The role played by literature in the inter-cultural educational process. Educational extensions of the contemporary feminine diaries

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Abstract

Viewed by the specialised critique as texts displaying covert, non-intentional literariness, always rooted in the near-by reality due to the over-ruling and persuasive feminine conscience, the diaries written by women guide the young generation spiritual formation by means of their patterns pointing out intellectual openness and tolerance. Actually, the didactical and methodological resources of the Romanian contemporary educational system can never satisfy the intercultural openings implied by the rational drive for European integration. As they ask for the awareness of the multiple roots relating them to the multicultural, pluridentitary and democratic world, the didactic strategies used in high-school curricula when coping with the feminine diaries represent the ideal, balanced solution for the equation didactics – the contemporary context. From this point of view, the analysis focusing the feminine diarist writing has two major key-elements: the approach on the feminine cultural activity, which has been ignored too long now, imperatively asking for a moral and intellectual re-reading and the relation established between the diary and the contemporary Postmodern quest for the intimate, self-confessing narratives recovering the real world rather than for fiction itself.

Keywords: Inter-cultural education, Romanian educational system, Contemporary feminine diaries, European integration

1. Introduction. Theoretical perspectives.

The issue of feminine diarist writing should be placed in the contemporary European and global context, which rests under the sign of post(post)modernism and multiculturalism, of re-writing individual and collective histories from the perspective of ethnic, social and cultural-identity tolerance, as well as that of accepting the concept of cultural geography. From a sociological point of view, the emphasis is "on the fact that the frontier is not actually a spatial reality with sociological consequences; it is, rather, a social reality that takes shape in space. According to Georg Simmel, frontiers are the product of a psychological process of delimitation which results into territories, regions or countries – all of them representative cultural spaces for a certain social group and which do not necessarily correspond to the accepted political boundaries. Simmel stresses the active role of collectives in tracing boundaries and frontiers. He significantly widens the semantic field of the concept of frontier, including any process of delimitation, which invites to meditation on the role of the frontier in social and cultural practices.

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The dictionaries of cultural geography, which are highly popular these days, define frontiers as elementary spatial structures, serving as geopolitical discontinuity and as marker, landmark, operating in three registers: real, symbolic and imaginary.” (Spiridon, 2006) In this context, according to Victor Neumann, the concept of multiple identities is the perfect solution for a synthesis of the psychological and intellectual particularities of individuals with plural identities, coming from mixed families or forced to adapt to a new cultural space, perhaps only known from books. Such is the case of diaries and memoirs written by intellectuals of Romanian origin who took the path of exile, in the view of the spiritual and moral void produced by the post-totalitarian society, or who experimented inner exile, as a means to survive. “Unlike monoculturalism, and partly by reference to multiculturalism – the researcher states – the concept of multiple identity also has a positive charge. How should this concept be defined? The multiple roots, whether linguistic or community-bound, of most inhabitants of a city or a region suggest the existence of plural identity for each person. The life of representative social segments which relies on assuming the diverse cultural traditions (a situation which may involve the majority of the inhabitants of a space) indicates the existence of a multiple cultural identity.” (Neumann, 2001) If identity results from the process of negotiating the self image in relation to the images constructed of others, and to the mirror representation the others have of the individual who defines herself, feminine diarism represents an identity option which reflects almost all the components of the theories, of the educational practices and of literary discourse concerning the matter of multi- and inter-culturality.

From an educational point of view, the theoretical and practical research conducted on different levels of study (Moraru, 2001; Fokkema, 1993 and Derive) confirmed the readiness of pupils for the inter- and multicultural problematicas, as well as the remarkable efficiency in correlating the didactic methodology focused on the relationship between literature, education and social behaviour. In the opinion of a reputed Romanian educator, the multiple relations between society and education can be explained by the fact that both are structures undergoing “change, development, achievable and achieved in space and time. The spatio-temporal determinations strongly mark the entire praxeological circuit of the education-society continuum, providing specific aspects for the trails of logic that follow this continuum and for the particularities of each composing element: the subject of the educational activity, the object of the educational activity, the subjectivity of the object, concretized mostly in ideals, aims and objectives, the educational device, the educational messages, the educational setting, the educational situations etc. Within this context, each of the components changes in relation to the other, keeping its own autonomy within the circuit which could be defined as ‘social field of forces’. ” (Nicola, 1996 and Dasen, 1999) In this case, the role of feminine diarism may have a central position, since it could help to identify the main genre differences, while functioning as a supplier of behavioural models suitable to the identitary and cultural diversity of the present. The forms of inter- and pluri-ethnic adaptability and tolerance are equivalent with a manual of practical ethics of particular usefulness since it is based on direct experience, described as such and with the persuasive force resulting from the latent literariness of diarist writing. The inter-relatedness that exists between the educational system and society relies on the fact that „education is the process by which a community has the opportunity to transmit its values and knowledge from one generation to the next in a formal, informal and non-formal manner. Formal education, which takes place in specialized institutions, is, first and foremost, the place where the respect for ethnic diversity must be visible and encouraged, since formal education is that which is systematic, organized, legal, representative for the cultural space we inhabit.” (Gorcea, 2007)

2. Methodological preliminaries

In the context of contemporary Romanian education, interculturality occupies its rightful place only in theory. The efforts that are made for remedying this state of facts are considerable. However, the process promises to be a long and difficult one, delayed by the long-term effects of communist totalitarianism on consciences and the collective psychology. Therefore, we propose a psychological experiment, the subjects being secondary school pupils, and the aim being a clarification of the identitary status of each individual in the multicultural society of the present based on the analysis of the journal belonging to a Romanian writer in exile, Sanda Stolojan. Situated simultaneously within her country of origin and, by force of circumstances, outside it, the diarist combined lucid self-analysis, determined by the social and cultural conditionings of exile, with the analysis of the political situation and of the slow evolution of psychological structures within Romania, free of communism, and France, her adopting country. While didactically exploiting these aspects, Sanda Stolojan’s journal facilitates, for the secondary school
pupils, the understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to a delineation of the individual identity profile and of the factors that influence it, of the relationship between the *idem* pole and the *ipse* pole (Ricoeur, 1990), also raising awareness of pluri-identity and its open acknowledgement, where necessary, or its treatment with respect. The methods that we consider appropriate for this type of endeavour are the *case study* and the *debate* – the latter being rather an instrument subordinated to the former – as they allow both group activities and individual work. The *case study* allows the analysis of an identitary situation based on actual information and it gives pupils the opportunity to come with their own solutions according to their experience and their already assimilated knowledge. Furthermore, the method allows the passage from the particular to the general, by means of inductive reasoning, and it uses the literary resources of the journal as open possibilities to imagine similar cases of socio-cultural behaviour with effects on the personalities of the pupils involved. Additionally, the *debate* can successfully activate the learning process by allowing the students to freely express their own opinions and to support them. This may lead to a modification of their behaviour in society. After going systematically through the stages necessary to becoming familiar with the text, deciphering its main ideas and the immediate impact on the self image that the pupils have, the next stage should consist of discussing the specific situations in which the necessity of assuming the original identity while adopting its coordinates to the new cultural context was obvious for the diarist and for the other characters in her journal. The space reserved for our project and the main premise of the present article demand a reduction of the space dedicated to the preliminary stages of the experiment – which also presupposes the previous and thorough familiarization of the students with the terminology and operational concepts necessary for the analysis that they are supposed to make – so as to expand on the proposed model of analysis. The experiment can start from a set of key-questions brought by the teacher, for example: what are the stable identity markers of an individual cultural profile and what are its variable components?; what are the components and functions of the imaginary homeland, from the perspective of a Romanian intellectual woman in exile?; what are the effects, limitations and advantages of the feminine adaptability in the adopting space?; to what literary history does a Romanian writer in exile belong, since she publishes in the language of her adoptive country, while also continuing to write in her native tongue? etc. These questions will guide the reception of the text and will provide the pupils with the guidelines for the analysis. After a time interval appropriate for conducting research on the personality of the diarist, her public activity and her other writings, after group discussions and the public debate, the pupils will be asked to write an individual essay that will also be used in collective activities: the specific data of the identity *case* submitted for analysis, the perspective assumed on the text (more specifically, the working hypothesis), the identification of the main components (both the stable and the transitory) of the identity profile under discussion, the analysis of the identitary transformations and of the causes that lead to them, the self-explanatory impact of her own writing on the diarist, and, above all, the way in which all these can function as a behavioural guide for each of the pupils participating in the experiment.

### 3. A model of textual analysis

Facts come first, the people who make and remake political alliances on the great stage of history, the anonymous masses of people who suffer the consequences of this game with/of power prove fascinating for the diarist and she watches it retracing the image of the sage who contemplates and meditates on the great *theatre of the world*. Still bearing the traumatizing experience of communism, Sanda Stolojan always analyses, with lucidity and poise, applying cold reason and condemning, in the name of the Romanian community within and without the borders of Romania, and in her own name, the communist totalitarianism.

As a character of her own writing, she is characterized by the behaviour of a woman accustomed to spend time in the company of powerful men, capable of political decisions with implications on the European or global stage. Her public life is that of an active woman, with demonstrated aptitudes of interpreter and translator, always asked to intermediate as a translator, official meetings between chiefs of state (she was the official interpreter for the Presidents of France, starting with Charles de Gaulle and ending with François Mitterrand), which places her almost exclusively in a world of dominant masculinity. Her spiritual role-models are all men, philosophers, like Emil Cioran or Constantin Noica, Nicolae Steinhardt – a Jew converted to Orthodox Christianity in the communist prisons and author of the moving *Journal of Happiness*, in which he recounts the sufferings endured and the spiritual experiences that he had – the writer Eugen Ionescu or the diplomat Alexandru Paleologu, a man with a broad humanist education.

Sanda Stolojan – the feminine character who is asymptotic to the author of the journal, to her biography, to her identitary apprehensions, to her vocation as a writer who belongs to a community and a system that supports a system of values and an *imago mundi* that is never altered by the exile – also builds and evaluates herself in her private life around the same collection of strong masculine role-models. They are interiorized and claimed: Emil Cioran, as an example of Romanianness (re)negated in the name of a nihilism felt to be necessary for the spiritual survival of the individual, but later reclaimed, under the pressure of a stable, immutable identitary nucleus; the father, whom the character seems too long for secretly; Duiliu Zamfirescu, from whom the diarist inherited, in spite of her reticence and her lack of confidence in her epic strain, the interior structure and the power of seduction through writing specific to the creator.

Therefore, as a public figure, Sanda Stolojan proves to be a Western woman, closely familiarized with the French and European diplomatic circles, with the main protagonists on the stage of history. However, on an interior level, the writing gives life to an Oriental mentality, almost archaic, one might say, in which the *imaginary homeland* keeps both the boundaries and the colours of the Balkan space, as well as the aromas, the sentimental vibrations and the images of the Romanian rural space, which had a clear connection with the interiorized myth of the golden age and of childhood. The dynamism, the ebullience and the devotion towards the political and moral cause of the Romanian political exile during Ceausescu’s dictatorial regime are counterbalanced by the Pascalian restlessness of the woman who discovers that the world is void of sacrality. Furthermore, the collective memory, the mental representations with clear identitary functionality, which (re)write the history of survival through frequent imaginary or actual returns to Romania, imbue the writing with the marks of the feminine ego of Oriental essence, often inclined to daydream in nature, to idle while resting her spirit in the aromas of wild vegetation, as she used to do in her childhood, in her grandparents’ courtyard. Whereas in appearance she is free of the spiritual servitudes that characterize femininity in the post-totalitarian space, the diarist carries within her, unconsciously, the need to build masculine patterns of behaviour and thought for her.

The journal focuses on the profound feeling of uprootedness of the feminine ego. The exile is rather a state of mind, a *modus vivendi* and a continuous existential motivation; it proves inoperative after the fall of Ceausescu’s dictatorship, both as a multiple identitary status, and as a cohesive moral principle. Not surprisingly, the uprooted woman builds a compensating identity for herself, centred on the image of the abandoned country and on the Romanian language. Nevertheless, besides the motivation of the exile, this auxiliary identity, while necessary for a spiritual survival, can no longer find justification: “Exile made me discover that I had roots that a part of me was missing. There are bonds of this kind, love stories that are kept alive by separations... [...] I live in a state of disorientation, with the sensation of a void. After the enthusiasm of the revolution, we, who confronted communism, experience the same state of soldiers returning from the battlefield...” (Stolojan, 1999)
Sanda Stolojan is a polyglot, with pluri-identitary roots, accustomed from an early age to the European cultural space, be it Italian, French, or English, and she transforms her writing in a search for herself, as a feminine profile caught between two worlds and two cultural paradigms – that of origin and the adopting one. One may speak of a spiritual itinerary that unfolds among spiritual models in which she projects her own aspirations and identitary anxieties. It is an almost desperate search for a balance between the games of the affective memory, keeper of her own identity markers, post-revolutionary Romania, a world turned upside down and degraded both spiritually and morally, and France, where Cioran and Ionescu live, absolute values of the Romanian and South-Eastern mental structures, and where the games of power of the present are also played.

Preoccupied with finding the archetypal profile of the Romanian, the diarist cannot see herself, in the inextricable blend of Oriental spirituality and Western cartesianism. She can only see her image in a masculine reverse, mirrored in the human structure of Alexandru Paleologu, descendent of an old family of boyars and survivor of six years in communist prisons: “Notwithstanding all the hardships he had to endure, A. P. never lost his Romanian character, his capacity to accept, if necessary, the cohabitation with the forces of evil, without rebellion, as a fatality that he continued to refute in his own way...” (Stolojan, 1999) In the case of Cioran, the agony of the Romanian writer in French is also painfully experienced by the diarist, since she is in the years of her senectitude as well. The death of the philosopher ends an existential cycle on many levels – that of the Romanian exile in France and of the Romanian exile in general, that of communist Romania and of an entire sacrificial generation of Romanian writers that includes Sanda Stolojan. Therefore, Cioran’s tragic option has a paradigmatic value – it is a painful renunciation of the self so as to give primacy to his creation: “Cioran sacrificed his soul for his spirit. His passage from the soul that suits Romanian language (the lyricism of his first essays) – to the dryness and the irony demanded by the spirit of the French language.” (Stolojan, 1999)

The diarist lives in a multicultural society that continuously debates (or questions) the relationship margin-centre, a society that transforms her multiple cultural identity into an instrument of adaptation to the pluri-lingual space she inhabits, in a hermeneutic balance beam between the identity markers specific to the individuals who are traumatized by the life in a (post)totalitarian society and the full life in a free Western world. It is thus that one may account for the encounter, in the pages of the journal, between the Albanians, who are the last to symbolically tear down Stalin’s statue, thus completing the political fall of the Soviet Bloc and the leftist French intellectuals who are still doubtful of the social cataclysms that can be produced by communism and of the respect with which Germany honours her dead from all wars and on all fronts. Moreover, the actual entrance of Romania in the European circuit – many towns in Switzerland adopt Romanian villages, thanks to the hearty people who live there – is rounded by the reassuring image that is left with the diarist by an Egyptian of Coptic origin, president of the United Nations, by the name of Boutros Ghali. And here we have a mention of Grégoire Brancovan, married to a woman from Laos and a Westerner to boot, while also keeping the old Oriental custom of moving the prayer beads through the fingers. The genealogy of this character, descending from an illustrious family of boyars that also produced a ruler for the throne of Tara Romaneasca, is illustrative for the mix of cultures and ethnicities in the Balkan space and which renders, on a smaller scale, the pattern of European multiculturalism: “I remembered then that his grandfather, Anna de Noailles’s brother, had been married first to a Greek woman from Egypt and that the mother of his grandfather Constantin and of Anna de Noailles was the daughter of Musurus Paşa, a Greek from Fener, Turkey’s ambassador to Paris.” (Stolojan, 1999)

4. Conclusion

In an attempt to define herself, the diarist openly acknowledges her identity in permanent transition, the importance of the ipse pole in the process of accommodation with the new space: European, French and, at the same time, cosmopolitan. Similarly, she recognizes her profile in the still unclear image of Romania, captured in a few significant snapshots and retrievable due to the characters who populate the (simili)real of the journal as well as the stage of public and private history and who act as mirrors: “The diary speaks about an exiled woman at the end of the 20th century, driven by the wind of bygone times, someone living on a neutral background, like so many other beings come from the East. I saw myself exactly so, in the mirror of a certain ‘gone with the wind’ Romania! It could not be otherwise, except on the background of a Parisian court. Places are, in the end, what they have to be, that is landmarks on the road.” (Stolojan, 1999) In the search for one’s self.
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