

ROMANIAN COMPLEXES AND IDENTITY CRISES

■ Andra Bruciu-Cozlean
■ University of Tampere
■ Finland

ABSTRACT:

With the purpose of acquiring its own cultural identity, each country makes great spiritual efforts. Romanian culture has prepared, during the last centuries, the ground for an adequate reception of the linguistic characteristics of Romanian language, and its unique system of values. Romania has, in time, suffered because of complexes which are more or less justifiable from an ideological, political, and cultural point of view. In an attempt to diagnose the identity crises that characterize this Romanian cultural phenomenon, Mircea Martin, in his book, *Călinescu și complexele literaturii române* (George Călinescu and the Complexes of Romanian Literature), published in Bucharest in 1981, with a second edition in 2002 is emphasizing the Romanian cultural pathologies by cataloguing its 'constitutive complexes': the one of 'provincial isolation or marginality', of 'European and universal ignorance', 'humble origins', 'a delay or a discontinuity from other European cultures', 'rurality', 'imitation', and of 'the absence of headliners'. Another work we have mentioned on this occasion is Adrian Marino's *Pentru Europa. Integrarea României. Aspecte ideologice și culturale* (For Europe. Romania's Integration. Ideological and Cultural Aspects). Both Martin's and Marino's texts set personal points of view on this controversial issue of the Romanian complexes and identity crises. This paper attempts to be a short description of these complexes which have entered in a general metabolism of the Romanian aesthetics, thought and perception, causing it damage.

KEYWORDS

Romanian culture, complexes, crises, Mircea Martin, Adrian Marino

In one of the future responses concerning Romania's place and its type of relations and kinship with Europe, one will not look passed the fact that, compared to other countries in central and western Europe, the landmarks of its cultural and political

identity have been drawn up differently. In this framework, one welcomes a re-evaluation of those particularities which have accompanied Romania's general historic evolution. Under the pressure of this demonstrative necessity, the literary critic, Mircea Martin, undertook, in 1981, a serious investigation. The book that resulted from this is one of the most provocative and most exciting works published in post-war Romania, talking about a set of constitutive 'complexes' for literature, as well as for Romanian culture in general (Martin, 1981, 2012). The complexes enumerated by Martin are those of a small, marginal culture, suffering from countless historical misfortunes. The listed complexes are dialectical: of closure and/or openness, of individuality and/or integration. As the title suggests (*Călinescu și complexele literaturii române*), the book looks like a eulogy brought to a unique critical consciousness in Romanian literature. It concerns the writer George Călinescu (1899-1965), author of the study *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (The History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginnings up to the Present, 1941). A certain affinity to the canonical and a hubristic, projective compensation of an absent cultural heritage are reproached to him throughout the book. The title of the book is, in the end, a critical trap. Martin's work does not talk about the Romanian literary critique Călinescu, but about the complexes that characterize Romanian culture in its whole. As far as the political context in which Mircea Martin published his book is concerned (1981 – Romania was under the most severe communist censorship and under the pressure of the protochronist, nationalist and egotistical model), it was completely unfavourable, the first edition lacking several important fragments which had been censored. The second edition, with the same title, *Călinescu și complexele literaturii române* (2002), was not revised by the author. The reasons for this work's second publishing are still exciting: 'I've had – and shall continue to have – other priorities and, while waiting, I've decided to republish the 1981 version – as some type of wager with today's readers and, first and foremost, with those born over twenty years ago, as was this hereby book' (Martin, 2002: 5, our translation). On the one hand, we have an older message for a new public, on the other, we read in this venture a long-term bet the author made with himself, implying the necessity to revise the text, to press it against the present. The book is not one of 'the psychology of the Romanian people' or of psychoanalysis (even though one can recognise a psychoanalytic 'patent' after the model of the archetypes. Thus Martin proposes an original and singular method of analysis for the complexes of Romanian creativity. Each complex is followed from its first manifestations to its maturity, dissolutions and/or deformations, to the identity crises which it has generated and whose source it was.

The relevance is, according to the author, the plural perspective, because at least now, at the brink of the new millennium, Europe's unity should happen in both directions: from East to West, but also from West to East (Martin, 2002). The book takes reference from the national culture, the creating destiny of the Romanian people, from the obstacles it has encountered while creating its national

specificity. In a recent statement (2014), Mircea Martin returned to the theme, discussing with a detached eloquence about the identity and (still current) complexes of Romanian literature (and culture). ‘It will not be easy to renounce our complexes and I fear that they are passed on from generation to generation, I fear that they shall be tackled differently as the generations change, but the complexes linger on! The complex of marginality is difficult to overcome, it has an objective component which is unsurpassable even with imagination. The complex of the continuous beginning is still very vivid, even aggressive, encouraged by the political atmosphere, as well as the political moments we live through; in a more general term, this autochthonous Adam-ism, the idea that real things commence with us, the incapacity of many, including that of some people of our generation, to insert ourselves in a becoming, in a cultural series, without having this complex of irreducibility, of personal ego! I believe that this complex still has influence, unfortunately (...) Our integration in an Euro-Atlantic world does not lack importance, even if it is still only a political and military integration, but not a cultural one, as it should be... Unfortunately, even though we have many more opportunities than our forefathers to affirm ourselves outside the borders of our country, outside the borders of our language, we do not use them to the fullest! It would be wonderful if we were to use them, and it would be a modality intellectuals would somehow use to balance our country’s – to call it on its name or not – despicable image abroad and, implicitly, that of our culture... Certainly, all that has been mentioned so far is still debatable.’(Motroc, 2014). It would seem that these complexes have entered within the general metabolism of aesthetic and ethical Romanian perception and thinking, in the manner in which we react and live daily.

A work rather similar to Mircea Martin’s one is that of the critic Adrian Marino, entitled *Pentru Europa. Integrarea Romaniei. Aspecte ideologice si culturale* (For Europe. Romania’s Integration. Ideological and Cultural Aspects). This work uses the author’s older texts, published in Romanian and foreign magazines between 1968 and 1994. As its author states in the *Foreword*, the book is intended to methodically discuss the ‘European idea’, in its triple dimension: cultural-literal, ideological and political, as it is reflected in the present Romanian culture and realities. Some main ideas are restated, others nuance and accurately specify the author’s opinions on the identity complexes and crises of the Romanian people. The first complex that generates otherness and crises, a complex analysed both by Martin and by Marino in their books, is that of *encasing* (a retractile, traditionalist, anti-European complex which characterises Romanian culture in some of the important stages in its evolution) and the opposing complex, that of *openness* to the European, to modernity. The most important confrontation, brutal and not at all utopic in this sense, took place in Romanian culture and literature in the first half of the 20th century. Another one had been previously announced by Maiorescu through the acute conflict between ‘shapes’ (Western) and ‘content’ (autochthonous). Between

the World Wars, Romania was dominated at the same time, to offer a suggestive example, by the traditionalist approach represented by Nichifor Crainic, Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Garabet Ibrăileanu and by a modernist approach as well. The traditionalists were searching for models for Romania's development in its endemic past, believing that Romanian civilization is mainly rural, so that cultural imports of the urbanized West do not suit our national specificity. Eugen Lovinescu was the founder of Romanian modernism, defining the principle of synchronism through imitations, through the Europeanising of Romanian literature. He expressed, with visionary touches, the famous phrase: '*Ex occidente lux*'. 'Imitation is the basis of synchronism. [...] The unique factor of *imitation*, in which sociologists like Tarde have seen the forming principle of all societies is at the basis of the mechanism of our material life's contemporaneity. The social group is thus regarded as a gathering of individuals who mimic one another. The existence of imitation also involves the existence of the object to be mimicked itself; imitation thus presupposes *invention*. An inventor and an individual act are the origin or every invention (in language, art, science, faith)' (Lovinescu, 1934: 71, our translation).

On the other hand, according to Adrian Marino, modern Romanian culture, starting with the 18th and 19th century, is itself the process of a fast Western synchronisation. At the same time, the historical, traditional part, of the late Middle Ages, remains particularly strong. Hence, a characteristic situation: 'at the convergence of two cultural spheres, without any real affinities, profound among themselves, modern Romanian culture will be full of interferences, ambiguities and even of unavoidable conflicts. With one face towards the West and another towards the East and the Balkans, it will agglutinate the most diverse of influences.' (Marino, 1995: 69, our translation). The many influences coming from the two parts have created ambivalences which could be found in the same national idea – and this is a remarkable fact. The author continues by claiming that perhaps the most important, or in any event, dominant for Romanian culture is the complex of the Western 'canon'. Western culture is canonical, paradigmatic and symbolic for the entire world culture, starting with the eastern one. Fortunately, this melange of influences and doctrines has contributed, as far as Romania is concerned, to the genesis of very valuable literary works, of a culture of identity with a creative calling. The international career in poetry and plastic arts of Tristan Tzara (co-founder of the Dadaist cultural movement which led to a major revolution in the plastic arts and European literature), of the sculptor Constantin Brâncuși between 1920-1940, are just several convincing examples in this direction.

In either case, being in this fragile and imponderable in-between-worlds situation, Romanian culture always had to rewrite itself in the frame of a great adaptability in order to survive. It left to be understood that it took what was necessary from the complicated mechanism of interferences; actually it took from other cultures only

that which suited it. That is why Titu Maiorescu's¹ urge from over one hundred years ago is still actual: 'we are in a clear, substantial progress when it comes to poetic literature: we have major authors, subsequently their influence will spread extensively among the young generations of Romanians and even if they will be recognised abroad, their recognition at home will expand.' (Maiorescu, 1989: 296, our translation).

The complex of the cultural time lapse (to which the two authors are adding *the complex of an international language*) represents another point of interest in their writings. Romanians have always been judged, and have judged themselves according to their progress related to the grand productions of western cultures. The fact that Romanian people did not have a Romanian Renaissance or a Romanian Baroque encompassing distinct artistic periods it has become one of the main complexes. The pressure of history was not to be trifled with. On the contrary, there still are complexes and they are activated by the consciousness of this time-gap. With the exception of a few important writers such as Eminescu, not many authors can be pinned in the Romanian Literature to one particular literary movement. As a continuance of evolution, in the last decades of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, Romanian authors were affirmed through the same batch of texts pertaining to late romanticism, realism, naturalism or symbolism. The writers Rebreanu and Sadoveanu had been late in their affirmation, while modernists such as Camil Petrescu and Urmuz were early. Literary movements themselves can only be defined through texts and not through their authors. But gaining a head-start from the others, doing rapidly, in a febrile cultural time what others have done calmly, seems to be a *pro domo sua* statement.

Another complex mentioned by Marino, susceptible of being the source of identity otherness and conflicts is the one of 'entering' Europe. In the chapter entitled 'Romanian literature 'enters' Europe', the author talks about the necessity to transform the presenting of Romanian literature in systematic acts of knowing and diffusing. He presents the massive *Histoire de la littérature européenne. Lettres européennes*, work written by a team of 150 university professors from all over the European continent, coordinated by Annik Benoit-Dusauso and Guy Fontaine (1992). Marino noticed that this work poses 'in full, the entire problem of our European literary presence' (Marino, 1995: 81, our translation), Romanian literature appearing merely in the period of the Baroque' (Marino, 1995: 81). An important moment of the export and importance of Romanian culture was pinpointed by Miron Costin (1633-1691). *The Chronicle of Moldavia and Wallachia*, written in Polish, was made for the voivode Ioan Guinski, to whom it was offered in 1677. In the prestigious volume, it is said that Miron Costin 'privileges the

¹ Titu Liviu Maiorescu (1840–1917) was a Romanian literary critic and politician, founder of the *Junimea* Society. Contemporary with the great Finnish professor, essayist and aesthetician Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä (1847-1917), Maiorescu helped to the development of the Romanian culture in the second half of the 19th century.

existential dimension of history' (Marino, 1995: 83, our translation). In 1714, Dimitrie Cantemir was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Berlin. Cantemir wrote the first monograph of Moldavia, *Descriptio Moldaviae*. He also wrote, in Latin, the first scientific history of the Ottoman Empire, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Ottoman Empire*, translated in English (1734, 1736), in French (1743) and in German (1745). Even though they appear in the index, the writings of chronicler Ion Neculce (1672-1745), our first story teller, are not, unfortunately, discussed in the volume, according to Adrian Marino. In any case, these were following a different direction – that of gradual laicisation of the thinking of the first half of the 18th century, where the cult element was reigning over the eidetic image of byzantine tradition. Maintaining the lead of the same process, the monopole of the ecclesial book nearly ceases, Romanian printings maintain their religious frameworks, thus defining a mentality with features that surpassed the confessional frame. The natural evolution of Romanian literature, chronologically corresponding to the Enlightenment with its Eastern-European values, marked a period of fruitful connections with the western rationalism. Romanians were fighting for their political statement in the space of a Habsburg Transylvania, where in 1791, the petition *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* was being written and where the entire program of the *Transylvanian School* remodels in a national meaning the Latinist idea. In Wallachia and Moldavia a battle was fought for political independence from Turkey – the movements of social and national emancipation illustrated by Tudor Vladimirescu's revolution (1821) being supported by an intellectuality open to the West, also important founders of Romanian schools. The Moldavian and Wallachian revolutionists of 1848 envisaged a European synchronism, perhaps with as much critical spirit impregnated by scepticism. In Romania, Vasile Alecsandri sets the foundations of Romanian modern poetry with the ballad *Miorița*, states rather ambiguously the text of the Belgian authors. Mihai Eminescu remains an important poet of that time. I. L. Caragiale finds a small place in *Le Théâtre réaliste*. The compartments for the 20th century are somewhat more generous. In the first decade, Alexandru Macedonski introduces symbolism in Romania while Ovid Densusăianu becomes the theorist of the new movement. The highly modernist orientation constituted within the Romanian culture in the beginning of the 20th century is visible in Blaga's expressionism, in Ion Barbu's and Tristan Tzara's poetry, in the plays of the absurd written by Eugen Ionescu. The last ones, Tzara and Ionescu were raised in an atmosphere of emulation of avant-garde, illustrated by certain magazines: *Contemporanul*, *Unu*, *Integral*. Ion Pillat and Ion Minulescu mix neo-romantic traits with symbolist trends. The idea of being European and at the same time aware of one's own value was always profoundly constructive and up-to-date. Regarding the contemporary Romanian prose, the valuable work created by Marin Preda is notable. The author of *Viața ca o pradă* (Life as Prey) is situated in this work between a Bulgarian novelist (Blaga Dimitrova) and a Greek one (Dimitris Hatzis) (Marino, 1995: 83-85). Moromete's

Iocan's smithy emphasizes an acute identity crisis of the present-day Romanian society which marks not only the politic, but also the cultural plans (Benoit-Dusausoy; Fontaine, 1992: 890). The crisis of Romanian society rises from the major 'complexes': the complex of a small culture, forced to integrate to an a-chronologic rhythm of development and Europe's complex which brings about the necessity of globalisation and the acceptance of an expanded supra-nationalism.

Following the line of history, two trends in Romanian culture appeared in the literature of the '60s: one, official, dogmatic, that glorified the regime without judgement and another, which tried to impose authentic values, adapting the writing according to the circumstances to avoid censorship. The first one lacked durable cultural qualities, while the second imposed, particularly after the passing of the first decade of Stalinist Communism, numerous valuable works. Unfortunately, unlike other countries of the communist block such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, where contesting the regime was done publicly, starting from the intellectuals, in Romania things developed extremely slowly. During this time, the most representative personalities were Nicolae Breban, Alexandru Ivasiuc and Sorin Titel, as well as the poets Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu, Ana Blandiana and Ștefan Bănuțescu, the critics Ion Negoitescu, Edgar Papu, Matei Călinescu, Nicolae Manolescu and others. Most of the dissidents who chose not to emigrate or who did not manage to exile themselves abroad lived under the watchful eye of the regime's agent in house arrest or in a 'forced domicile'. Some chose the path of retreat in the solitude of monasteries. Among the most notable names of philosophers we have Constantin Noica, Petre Țuțea and Nicolae Steinhardt. Many of their uncensored works, published after 1989 have been translated in numerous foreign languages. As far as the export of Romanian culture abroad is concerned, Alexandru Paleologu's words seem to have a sense of prophecy: 'Romanian culture is starting to be known. This can be our advantage, shredding the impermeable curtain that separates us from a real audience in the world.' (Paleologu, 1980: 239, our translation).

Another complex Marino noticed is that of 'bringing Europe home, no matter the cost. At our place. In Romania. In other words: to create in Romanian values of circulation – at least virtual, potentially European. In the same time, to found Romanian and European cultural institutions (foundations, magazines, publishing houses, etc.) in our country can represent the landmark of a most recent synchronisation with Europe's cultural productions.' (Marino, 1995: 110, our translation). A last complex, *of continuous beginning* seems to double those identity crises that have given an aspect of permanent improvisation to Romanian culture, involving the acceptance and surpassing one's own complexes and prejudices. Torn between the obsession of the beginning and that of a monumentality which is unthinkable, but through a new beginning, Romanian culture is maintained in a certain temporariness which is contradicted by the accomplishments, but moreover

the major availabilities (Martin, 2002). There is another common denominator in the two above-mentioned books: the eulogy to the critic spirit (Martin, 2002). It is uncovered in each of the pages dedicated, throughout time, to the morphology and physiology of the various autochthonous historical-literary constructions, as in the book on George Călinescu.

CONCLUSIONS

Consistent efforts, lasting for centuries, have been made in Romanian culture to create a practical connection to the rhythms of Western and universal culture. But Romania has opened the world's eyes to its own values and contributions. The idea that Romania has always had complexes of inferiority towards the cultures of its surrounding countries is not new and not arbitrary. Nonetheless, it has assimilated foreign models not to its own demise, but to its purposeful use. There have been creative assimilations coming from the most various spheres of influence: Byzantine, South-Slavic, Turkish, Russian, Austrian, German and French. These foreign influences have helped Romanian culture in creating a unique profile, rich and kaleidoscopic. A profile of synthesis. On the other hand, the complexes, once manifested, have degenerated in identity crises. The latter have yet turned more acute as the pressure of the model has turned stronger and the socio-historic conditions more severe.

REFERENCES

- Benoit-Dusauroy, A.; Fontaine, G. (1992), *Histoire de la littérature européenne. Lettres européennes*, Bruxelles-Paris, De Boeck.
- Lovinescu, E. (1934), *Istoria civilizației române moderne*, vol. 3, Ancora, Bucharest.
- Maiorescu T. (1882, 1989), *Literatura română și străinătatea*, in *Critice*, Minerva, Bucharest.
- Marino, A. (1995), *Pentru Europa. Integrarea României. Aspecte ideologice și culturale*, Polirom, Iași.
- Martin, M. (1981, 2002), *Călinescu și complexe literaturii române*. First edition: 1981, Albatros, București. Second edition: 2002, with a Foreword by Nicolae Manolescu, Paralela 45, Pitești.
- Motroc, G. (2014), <http://www.agentiadecarte.ro/2014/04/cartea-noile-media-si-complexele-literaturii-romane-de-azi/> [5.12.2015]
- Paleologu, A. (1980), *Ipoteze de lucru*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest.