat out of the bag is something that irradiates in every nook and corner of his work, comprising his literature, which also builds on his overall infatuation with biography. Is it true then that Călinescu's literature succeeds, as the author would have certainly wished for, in touching the myth's classical and impersonal formula or the symbolically sublimated expression of the biographical account? Of course not! Barely does it fulfil this aim, and when it really scores, the purely subjective notes of the source-personality cannot pass undertone. In spite of his principles from *The Meaning of Classicism*, when dressed in a writer's robe, Călinescu is not, by any means, an anonymous and does not vanish from his own

²⁸ G. Călinescu, *The Universe of Poetry*, p. 97: "ceea ce se raportează la destinul meu de om"; „un animism reducând lumea la persoana mea”; „orice lucru care vorbește despre mine”.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 98: "decât elemente de biografie, nimic inert și fără semnificație”.

³⁰ G. Călinescu, *Fals jurnal [False Diary]*. Edited by Eugen Simion, București, Fundația PRO, 1999, p. 86: " [...] întreaga operă a unui scriitor autentic e un jurnal, din care nu e cu putință să rupi nicio filă fără să întrerupi cronologia sufletului”.

work. The individual signature lasts as a permanent presence, as well as the traces of world he lived in, a world whose reality and concreteness is never fully transfigured into a realm of ideas. It is only one example that I would like to make appeal to: when his young disciple, Adrian Marino hurried to shatter the Master's disappointment on the negative reception of his *History* by praising instead the victory of Călinescu's art in his allegorical play *Șun sau calea neturburată. Mit mongol (Shun or the Untroubled Way. A Mongolian Myth, 1943)*, which was acclaimed, however, on impure and basically contextual arguments, Călinescu recoils to his Self and dismisses all autobiographical presuppositions. Ultimately, he claimed that accidental determinations are unworthy of attention: "Thus, the reduction of an artistic work to biography and its censuring to our own arbitrary presumptions on the human being represents a sheer ignorance shifting the aesthetical process itself. An artist always speaks about himself as a particular manifestation of the universal"³¹.

To end with, I must prove perhaps that Călinescu's posterity assumed his teaching; he who was so inclined to skid out the intellectual line and to give in to cancan and anecdote... One thing is sure though. In spite of his self-styling as a "petulant Ataractic", his circle of acquaintances was informed about the critic's superstition, especially on the "Friday" topic, the only day of the week when he would not get out of his house on grounds that it brings misfortune. He would rather pass his time in Vera's company, his faithful wife, whose passion for astrology slowly infected the critic's own vision. I do not know if it brings more relevance to our case here, but it is reported that it was Friday (*dies Veneris*)³² – that is, a time consecrated to the goddess of Love in the Roman Empire and then, *urbi et orbi*, a time to fast and pray all over Christendom – the day that scared him to death! Yet no mere accident must have been that exactly the same day actually brought sudden death to the critic who loved (his) life so much. Who knows why? Maybe Călinescu's own biography took revenge on him for his posthumous "divine" glory.

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³¹ G. Călinescu, "Psihologii profesionale" ["Professional Psychologies", 1944], in G. Călinescu, *Collected Articles V*, p. 273: "Reducția așadar a unei opere la biografie și cenzurarea ei prin dimensiunile noastre arbitrare despre om este o ignorare a procesului estetic însuși. Un artist vorbește totdeauna despre el sub speța universalului".

³² In Romanian, the word "vineri" (Friday) comes from the Latin name of goddess Venus ("Venera").

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THE IDEA OF BIOGRAPHY IN G. CĂLINESCU' S WORK (Abstract)

As Adrian Marino suggests in his *Dictionary of Literary Ideas (Dicționarul de idei literare, 1973)*, only with Călinescu alone “the biographical issue starts being diligently debated in Romanian literature”. However implicit, his particular way to cast aside a whole historiographic heritage drives the Romanian critic to a series of interesting remarks, though scattered in the miscellaneous articles and lacking a real “theoretical core”. Yet, since its one and only function is to explain the artist’s masterpiece, his consistent idea of biography is that it should be worked out as an “ideological synthesis” of all relevant moments from one’s existence and, on the structural level, as a novel narration. In a nutshell, he opposed *romanced biography* to *biographical romance*. Well, it is also true that our greatest literary historian used to say the “intimate” diary is nothing else but childish nonsense or, anyway, the most “stupid thing” to do, since, but for few exceptions, it does not raise to the standard of real literature. Anyway, the diffuse intimations – as shown by Eugen Simion’s version of Călinescu from *Fals jurnal (False Diary)* can assemble, in spite of the critic’s discretion, into a species of autobiography. Is it true then that Călinescu’s literature succeeds, as the author would have certainly wished for, in chasing away autobiographic accounts and in touching the myth’s classical and impersonal formula? Of course not! Barely does it fulfill this aim, and when it really scores, the purely subjective notes of the chore-voice cannot pass undertone. In spite of his principles from *The Meaning of Classicism*, when dressed in a writer’s robe, Călinescu is not, by any means, an anonymous and does not vanish from his own work. The individual signature lasts as a permanent presence, as well as the traces of the world he lived in, a world whose reality and concreteness is never fully transfigured into a realm of ideas.

Keywords: biography, romanced biography, biographical romance, autobiography, realism.

IDEEA DE BIOGRAFIE ÎN OPERA LUI G. CĂLINESCU (Rezumat)

Așa cum sugerează Adrian Marino în *Dicționarul de idei literare* din 1973, problema biografismului începe să fie discutată competent în literatura română doar odată cu G. Călinescu. Fie și implicită, această „metodă” a criticului de a îndepărta o întreagă tradiție istoriografică îl conduce spre o serie de remarce interesante, răspândite în articolele sale și lipsite, aparent, de un nucleu teoretic. Având în vedere însă că singura funcție a biografiei este de a explica capodopera artistului, Călinescu susține că biografia ar trebui concepută în forma unei „sinteze ideologice” a tuturor momentelor și trăirilor relevante, în timp ce, la nivelul structurii, aceasta ar trebui să adopte întotdeauna o formă narativă. Pe scurt, criticul român ține să disocieze mereu între *biografia romanțată* și *romanul biografic* și tot de aici pornesc considerațiile sale fragmentare despre metoda biografistă. Dar tot Călinescu afirmă, în repetate rânduri, că jurnalul intim e o „prostie” sau o formă de imaturitate, întrucât, cu câteva excepții, reprezintă o scriitură care nu se ridică la standardul adevăratei literaturi. Dar așa cum arată Eugen Simion în *Fals jurnal*, în ciuda suspiciunii criticului, imaginea omului poate totuși asambla din fragmente, constituind o formă de autobiografie. Să-i fi reușit lui Călinescu, prin operele sale de ficțiune, dorita formulă „clasică” a mitului impersonal? Sigur că nu. Niciodată nu-și va împlini idealul impersonalizării iar când se învâluie în schema mitică din *Șun*, accentele vocii din fundal rămân încă audibile. În ciuda principiilor sale din *Sensul clasicismului*, Călinescu nu reușește în niciun fel să rămână un anonim sau să se sustragă propriei sale opere. Semnătura se permanentizează ca un fapt istoric, cum și urmele omului prin lumea în care a trăit. De asemenea, realitatea și concretețea lumii lui Călinescu nu se poate transfigura, așa cum ar fi dorit criticul, în idee pură.

Cuvinte-cheie: biografie, biografie romanțată, roman biografic, autobiografie, realism.