Abstract

G. Călinescu, a Romanian writer, critic, literary historian and publicist, a multilateral personality of classic orientation, has a long, continued and high-class publishing activity, for 45 years (1920-1965), in over 30 prestigious literary publications. The publicist is a sober technician; he motivates the man into a scenery of order, he approaches with interpretive amplitude the idea of architecture, monumental, civic, architectural and cultural heritage, the traditional identity axis. In his novels and articles, he describes competently the old Romanian towns full of architectural history, highlighting the Greek and Latin harmony of the monuments, building visionary new cities (especially the capital Bucharest) according to new artistic rules and draws accurate scientific sketches. The paper proposes an analysis of these articles and writings of the past in order to prove the timeliness of the writer's vision regarding the importance of preserving the heritage of the Romanian architectural landscape designed in modernity.

Keywords: cultural heritage, urbanism, architecture, architect-character, journalism

1. Introduction

G. Călinescu's publicist work is partially known so far, summing up a huge work that has twelve volumes in 17.000 pages (Călinescu, 2012, p. 5) which haven’t been fully printed until 2012, after eight years of efforts of a whole team of researchers from the “G. Călinescu” Institute of the Romanian Academy. As far as the dimension and cultural importance is concerned, the journalistic work of G. Călinescu was compared with his predecessor’s activity, Nicolae Iorga, a historian, writer, literary historian, publicist and Romanian politician whose ideas, contributions, synthesis and works of great coverage (over 16.000 titles) include him among the
great historians of the world. Along with his literary work, during the 45 years of intense publishing activity (1920-1965), G. Călinescu wrote hundreds of essays, reports, studies of literary history, literary chronicles published in many important magazines of the time (Simion, 2004, p.132) as follows: the magazine of literature, art and general culture Revista Fundațiilor Regale (Royal Foundations Magazine) (1934 -1947) after the French model Nouvelle Revue Française, or the democratic attitude magazine and encyclopedic profile - Adevărul literar și artistic (Literary and Artistic Truth) (1871-1951); the weekly information and literary criticism sheet - Jurnalul literar (Literary Journal) (1939). (Hangiu, 1987, p. 19-21)

In this enormous public diary, as noted by the critic Eugen Simion, we find articles that transpose intelligently G. Călinescu’s principles, concepts and judgments, transformations, evolutions or involutions of the society at the time, personal stories and moods, documented scientific interpretations, judgments about fashion, theatre, film, art, cultural events, politics, economics, history, literature, architecture, urban planning, in other words, an overwhelming thematic area.

2. G. Călinescu - writer and social observer in the journalism of the 30’s - 60’s

The hardworking intention of the publicist with mathematically organized ideas was to straighten the Romanian architectural and social irregularities existing at that time (and unfortunately propagated in time), by designing architectural consistency and geometric order, through discipline, empowerment, high level of development. He travels abroad and in the country, he wanders, observes, meditates and writes. “The vacation allowed me to wander across the streets and strengthen some of my observation that gathered long ago at the bottom of my conscience” (Călinescu, 1935, p. 8, own translation).

During his frequent ramblings across the country (with impressions translated into articles like: Călătorie de studii I-V (Journey of study I-IV), Orașe I-II (Cities I-II)) and especially across Bucharest (București în trecut și viitor; București (Bucharest in the past and the future, Bucharest)), in addition to the positive aspects, he will record bitterly, sometimes with resignation, but often with riot, the countless competent comments on lack of impressive monuments, lack of architectural style and clear urban plans, the existence of buildings of different mediocre styles. In the article Spirit constructiv (Constructive Spirit) published in the magazine Adevărul literar și artistic (Literary and Artistic Truth) in 1936, the author complains about the demoralizing feeling caused by these shortcomings:

By the way, when a cultivated civilized eye falls upon our rural views, yet scenic in terms of wild nature, it remains embarrassed, demoralized. In Romania, whatever illusions we had, there is not the slightest trace of civilization. The architectural spirit is lacking and the house or the fence smears the field instead of developing it. (...) A whitewashed barbed wire surrounds certain green portions. (...) This fact saddens you at the beginning; it humbles and makes you unable to further contemplate the monumental history. A primitive wall of rocks would have been more in place. (Călinescu, 1936, p. 8, own translation)

For Bucharest, he uses drastic statements as an ugly, mottled, dirty, patched city with riddled pavements and a square as a formless wasteland, just to provoke, to attract the attention to a civic spirit that should exist, to a feeling of the city and a city spirit that must remain. The publisher knows and highlights the idea that this spirit is the foundation of any great culture and the great signs of a civilization are the monuments. He makes comparisons and gives the example of the great European cities like Paris, Rome, Venice, Florence, Milan perhaps as small as extensive as Bucharest, but so rich in unique monuments, collective monuments, communal palaces, cathedrals, squares, triumphal arches, pantheons, decorative palaces, gardens, fountains (Palais-Royal, Notre-Dame, Saint-Sulpice, the Louvre, the Luxembourg Gardens, the Champs-Elysees, the Palace Venezia, the Pantheon, the Dome, the Capitol), considering that these cities had an artistic ambition and a city pride that we
do not have yet. In counterpoint and contrast, when moving around the city and surroundings, at small churches and monasteries, everything saddens and shames you.

The article *A mătura și a construi* (Swiping and building), published in the magazine *Națiunea* in 1947, enlightens the purposes of these considerations:

Let me tell you that Bucharest is not dirty but ugly. It may have charm, that's another thing, perhaps it may include details of high artistic value (I share this opinion), but the city as a whole is horrible. The heterogeneity of the constructions, the lack of architectural taste in general, the poor distribution of space, the lack of large monuments in large blocks of stone, of perfectly defined squares, obelisks, columns, fountains, the use of cheap and shabby material to build the blocks, the presence of thousands of huts, the cracked sidewalks, the pavement irregularity, these and many more make Bucharest a meaningless city, variegated without being scenic, miserable, patched. What? Is it because of the snow that the Nation Square is ugly, or because it is a shapeless square, having nothing geometrical to surround it? (Călinescu, 1947, p. 1, own translation)

The publicist concludes in this article that it is not enough to clean the dirt of the capital, to swipe and to whitewash disgraceful buildings, luxury counters, modernist hovels, timber work huts, he calls for new constructions: “Let's build, that is the watchword. London was not built swiping.” (Călinescu, 1947, p. 1, own translation)

But not construction at any cost, copied, modern; if not adapted to the climate of the country, the houses can collapse and dissipate and thus modernism becomes useless and inimitably ridiculous:

The results are lamentable. (..) Look at the poor modernist houses. Licked by a greenish leper, riddled by rain, they are endangered now, if small, to collapse under the forthcoming piles of snow. (..) Where does this new inappropriate modernism come from? I assure you that not from the West. In any case, if from there, it comes completely distorted. (..) The German Modernism simplifies the Gothic, suppressing the warhead and the pilasters and cultivating the enormous smoky rampart. But our modernity is inimitably ridiculous, lacking a perfect reason. (Călinescu, 1936, p. 8, own translation)

The exegete S. Damian, in the study *Focare în romanul lui G. Călinescu* (Outbreaks in G. Călinescu’s novel), outlines a path of the writers who have dealt with a morphology of the city by describing the slums of the old Bucharest and refers to the unforgiving eye and to a spur of disqualification used by Călinescu when describing the capital city, which has deserted houses, decompositions, obsolete aspects under deceptive facades:

Deliberately, G. Călinescu places himself on an orbit of Wallachian literature (I. Ghica, N. Filimon, Anton Pann, I. L. Caragiale, Matei Caragiale), for who the morphology of the city is the primary target of the investigation. (..) Walking down the slums of the old Bucharest, the Wallachian writers recorded the contours of the streets and squares, the height and the extent of the buildings, the location of bridges, monuments, the frequency of vacant areas etc. (..) If we go beyond the apparent impassivity, we rather discover a polemical intent, an impulse of disqualification. What vindictive throb animates G. Călinescu’s urban spirit? From Ghica and Filimon to the years between the two wars, the capital changed and gained amplitude, it got rid of many obsolete elements. With an unforgiving eye, G. Călinescu continues to unravel under the deceptive facades the same half-oriental condition of decay and dissolution. (Damian, 1970, p. 150, own translation)
The publicist’s notes, so thorough, persuasive, denoting depth and competence in all aspects, are not without humour at times. In order to be perfectly vitriolic, the bantering gets subtle meanings by means of plastic comparisons, causing smiles and a perfect comic situation. So, here are some examples:

In the church, and I find this fashion generalized throughout the whole periphery, they sat a tiled stove. The one who made this Balkan exploit must be very proud. (...) Under the smoked walls with paintings good for founders and saints, the stove is neither here nor there. And it's big as a hovel and takes a quarter of the small church. (Călinescu, 1936, p. 8, own translation)

The church was painted as a certain room, and the veil is a disaster. The Patriarchy is asked to contemplate by a competent delegate this hilarious masterpiece. The doors to the sanctuary were painted white as the bed heads and a stainer drew some angels with red repulsive lips. The cans enjoy a greater iconographic attention. (Călinescu, 1957, p. 1-7, own translation)

When authority itself plans this monument, the citizen jumps to give his ideas: pearly cap – he cries –; what we need is poor people, city hall! (Călinescu, 1939, p. 4, own translation)

The critic Geo Șerban, in his essay Ulysse la ţărm (Ulysses ashore) in the volume Aproape de Elada (Near Hellas), considers that Călinescu’s intention was to educate the public opinion and to implant classical Greek architectural aesthetic preferences, in order to cancel through ambitious parameters an inherited provincialism:

His obstinacy for the monumental edifice reinforces, in the conscience, the idea of agora, the sense of community as the Greeks. (...) The literature teacher, applied to the daily routine, fills with his reflections of high posture Tribuna poporului (The Tribune of People), Lumea (The World), Națiunea (The Nation). In parallel, he participates at public symposia, he moves to give lectures in other places then universities, but with equal prestige, striving in addition to a broader audience from the need to combat the mistrust disguised under the pretext of “crisis”. His effort is always directed to push to maximum altitudes the public opinion, making it think in ambitious parameters at the relationship between civilization and culture, to analyze inherited complexes, outdated conditions of provincialism. (Șerban, 1985, p. 15, own translation)

3. Urbanism and Architecture in G. Călinescu's Writings

G. Călinescu deals, during his whole life, with the idea and the preoccupation about monumental, cultural heritage, architectural and civic, architecture, in his most important novels Bietul Ioanide (Poor Ioanide), Scrinul negru (The Black Chest of Drawers) and Enigma Otiliei (Otilia’s riddle), as well as in a multitude of articles of which we can only briefly mention a few titles: Sentimentul cetății (The Fortress Feeling) in Jurnalul literar (Literary Journal). 1939; Știință constructivă (Constructive Spirit) in Adevărul literar și artistic (Literary and Artistic Truth), 1946; Marea arhitectură (The Great Architecture) in Națiunea (The Nation), 1947; Nasc și la noi monumente! (Monuments are born with us too) in Contemporanul (The Contemporary), 1956; Orase (Cities) in Contemporanul (The Contemporary), 1957; București în trecut și viitor (Bucharest in the Past and in the Future) in Contemporanul (The Contemporary), 1959; Un arhitect (An Architect) in Contemporanul (The Contemporary), 1964. George Muntean, in his study G. Călinescu și artele (G. Călinescu and arts), tries to answer pertinent questions such as: Where did Călinescu inherit his passion for architecture? and what led and formed the writer for this concern, yet located in time?
You are still disposed to give the architecture the role of first violin between those “of Ingres” that Călinescu sang. (...) Where from he has this interest in architecture is more difficult to specify (the discussions in the press about the construction to be prepared after World War I), the national specificities in architecture, the contact with Italy, with its old and new architecture and with the Romanian school from there, seriously concerned about archaeology and ancient architecture? - all together?), but the public events on this side begin to thicken about the eve and during the last war, going up or even in cadence somehow equal till the end of life. (Muntean, 1968, p. 35, own translation)

The study of the critic Serban Cioculescu, Viziunea arhitectonică la G. Călinescu (G. Călinescu’s architectural vision), also analyzes the writer’s consequence and his pedant importance that he attaches, in his writings, to the habitat and its architecture:

In G. Călinescu’s novelist work, we are impressed at first glance by the important place occupied by the architecture. It could be said that just after the man and before the nature, there is the habitat and its concerns. As in his great precursor’s works, Balzac, the man is spiritually betrayed by his house which reflects his moral essence. (...) As in a opera overture, the amateur music lover can induce unmistakably that “qualité maîtresse” defined by Taine, so the warned reader, from the first pages of the book, could guide himself through the fundamental concern of the novelist and his predilection for the supreme art that is the architecture. (Cioculescu, 1966, p. 398, own translation)

In many literary chronicles that analyze G. Călinescu’s works, when referring their epic style, they use terms like architect, architecture, building, materials, etc. Therefore the monumental is credited according the merits, not only as a discussed principle but as an achievement of his own literary work; for example: the critic Perpessicius, in an article in the journal Romania in 1939, mentions: “Otilia’s Riddle is one of the best-built novels and Mr. G. Călinescu is one of the most experienced architects of the epic style, the materials are of the most serious ones.” (Perpessicius, 1938, p. 4, own translation).

In the article Bunuri comunele (Common Goods), the publicist confesses with visible pleasure, as a huge need of the spirit, the predilection for monumental and elegant, dreaming of big rooms, huge staircases, grandiose columns, a lot of domes, towers, gables, steeples, concave marble banks, vast geometric pools, huge waterfalls:

I have the passion of thick columns that you cannot surround with the arms and which lie down, in the sun, long pitch shadows. (...). I look for porches of pilasters and columns along which I could run across the town. More than that. I have the passion of big halls with painted ceilings or decorated with cassetons, of huge marble staircases, of fresco painted walls, of statues and busts, of columns of porphyry, of precious stone doors, of travertine walls, of grandiose glass and pottery. (Călinescu, 1944, p. 1-3, own translation).

Proving thorough knowledge of architecture, history of art and civilization, for correcting, straightening and rebuilding from scratch, Călinescu designs a new visionary city with precise plans and blueprints and proposes perseveringly the most intelligent solutions applicable in practice, but able to meet the high aesthetical exigencies of a large European city. He proposes an admirable synthesis of architectural elements and styles, of romantic, classical, gothic and Greek concepts:

If I had to rebuild Bucharest or another city, I would do as follows. I would raise a huge station of stone blocks with rooms and corridors decorated with reliefs, with coloured marble pilasters, with classical-
style giant façades, in front of an immeasurable square, in a perimeter of building supported at the base by porches. I would raise two big forums in two points of the city, one rectangular, let’s say, and a round one, Trajan’s Forum and Decebal’s Forum. I would cut an immeasurable square, bordered by a perimeter of massive building in severe and white style, a square that would always seem empty because of its size. Such spaces, framed within solemn constructions, awake a great sense of human sustainability in the soul. I would build a large block of buildings in a square like the Louvre or in a long rectangle, with many tiers and classical profile, with equal and long halls, giving one to another. I would build, along a whole street, on one side or on both, a salon of Loggia dei Lanzi, that is to say a large porch which walls would serve for frescos and between the pilasters, statues to be installed. (Călinescu, 1944, p. 1-3, own translation)

These cultural approaches of the writer germinate, take amplitude and act in a country during interwar years, during the reign of Carol II, being the period of reconstruction after the war, when the economy of the country starts to thrive and the Romanian golden leu becomes a strong currency.

4. Conclusions

As a representative of a collectivity, G. Călinescu shares his highly civic opinions to his contemporaries by all means he masters so well (articles, speeches, programs of journals that he establishes and coordinates as founding director) to preserve the cultural, architectural and civic heritage. And not only to preserve but also to enhance it, by forming a sense of ownership and community, well anchored and designed in modernity. It is a commitment that the publicist takes with enthusiasm and hope that things will take a positive turn and will turn into a new aesthetic impression, of urban expression for the urban future. The publicist states that not long after that, the reader will respect the candour of marble and the clarity of glass and will walk with bewitched steps across the streets of the future. Looking back, we can say that this is the period when, in Romania and in Bucharest, the most beautiful and solid construction were built or completed, with a unique architectural style which can be admired even today in their fullness. Therefore, the fortress dreamed by the author proved to be durable only through monumental and turns into a reality that persists by defeating methodically the ephemeral.

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