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Overcoming Centre-Periphery Approaches in Intercultural Communication. Mythological Commitments and Aspirational Identities in Three Romanian Narratives for Western Audiences****

Abstract: The cultural journeys of Romanian thinking are recurrent meditations on the relationship between the Enlightened West and this *island of Latinity in the Slav sea*. While confirming the mythological allegiances of Romanian historiography, this metaphor carries another inherent constant in its aspirational identity, the relationship of a peripheral culture with the locus of the centrality of the world-system (cf. Dussel, 2004). The antonymic vein in Romanian reflexive consciousness, fed by permanent self-critical measurement against Europe, is constantly amended by a relativist conjunctive paradigm attempting to structurally integrate ruptures in meaning (cf. Alexandrescu, 2000). Our analysis of three such attempts to present Romanian culture to an Academic Western audience will follow the construction of a narrative about Romanian identity which employs various degrees of reflexivity in order to define a relational paradigm. We are going to illustrate this mythological commitment in relation with the centre-periphery paradigm and its subsequent influence on identity construction by treating this type of narrative as a rhetorical genre in its own right, governed by a typical exigence (cf. Bitzer, 1968) and generic constraints (cf. Jamieson, 1973). We will show that although dichotomic concepts for discussing identities can hardly be avoided (as is the case of myth in historiography), an evolution from a disjunctive to a conjunctive paradigm is possible through reflexivity.

Keywords: foundation myth; centre-periphery paradigms; conjunctive paradigm; aspirational identity; reflexivity.

1. Foundation Myths and the Management of Periphery

Questions of identity do not necessarily pertain to the childhood of nations; indeed, in the age of complex interdependencies, identity is put to use in any other way but innocently. The freight of cultural goods is laden with connotations, some of which (be they political or economic) are far from the emotional or cognitive significance usually associated with such goods. Insularity is not the proper (culturally adaptive) response to the assault of global flows of cultural symbols and meanings; cosmopolitanism has come to characterize cultures, albeit in various degrees and with quite different consequences. This apparently infinite variability

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ty might seem discouraging to the analyst, in its homogeneous wrath – which might explain the abundant attempts at pinning down *universalia* or local specificities.

When such constant playing against the strings of global culture for finding the unique tune of one's own culture is accompanied by the loud, constant drumbeat of one's traditional counterpart, one might find it extremely painful to tune in such various accounts of identity and avoid cacophony. While Western culture is seemingly emancipated from two-fold approaches, the cultural journeys of an Eastern European nation must always comprise the scenery of both the eternal other, the enlightened West, and the newer, but not less luring, reality of global cultural scenery.

The repository of symbols in Romanian cultural historiography constantly includes references to the privileged, yet tearing position as *the island of Latinity in the Slav sea*. This metaphor came into being during the period of the *Organic Statutes* (1829-1834) when Romanian Principalities came under the joint ruling of Russia, the Austrian Empire and France. In history, the *Slav sea* turned into a *Slav and Turkish*, *Slav and Germanic*, *Slav and Hungarian sea*, depending on the geopolitical pressures of the moment. The last iteration of this metaphor belonged to the historiography of nationalist communism, when the recourse to it marked the quest for political independence from Moscow. The metaphor turned into a cliché soon after its appearance, initially as part of the political discourse, but nowadays turned banal and recurrent in various types of discourse (scientific, didactic, journalistic). It is frequently invoked in school textbooks and tourist guides alike, and it was even a subject of bitter, ironic reflection for Emil Cioran, in the 1930's. Yet, it is symptomatic for the identitarian strength of this metaphor that even a critical historian like Lucian Boia, very careful about the mythological allegiances of national historiography, entitles his chapter on Romanian identity, in an introductory textbook on Romanian culture, 'an island of Latinity' (see Boia, 2001, p. 28-58). The metaphor carries significant connotations: the purity of the language, the isolation from the continent to which it belongs (Western Europe), the distance of this peripheral setting from the continent generating difficulties in communication and a certain nostalgia and longing, all of which amounting to a good illustration of aspirational identity. Yet, the metaphor is misleading to the point where it does away with the mixture of influences which usually explains a culture – and this is evidently the case for Romanian Culture as well; a fallacy one may easily forgive, given that this exclusive, 'particular logic of *foundation myths*' ('endlessly re-actualizing' moments in history that serve the interests of the present) (Boia, 2001, p. 33) falls in step with the traditional Western attachment to the inheritance of the Roman Empire.

Nonetheless, to the Western eye, it was the peculiarity of our Latin descent that finally granted us a place on the mental maps of the civilized world. It is as late as the XVIIIth century that we are placed within imaginary empires, as far as 'Turkey-Europea' or too close to the Habsburg Empire. 'Europe's cartographers acknowledged another truth of images and associations, which sometimes took over the alleged truths of the state system' – a map of distorted cultural memories, where we were just a stretch of barbarian land (Wolff, 2000, p. 219, *our translation*).

Rewriting cultural history from the angle of contextual expectations and imperatives, along with 'reinventing traditions' (cf. Anderson, 1991), have mainstreamed Romanians' social energies towards modernization and Europeanization. The Romanian conscience has lived with acute awareness the contradiction between this mythical projection (prestigious 'origins' nostalgia') and the state of affairs in Romanian society (deficiencies in modernization and de-

velopment gaps). Consequently, the myth of origins has always been combined with a long-lasting inferiority complex, fed by permanent, self-critical measurement against Europe, which has been the model for Romanians' aspirational identity.

Political and cultural elites in Romania have taken the marginal, peripheral setting of the country as an unsurpassable geographical fatality, which has resulted in imbuing the terms of national identity with mythological significance. Narrations on the myth of origin and self-projections have equally served as compensation. Romanians portray themselves as protagonists of a mythical fight between the good and the evil, between the West and the East, or, more commonly, as victims of this confrontation. Romanian identity has often been defined as a synthesis of contradictory traits – a source of incessant ideological and cultural disputes between modernist/pro-European and traditionalist/autochtonist trends throughout modern history, with this opposition at the heart of the reference system (Spiridon, 2004, p. 16, *our translation*). The very bipolar pattern expresses the problematic character of Romanian identity, marked out by disjunctive, antonymic logic (cf. Durandin, 1995).

Identity as an atemporal given permanence can at best feed linear horizontal narratives; yet it is incongruities that characterize processes of becoming. However, discontinuities between European and Romanian culture in terms of structural coherence could be understood, from a conjunctive point of view, rather as structural differences between complementary types of culture. A convincing argument is put forward by Sorin Alexandrescu when he discusses Romanians' 'identity in rupture': while ruptures of meaning are inherent in the construction of Romanian identity, they are part and parcel of a particular mode in the propagation of cultural influences – not a seismic, irrational shock wave (as in Huntington's perspective), but a conflictless dispersion of various European influences in integrative trends (Alexandrescu, 2000, p. 37). In this reading, a marginal/provincial culture such as Romanians' is not to be judged axiologically, but structurally, and the relation between central and provincial cultures thus understood, might become illustrative for a conjunctive paradigm.

Irrespective of the paradigms employed in explaining the modernization process (the 'Eurocentric', claiming that modernity was the product of rational Europe, and 'the planetary', which understands modernity as the 'result of the *management* of this <centrality> of Europe, within an integrated world-system – Dussel, 2004, 4), Europe still preserves its position as the 'reflexive consciousness' of this particular time in history (notwithstanding that it came into it as a result of the displacement of former centers of power). However morally unacceptable this dominance of Europe appears to the modern eye (especially in its pretence for the universality of values such as human rights), one might reasonably claim that the kind of universalism that dominates today's world is of European descent. This reading of civilization, acknowledging Europe as 'the locus of enunciation' and the rest of the world as 'the locus of the enunciated' (Mignolo, 2004, p. 33), still permitted the periphery of Europe to feel as part of the world-center. Eurocentric histories of the world, with their trust in the linearity of progress and development starting in the West, find a counterpart in alternative histories by the colonized. Although culturally mediated as well, these representations will eventually amount to a coherent vision that will enable a 'critique of the epistemological foundations of modernity' (Bush, 2006, p. 98), confirming the reality of 'multiple centers of modernity'. In this respect, 'provincialising Europe' (in the terms of Chakrabarty, 2001) with alternative narratives of Western influence from non-Western territories might be a valid process.

One might reasonably argue that the same expectation is encouraged by the architecture of the European Union, which allows the periphery to take part in the decision process (the

core being quite fluid, ‘not a *place*, but a *stratum*’, because of the ‘functional rather than the usual structural, absolute, and monist mode of distribution of power’ – Gravier, 2009, p. 632). Depending on the power under consideration (be it economic, industrial, demographic, cultural), the core and periphery will change composition; meanwhile, the communication between various peripheries of Europe gives them a chance to select from a variety of relations with the core. In the imperial logic, the empire will not enforce a particular identity at national/regional level, as long as the communities within the empire partake in the larger, supranational identity deriving its force from ‘a universalistic ideology’ (such as the peaceful, bountiful polity) that will imbue the civilizing mission of the empire (Gravier, 2009, p. 642)¹. The cultural vehicle of this ideology is of interest here – indeed, the cultural hegemony of empires has often survived the more traditional traits of imperialism: we are witnessing it in the American content of the emerging global culture, representing the ‘Hellenistic phase of Anglo-American civilization’ (Veliz *apud* Berger, 2002, p. 3).

It is then hardly intriguing why Romanian culture is still obsessively asking questions on its identity and specificity. Rather than a sign of insufficiency (as taken by Boia, 2001, 220), it might well prove to be an exercise in maturity.

2. From Opposition to Conjunction – Consecrating Relational Identity

The history of European thinking has a long tradition of confrontation and dialogue on the relationship between unity and diversity. The paradigms interpreting this relationship vary vastly depending on the ontological and cognitive, tacit or explicit suppositions and the axiological attitudes regarding cultural identities and differences. A bird’s eye view of modern thinking will confirm that the disjunctive paradigm, operating with ‘hard’ oppositions (cf. Vattimo, 1993) as employed by classical rationalism, has been heavily employed. While acknowledging cultures’ internal legitimacy (values’ autonomy, political pluralism and so on), this paradigm has also overstated unity over diversity of cultures under the influence of monolinear evolutionism and has furnished evidence and justification for Western-centric visions and attitudes.

On the other hand, the relativist conjunctive paradigm, associated with the idea of ‘new alliances’ between cultures, values and knowledge strategies, renders cultural diversity valuable, legitimizes the pluralism of evolution tracks and promotes intercultural dialogue. The contemporary world itself encourages conjunction over disjunction. This elicits a new interpretive framework for the relationship between unity and diversity. A new mental map would enable the adequate understanding of the new global context, shaped by complementary forces. Europe stands out because of its ‘dialogical’ vocation, in Edgar Morin’s view. Europe should be built as *unitas multiplex*, since ‘the unity of European culture resides in the vitality of its antagonisms’, and its communitarian structures are the proper frames for preserving cultural differences and intensifying dialogue (Morin, 2002, p. 139 – *our translation*). European integration and the powerful case made by cultural identities are conjunctive, rather than disjunctive aspects. ‘Cohabitation’, defined by Dominique Wolton as the coexistence of cultural differences and ‘relational’ identities within a common framework, might well be the key to ‘another globalization.’ ‘The whole problem – which is central in relation to tomorrow’s political challenges – is to know in which circumstances we might build a *relational cultural identity* and avoid the *refuge-cultural identity*’ (Wolton, 2003, p. 69 – *our translation*).

Most theoretical models constructed by Romanian authors and developing the relationship between Romanian and European identity are clearly marked by disjunctive visions in discussing culture's internal workings, betraying such 'refuge-cultural identity'. The structural opposition is between the premodern (popular, traditional) stratum and the modern (written, specialized, bookish) cultural stratum, an opposition clearly outlined ever since Dimitrie Cantemir, at the beginning of the XVIIIth century.

These oppositions have been obsessively brought to the fore by many trends, schools of thought and personalities in the Romanian cultural landscape in the last two centuries. They have been projected outwards, to acquire significant geopolitical meanings (in terms of contrasts between the West and the East, centre and periphery, European and national). Although such schematic oppositions clearly simplify the complexities of historic processes, they may offer a clearer image of divergent orientations that have both animated and torn apart the Romanian spirit throughout the modern times, when Europe became a landmark for national illumination and revival – a model worth imitating and a centre of cultural legitimization (Hitchins, 1996, pp. 251-254). In a timespan of several centuries, the reference system switched from Byzantium to Rome, and scholars enthusiastically highlighted the Latin (*id est* Western) vein of our cultural and spiritual identity. The illuminist movement, prefigured by Cantemir and represented by the Transylvanian School, is the pivotal event leading towards this significant geopolitical overturn resulting in Romanian culture orbiting Europe. This previous accumulation allows the historical orientation axis of Romanians to 'switch from East to West' (cf. Lovinescu, 1997) in the first part of the XIXth century, which will later lead to the formation of the unitary national Romanian state, to increased modernization and (after dramatic syncope and historical detours – the Communist time) Romania's integration in the EU.

Under the pressure of cascading changes triggered by modernization and synchronization processes, Romanian thinkers have veered towards a 'relational' reading of identity and a conjunctive paradigm, which requires critical self-evaluation and permanent comparisons between complementary national and European aspects. It is the duplicitous nature of cultural allegiances that cuts quite a tragic figure of Eastern European communities as 'doubly socialized' (Marino & Antohi, 2001). A synthesis between autochthonism (isolationism) and Europeanism would mark the rupture from the state of 'cultural self-colonization' (namely, the appropriation of Western cultural models). This synthesis would take the form of a culture of interference, forced to acknowledge several centers of influence (and, subsequently, conflicting sets of norms). Permanently trying to 'strike a balance' between the West and the East, Romanians have searched to harmonize the terms of differences and disjunctions. Many foreign observers and Romanian analysts alike have defined our culture as one of interference and synthesis, negotiating between opposite civilizations. Confronted with the binary terms of tradition and modernity, on the one hand, and Western and Eastern models, on the other, Romanian thinking found the conjunctive paradigm to be the meeting point of European and autochthonous traits.

3. Three Narratives on Romanian Identity

In order to reveal a certain type of 'mythological' commitment in relation with the centre-periphery paradigm, we intend to analyze the presentation of Romanian culture to an audience representative for this centre (Western Europe) as a critical case study. We are going

to illustrate this mythological commitment and how it creates an aspirational identity by treating this type of narrative as a rhetorical genre in its own right, governed by a typical exigence (cf. Bitzer, 1968) and generic constraints (cf. Jamieson, 1973). The analysis will focus on three paradigmatic texts introducing the Romanian culture to an academic Western audience, each of them instituting a rhetorical situation: *Descriptio Antiqui et Hodierni Status Moldaviae* (from now on, DM), a book written around 1716 by the Moldavian Prince Dimitrie Cantemir at the request of the Academy of Berlin; *What is Eternal and What is Historical in the Romanian Culture*, (from now on, EHRC), the text of a conference held in Berlin in June 1943 by the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica, and *The Romanian Paradox* (from now on, RP), the leading article written in 1976 by Sorin Alexandrescu for the first issue of the *International Journal of Rumanian Studies*, a journal dedicated to the study of Romanian culture by both Romanian and non-Romanian researches (the journal was issued in Amsterdam, where Sorin Alexandrescu was Professor of Semiotics at that time). What makes these texts particularly relevant for our study is the fact that although meant for a foreign, specialized audience in Western Europe, they rejoiced a second, more prestigious life within the Romanian culture, being translated and widely diffused, frequently quoted, criticized and included in various contexts of circulation, from high-school textbooks to academic anthologies. Thus, these texts are able to reveal a second persona (cf. Black, 1970), an audience implied by the text, i.e. the reconstruction of the ideal auditor of a certain message, participating in a rhetorical transaction. We would expect this second persona to be a projection of a European audience; but the texts are also indicative of an assumed identity (first persona, rhetorical persona, implied author), given their success in the Romanian culture.

Our analysis is rooted in the rhetorical criticism paradigm, which aims at the “explication of the dynamic interaction of a rhetorical text with its context, that is *how* a text responds to, reinforces or alters the understandings of an audience or the social fabric of the community” (Gill & Whedbee, 1997, p. 159). It is delineated by the following sets of questions:

1. What exigence is implied by this particular rhetorical situation (presenting your culture to others)? To what degree does this exigence exploit or construct an opportune moment (*Kairos*)? Are there any indicators in the text for an awareness of this *Kairos*? What is the relation between this awareness and the reflexivity of the authors? By these questions we attempt to describe the generic constraints of such a situation and to reconstruct the context of these texts in accordance with these constraints.
2. How is the Romanian cultural identity presented? What elements are salient and what elements are disregarded in this portrait? To what values, attitudes and methodologies are the authors committed, explicitly or implicitly, in their texts? By these questions we aim to identify relations and patterns between how the Romanian identity is presented and the methodological commitments of the text. We are not interested in the truth or falsehood of the portrait resulted, but in the grounds and stances adopted by the authors in drawing this portrait.
3. What type of relation does the text construct with its intended audience – i.e. the centre, the Western Europe? What type of reflexivity can be identified in these approaches and what type of identity is implied by this attitude towards Western Europe? By these questions we aim to reveal the aspirational identity which presupposes the centre-periphery paradigm, but which can be overcome through reflexivity.

3.1. Seizing the occasion, or creating it?

In one of the seminal articles of rhetorical criticism, Lloyd Bitzer defines the exigence as 'an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. (...) an exigency is rhetorical when capable of positive modification and this positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse.' (Bitzer, 1968, p. 1) The exigency is the main element structuring the rhetorical situation and any rhetorical discourse can be conceived as an attempt to provide a fitting response to the exigence. The apparent exigence uniting these three rhetorical situations is a lack of knowledge, recognized as such by Western Europe, and the urgency to reduce this gap in knowledge. But how does this lack of knowledge come to be recognized? Does such awareness precede the discourse, or do the writers themselves create this awareness through problematization? What makes the reduction of the knowledge gap an urgency?

DM is Dimitrie Cantemir's elaborate answer to a request by the Academy of Berlin, with which he got into contact through German intellectuals at the court of Russian Tsar Peter the Great (in 1712-1714), where Cantemir was in exile, after his defeat by the Ottomans in 1711. Although completed by 1716, this book never got to the Academy of Berlin during Cantemir's life. It was only in 1769 that a version of the manuscript was finally published for the first time, in German translation, from the Latin original. The first Romanian translation was made in 1825 and was based on the German text. The first Romanian translation based on the original manuscripts was published in 1872, followed by various other translations in Romanian. It was as late as 2006-2007 that a critical, bilingual edition was published, based on confrontation of all the versions of the manuscript.

Constantin Noica's conference, organized by the Romanian Institute in Berlin, in 1943, was intended as a first step in a wider project on a History of the Romanian Philosophy, ordered by a German publishing house. On the one hand, the project couldn't be completed due to the evolution of the war. On the other hand, Constantin Noica had already realized that, because of the lack of a philosophical tradition in the Romanian cultural landscape, such a project couldn't be very meaningful to a German audience, so he redesigned the project as a broader history of Romanian spirituality. When the project was dropped, Noica published parts of it in a book, 'Pages on the Romanian Soul', in 1944, its first chapter being in fact a translation of the conference. During the communist regime the book was ignored, but it was re-issued in 1991 and was quite well received because of a surge in public interest for the interwar intellectual models.

As opposed to the first two texts, whose 'reactive' nature is obvious, Sorin Alexandrescu's text rather constructs its own exigence instead of simply replying to a pre-existing one. Since this is an introductory, leading article of a new journal, the stakes are mentioned from the very beginning: '(...) the scientific autonomy of the Romanian studies outside the borders of Romania.' *The International Journal of Rumanian Studies* appeared between 1976 and 1989 in Amsterdam and Tübingen and between 1999 and 2002 in Bucharest, bringing together both Romanian and foreign researches of Romanian Culture. Yet, its impact in the academic world is difficult to evaluate. More relevantly, the article *The Romanian Paradox*, originally published in French, was republished in 1996 in an anthology by the Romanian historian Alexandru Zub and then translated in Romanian and included as an introductory chapter of the eponymous book in 1998. The article is frequently part of mandatory bibliographies on Romanian Culture and references to it are made even in high-school textbooks of Romanian Literature.

As anticipated, each of these texts exploits an opportune occasion, a *kairos*. Through his savant knowledge, Dimitrie Cantemir is able to satisfy the interest of a Western audience at a moment when modernity is starting to diffuse towards East, animated both by an interest of the West for this part of Europe, but also by the emerging conscience in the political elites of Eastern Europe that Byzantium is starting to lose its appeal as a political centre or cultural model. Noica resumes eloquently this ambivalence by pointing out that: [While] '[A]n expert in oriental issues, for the West, Dimitrie Cantemir is, at his time, the first European in the East.' (Noica, 1944, p. 25)

If Cantemir's *kairos* is one pertaining to European culture, Noica's is rather relevant for the Romanian culture. He writes at the climax of the cultural development represented, in the Romanian history, by the interwar period, thematising not only the historical conscience of his generation and its discontents with the Romanian history and culture, but also the allegedly unprecedented situation of participation in a war outside Romanian borders (the involvement of the Romanian army in the German offensive in Russia during WWII). He joins Emil Cioran's 'fever of modernity' and recognizes the potential of development encapsulated in this discontented conscience. In his text, Cioran stages the drama of his generation, caught in the history whirlpool, but at the same time asking for it, as a reaction to the tendency to 'evade history' that supposedly characterized the Romanian culture for centuries.

The relation between Alexandrescu's *RP* and its *kairos* is more diffuse, but at the same time is constructed and invoked rather than simply situated into. Trying to promote Romanian studies abroad, Alexandrescu emphasizes that at the end of the '60's, due to the political role that Romania played in international politics, there was increasing interest in the Romanian culture. This interest is doubled by media development that is supposed to cover all cultural *loci*. A third argument (which in a contemporary reading might appear naïve) is that of cultural decentralization: 'there isn't any longer a centre of Europe, not to mention that Europe is no longer the centre' (...) so 'the Romanian Culture starts being known simply because any cultural object has to be known.' (Alexandrescu, 1998, p. 21). The discourse explicitly thematises its opportune moment, implicitly admitting that a virtual audience might disregard such factors.

3.2. Three views on Romanian identity

Dimitrie Cantemir's *DM* is constructed on the typical structure of the geography treatises of its age. It has no introduction or expositions of motives, no section explicitly legitimizing or explaining the aim of the endeavor. This doesn't mean that implicit and even explicit attitudes, as well as critical reflections, do not occur in the text, but the text is constructed in such a way that it takes its audience and the reading conventions for granted. *DM* is structured in three sections: a geographical section, briefly describing the historical genesis of the Romanians, and the most important steps in the appearance of the Moldavian medieval state, together with a detailed account of geographical position, relief, flora and fauna, major cities and various resources; a political section, describing the political, judicial and administrative organization, the political institutions and court etiquette, the inhabitants and their occupations, and the relations with the Ottoman empire; and a third part, presenting the religious life in Moldova, religious structures, the sporadic conflicts between Orthodox Christians and Catholics, and the state of the religious education. Common topics of the Enlightenment, such as the light of knowledge versus the barbarism of ignorance, are seldom encountered. The

whole book is structured on two pairs of antitheses: the beauty and the wealth of the nature versus the deplorable economical and political situation, and the magnificent past versus the decayed present. The local aristocracy, the corruption, but mostly the economical and political oppression of the Ottoman Empire, are held responsible for the disastrous situation in Moldova. Of particular interest is the seventeenth chapter of the second part, *De Moldavorum Moribus*, where Cantemir attempts to sketch an ethno-psychological profile of Moldavians. It is one of the few places in the book where Cantemir explicitly adopts a critical attitude towards his subject and tries to justify it:

In our attempt to describe Moldavians' mores – of which few people, and even fewer foreigners, are well aware – it is our own *amor patriae* that drives us towards praising the people we were born into and speaking well of the inhabitants. Yet this love for the country meets with the love for truth, which hinders our attempt to praise what would, in its own right, be condemnable. It will be more meaningful for the people to reveal those misdemeanors that are so far spreading among them, than persist in kind praise and deft exculpation, which might lead them to believe that they are right in doing what more enlightened people blame as wrong.

Overburdened by the latter's arguments, we must honestly testify that in Moldavians' mores there is little to rightfully praise, apart from true Orthodox belief and hospitality. All vices that Moldavians share with other people are to be found here if not in plenty, then in no lack. Good habits are thin on the ground and, since they [Moldavians] lack both good breeding and opportunities to exert virtues, it would be difficult to find better mores in someone who is not uplifted by his own benevolence. (Cantemir, 2006, p. 297 – *our translation* from Romanian)

The description following is not flattering, and Cantemir's love for truth may have turned into blind passion, if one is to evaluate thoroughly the biases indicated by his insistence on certain examples. Positive traits are enumerated, but sporadically illustrated, while the negative ones abound in examples. Moldavians are depicted as lacking in measure and perseverance, proud and ignorant. Yet the portrait as such is less relevant. What is more relevant, as the above fragment clearly indicates, is Cantemir's external, etic account adopted in his portrayal of Moldavians – that of the 'enlightened people'. The internal conflict staged along the lines of *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas* reveals his commitment to the values of Western Europe, a commitment further emphasized by his inconsistent rhetoric: what meaning could this study have had for Moldavians (depicted as ignorant), a study not addressed to them and written in Latin, abroad? Cantemir's moralizing tone is simply a reiteration of his declared attachment to truth and moral progress, not a real attempt to improve the moral habits of Moldavians.

Constantin Noica's text attempts to describe the Romanian culture in its historical evolution. Without any explicit reference, Noica operates with a Hegelian philosophy of history, presenting the evolution of Romanian culture as dialectic of the eternal and the historical. He begins by recognizing the 'minor' character of Romanian culture, i.e. its a-historical, rural, ethnographic nature, only to exclaim, along with his peer, Emil Cioran, that 'we no longer want to be the eternal villagers of history (...) We are no longer satisfied with eternal Romania; we want a Romania of the present. This is our disquieting attempt as regards culture' (Noica, 1944, p. 4). He even concedes that the 'minor' character of Romanian culture is strictly a structural trait, independent of any value judgment, but he further states that a self-aware culture is personal, while a 'minor' culture is anonymous, lacking conscience, consequently having no chance to assert itself in history – along the lines of the same Hegelian philosophy of history. This clash between historical and eternal forms, generating the discontent of his

generation with the Romanian history and culture, is illustrated by Noica through three moments of maximum cultural development, one in the XVIth century, one in the XVIIIth century and one in the XXth century.

The first moment in this dialectical process, the thesis, is represented by Neagoe Basarab, a king of Wallachia quite aware of the significance of worldly power, but at the same time dominated by a refusal of the world and history which would later lead him towards a monastic life, incompatible with the political ambitions of a king. The conflict between the eternal and the historical in Romanian culture was definitely won by the eternal, and to prove this Noica analyses a fragment from the king's book, 'Teachings of Neagoe Basarab for his son Teodosie.' Noica identifies in Neagoe Basarab's book a religious and philosophical sensibility of ascetic nature, which finally loses any contact with the historical world, integrating into eternity, through ascetics: 'The conflict between the eternal and the historical side is solved directly, through renunciation of spirit or through its evasion, along with everything that it implies: knowledge, action, human endeavour. The human is not to assert himself in this world. He is here just to testify [to the glory of God]' (Noica, 1944, p. 14)

The second moment in this dialectical conflict, the moment of antithesis, when history prevails, is represented by Dimitrie Cantemir. Under the impetus of entering the history's whirlpool, the Romanian conscience becomes discontented with itself, while growing aware of itself. Noica identifies in Cantemir the starting point of this discontented attitude and describes it as the result of a European conscience turning towards itself and generating a crisis within the Romanian spirituality. Noica analyses the same fragment of Cantemir describing the Moldavians and concludes that it is not excessive love for truth that generates this portrait, but the fact that the prince 'thinks within ethical categories, alien to Romanians. Cantemir passes judgments from an angle given by the thirst for knowledge and truth specific to Western Europe, which thirst didn't animate the Romanians, either.' (Noica, 1944, p. 27)

The third moment in this dialectical process, that of synthesis, is represented by Lucian Blaga, a philosopher of culture whom Noica considers the most accomplished philosopher of the interwar period. Noica analyses the distinction Blaga draws between minor and major cultures: between ethnographic, ahistorical cultures, lacking the category of personality (in Kantian parlance), and monumental, historical, personal cultures. The Romanian popular culture (a minor culture) is considered the most representative for the Romanian spirituality. At the same time, Blaga cannot but recognize the need for historical, personal forms of culture, the need for major culture. The conflict between the two forms has a transcendental solution in Blaga's philosophy of style: since both of them are the result of the same cultural matrix, they share the same style characteristics. Yet, Noica points out that the explicit answer that Blaga provides to the problem of the relation between these forms of culture is to be found in his acceptance discourse when invited to join the Romanian Academy, in 1937. Having no forerunner to eulogies (because the opening had been created especially for him), Blaga chose to deliver a eulogy to the Romanian village – in Noica's terms, 'to everything that is impersonal, anonymous, ahistorical in the Romanian soul. The first fully accomplished attempt towards major culture is twined with a warm recognition of the Romanian minor culture. The conflict between the eternal and the historical seems to have found a solution, at least an academic one.' (Noica, 1944, p. 41) Yet this synthesis cannot solve this tension because it privileges minor culture: Blaga claims that in order to produce valuable works of major culture, one needs just to sublimate the works of the minor culture. The music of Enescu or the sculptures of Brâncuși are very much in line with this advice. Yet, the tension is not resolved for

Noica's generation: along the Hegelian philosophy of history, a new dialectical cycle is emerging and authors like Cioran or Noica represent, at a different level of consciousness and reflexivity, the same moment of antithesis and crisis as Cantemir. Lucian Blaga's solution to the conflict is not accepted by this generation, unwilling to integrate any dimension of eternity in the Romanian identity.

So, in *EHRC*, a self-conflicting Romanian identity is sketched, torn between the safety of an ahistorical, unreflexive identity and the aspiration towards historical forms of culture. The text is committed to the logic of historical explanation which is Hegelian in nature and which tacitly admits that the element in antithesis which generates the dialectical cycle is the European culture. Noica's position might be considered an oversimplification of the Romanian history so as to fit the Hegelian scheme: at closer analysis one can easily question the shift in meaning from the religious eternity of Basarab's moment to the different, structural eternity of popular culture – and this shift seriously affects the alleged Hegelian logic of explanation. But what is relevant here is that the conflict between the eternal and the historical is made salient and valued inasmuch as it can explain both the aspiration to include the Romanian culture in the European centre, and the fear that this aspiration might lead to a loss of identity.

Sorin Alexandrescu's text presents the study of Romanian culture as a paradoxical one both with regard to its object, the Romanian culture, and with regard to its subjects, 'the Romanians', the researches specialized in Romanian culture. In order to make a case for the autonomy of the Romanian Studies, both types of paradoxes have to be clearly formulated. It is symptomatic for *RP* that while the object's paradoxes are indeed very clearly and convincingly formulated, the subject's paradoxes are mainly allegorically depicted.

There are three paradoxes of the Romanian culture: the belonging paradox, the simultaneity paradox and the continuity/discontinuity paradox. The belonging paradox describes the position of the Romanian culture within European history and geography. Describing the Romanian culture through the old metaphor of 'an island of Latinity lost in a Slav and Hungarian sea', Alexandrescu points out that the Romanian cultural space belongs to all and none of the major cultural units surrounding it: Central Europe, Eastern Europe, the Balkans. Moreover, each historical Romanian province, separated from the others by the Carpathians, had its own 'local' centre in modernity: the Austrian Empire for Transylvania, the Russian Empire for Moldavia, the Turkish Empire for Wallachia. Since these provinces were not under the influence of a single power at any time in their history, it is quite remarkable that the Romanian culture and language managed to retain their identity and to emerge so harmonized with one another.

The simultaneity paradox describes the (lack of) integration of Romanian culture in the European cultural history. Successive waves of European cultural movements coexist simultaneously in the Romanian cultural space. For instance, there is no Romanian Renaissance or a Romanian Baroque, but in late medieval culture, one can find a humanist with a baroque style: Dimitrie Cantemir. The evolution of the Romanian literature can be described by texts, rather than authors. This paradox of simultaneity is to be explained by the desperate attempt of the Romanian culture to make up for lost time, but this attempt operates only at a superficial level, because the perpetual contemplation of the folkloric values (the minor culture, in Blaga's or Noica's terms) would permanently counteract this attempt.

Thus we get to the third paradox, that of continuity/discontinuity, which has two levels: a vertical level, where one can notice the existence of two separate cultures, the folklore and the written culture (a re-thematisation of the conflict discussed by Noica); and a horizontal

level, describing the ruptures between society and culture at the beginning but mostly at the end of the XIXth century, when Romanian culture decidedly switched from a Byzantine model towards a Western European one: 'Thus, the big tear takes place between state and culture, between what is political and what is cultural, between synchronization with Western values at any cost and the ballast of a past still loved and respected, between running towards the future and running back in history. (...) *Modern Romanian culture was consequently born through awareness followed by ideological polarization, at the moment when the vertical discontinuity of the two cultures was suddenly emphasized by the horizontal discontinuity between the medieval world and the modern bourgeois world.*' (Alexandrescu, 1998, pp. 15-16)

The researcher's paradoxes rely on the status of his subject-matter: a mere hobby for Western researchers, since 'the price of a cultural object on the market of European values was always determined by the importance of the political system including this object on the international political market' (Alexandrescu, 1998, p. 21). But Romania never had such an important status; moreover, due to the second paradox, its values tended to be either anachronistic or disconcerting. Not to mention the lack of any systematic attempt to promote the Romanian values abroad. Consequently, Romanian culture has a secondary status in Europe, and is regarded as a legitimate object of study only as part of wider objects, such as South-East European Studies. The implications for the researchers (the subjects) are not convenient at all and it is here that the paradox is illustrated by allegory:

'It is this image that others have on Romanian culture that is more or less visible at the very heart of our activity. We, the 'Romanianists', find ourselves in the uncomfortable shoes of the man who is embarrassed by his friends' comments regarding the woman he loves, in his very presence. He can neither accept their ironies, since they are targeting himself as well, nor dare he defend her, for fear that this proof of love might embitter their sarcasm. Then, his sole refuge is to rationalize his love, to offer logical arguments to convince the others that this is his only reasonable choice. Yet, for the moment, the Romanianist is torn between opposing attitudes which equally define the paradox of his love. He is either being ironical or very passionate, either distant or very involved. Exploring such options often depends on the Romanianist's involvement with his subject. For instance, many Romanianists of Romanian origin feel a duty to use arguments in justification of their choices. They might admit criticism as regards the structure and the typology of their cultural objects, but not criticism targeting their value. This 'desacralisation' is painfully felt, so much so that they do not realize that employing too fierce a defense may sometimes stand proof for an inferiority complex. The opposite Romanianist feels rather obliged to be the source of preventive ironies that he shares with his public out of sheer weakness, for fear that others might not easily grasp his own tenderness towards his subject. It is this irony that both saves and justifies him; he keeps his distance to be able to stay himself, and not be swallowed by his object. In other words, this Romanianist accepts the established cultural hierarchy in Europe to recover his own serenity and maybe protect himself against doubts as to the correctness of his choice of a profession.' (Alexandrescu, 1998, pp. 40-41.)

Alexandrescu finds these paradoxical aspects of the study of Romanian culture to be not only a hindrance in promoting Romanian studies, but also an opportunity for various cultural commitments: the fading of borders promoted by various postmodernisms makes this culture appealing; its archaic character might be inviting to those interested in primary forms of expressions, while the enemies of classifications and authoritarian discourses might find in the unclassifiable, paradoxical character of the Romanian culture a convincing argument to be employed in various ideological wars. So, making salient the paradoxical aspects of the Romanian culture and simply expediting various similarities with other European cultures emerging in spaces of cultural interference is a manoeuvre revealing a description of the ob-

ject in accordance with the cultural interests of Western Europe, a strategy of promotion in accordance with the preferences of the potential public (the foreign researchers), made aware of its own biases and inconsistencies. The cultural options and hierarchies of the West are strategically employed to construct the research object – but these are not the only factors relevant in the construction of the object: ‘The image that a public forms on this object is just another aspect of the object itself. Science has nothing to do with the opportunity of its claims, but only with their truth.’ (Alexandrescu, 1998, p. 42)

3.3. Intended audiences, projected identities, layers of reflexivity

There are several recurrences in these three narratives, worth emphasizing. All of them depict an assumed aspirational identity, a wish for connecting the Latin isle with the main continent to which it belongs. All of them can be described in relation with a double-leveled criterion of reflexivity: reflexivity towards your object and reflexivity towards your commitments in analysis. From a rhetorical perspective, the former is relevant for the construction of the ethos; the latter is symptomatic for the relation instituted with the audience. This concept of reflexivity goes beyond the traditional epistemic virtue of you being aware of the limits of your approach, by integrating a rhetorical dimension: an awareness of the situated character of your own discourse and of the peculiarities of the rhetorical situation governing this discourse.

That the intended audience of these three texts is a Western one can be easily seen now, irrespective of considerations related to the rhetorical situation. Cantemir’s moralizing tone has nothing to do with the Moldavians: his statements about *amor patriae* and love of truth are more relevant for the Western audience governed by the same ethos of truth. His tone is symptomatic for the values of the Enlightenment which he assimilated and projected in his portrayal of Moldavians. The firmness of his tone shows both his reflexiveless confidence in Western values and his reflexiveless confidence in his own knowledge and understanding of Moldavians. Through them both he is a man of his time, portraying himself as such to other men of his time.

Noica’s view on the evolution of Romanian culture is reflexive regarding his object of study. Despite his discontent with the Romanian culture, he understands and accepts the historical triggers leading to this situation. Yet he lacks reflexivity towards his methodology: letting aside the inappropriate application of the Hegelian scheme of explanation, his approach is employed both to describe the evolution of the Romanian culture and to legitimize his generation’s discontent. In the middle of WWII he is justifying the urge to make history through this Hegelian philosophy of history. His discontented ethos is doubled by an activist attitude, one that his intended audience shares (as far as we can historically speculate).

Sorin Alexandrescu’s text is marked by double reflexivity: it is not only the object that is paradoxical, but also the researcher. He is aware of the role of cultural hierarchies in the constitution of cultural objects, he is aware of the possible skepticism that his audience might advance and the ironic attitude he might confront with. At the same time, he mobilizes his audience’s own arguments for defeating this resistance, and makes his Western audience aware of its attitude towards Romanian culture and its researchers by appealing to the oblique strategy of allegorical confession: the situation of the man who is embarrassed by his friends’ comments regarding the woman he loves. Thus he is leaving room for the only relevant arguments in this type of debate: the quality of scientific results. Yet the quality of these results has to be validated by the same Western audience, an implication that Sorin Alexandrescu is

not considering. His ethos is rather a confrontational one. The aspirational identity remains, but the centre is no longer taken for granted as an indisputable model. It needs to be confronted with its own biases, in the light of its own criteria, in order to accept the legitimacy of new objects of study.

4. Conclusion

Accepting Lucian Boia's insight that mythologically-based explanations in history shouldn't be judged strictly in terms of truth and falsehood, but in terms of desire, then it follows that the myth cannot be eliminated from historiography, and reflexivity cannot substitute mythological sensibilities and commitments, although it can increase their awareness. It is symptomatic for such incongruous allegiances of Romanian historiography that the metaphor 'an island of Latinity in a Slav sea' has been repeatedly used either in a conjunctive reading, signifying that Romanian culture belongs to Western culture, or in a disjunctive reading, marking the isolation from Soviet Russian influence, during nationalist Communism.

With various degrees of reflexivity, the three narratives analyzed confirm Mignolo's idea that Europe is 'the locus of enunciation' and the rest of the world is 'the locus of the enunciated' (Mignolo, 2004, p. 33), with the simple amendment that Europe has its own centres (maybe diffuse), and its own peripheries (easier to point to). For Romanian culture the West has been the place of the perpetual return for defining one's own identity. Various epochs, with various degrees of reflexivity, regarded the West as a guarantor of values, a stimulus of modernity and a centre which is the essential counterpart for outlining identity.

Moreover, these peripheries are governed by a logic of interferences, of cultural waves generated by diverse centers and producing remarkable syntheses locally, as Alexandrescu illustrates (Alexandrescu, 2000, p. 38). In our analysis we tried to show that the myth operates at three levels: one of identitarian representations (the island, for instance), one of value commitments (which are the values of the West, adopted more or less conscientiously), and one of methodological and ideological assumptions (the optics through which you look at yourself and create the portrait to be presented). The first level is to be identified in the 'the locus of the enunciated' while the last two pertain to 'the locus of enunciation'. Although the polar, dichotomic concepts for discussing identities can hardly be avoided, just as the myth in historiography, an evolution from a disjunctive paradigm on the relation between centre and margin, to a conjunctive one (interferences between various centres rather than peripheries of a single center), is possible through reflexivity and such an example be traced in the three narrative analysed, opening the road to a conjunctive paradigm in the study of cultural identities in Europe.

Notes

¹ In this reading, the concept 'empire' is emancipated from its historical negative nuances, to signify a polity which, although still authoritarian and pursuing territorial conquests, is responsible for spreading its identity and culture.

Rezumat: Multe din întreprinderile majore ale culturii românești reprezintă meditații asupra relației între un Occident luminat și *insula de latinitate în marea slavă*. Această metaforă înglobează multe din atașamentele mitologice ale istoriografiei românești, ilustrând o constantă a identității aspiraționale: relația dintre o cultură periferică și centrul sistemului internațional (cf. Dussel, 2004). Constanta antinomică din conștiința reflexivă românească, hrănită de permanenta raportare auto-critică la Europa, poate fi amendată de o paradigmă conjunctivă relativistă, prin care se încearcă integrarea structurală a discontinuităților de înțeles (cf. Alexandrescu, 2000). Vom supune analizei trei încercări de prezentare a culturii românești unui public academic occidental, urmărind modul în care construcția unor narațiuni despre identitatea românească, narațiuni cu grade diferite de reflexivitate, este capabilă să definească o paradigmă relațională. Vom ilustra atașamentele mitologice implicite ale paradigmei centru-periferie și influența lor asupra construcției identității, tratând acest tip de narațiune ca un gen retoric de sine stătător al comunicării interculturale, gen guvernat de o exigență tipică (cf. Bitzer, 1968) și de constrângeri generice (cf. Jamieson, 1973). Vom arăta că deși conceptele dihotomice cu greu pot fi evitate în discutarea identităților (la fel cum mitul cu greu poate fi eliminat din istoriografie), se poate imagina totuși, prin reflexivitate, o evoluție de la o paradigmă disjunctivă la una conjunctivă cu privire la raportul centru-periferie.

Cuvinte-cheie: mituri întemeietoare; paradigma centru-periferie; paradigmă conjunctivă; identitate aspirațională; reflexivitate.

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