

SYSTEM AND ESSAYS

*F*or some time now, the philosophical essay has been disdainfully, sometimes thoroughly cast out as an imposture of would-be authors or an obstinacy of "Centaur's": fiction writers among philosophers and philosophers among fiction writers, all striving to be what they could never be. Romanian philosophy, chiefly produced by university professors, has dwelt under the sign of systematicism, which is not a bad thing after all. Nor is it so bad that it used to be, and perhaps still is, somewhat scholastic; or that our philosophers may have endeavoured, and still do, to be creators of schools or systems at any cost. These days their wish is even greater and stronger, irrepressible it seems, as it emerges as an (also) emotional reaction (following an ideologically depersonalising globalism) meant to re-institute everyone in another, ever-changing, possible world. More than ever, almost everyone – as the poet said, with a Robinson in his soul – is enclosing and organising his space, for the time being only with a semblance of closeness, more or less, to the reality of finding (and shaping) the self through a much needed centripetal action. For the other movement, towards something else and someone else, a movement of cognition-recognition of the other, being that of a subject, implies that of institution. This is the reason why philosophising is intensely soliloquial, thus being learned and practised (or learned anew, if forgotten) the technique of the dialogue. In a way, it must have been the same in the past, only the determinisms and motivations were different.

There is no need to conceptualise here this blockage (whatever its amplitude and form) before dialogue; it may not be a normal feature, yet – in principle – it is not negative either. Contextually, it may represent a chance, as the much blamed ivory tower is also a place for reshaping the world, far from the sometimes deceptive, other times misleading rumours of the "public place". Hence – if true – the zest for systems in Romanian traditional philosophy, but also in that of today, perhaps only with regard to nostalgia's ways.

This is, however, only one side of the matter.

We grew accustomed to look upon the essay as a literary genre, and accept it as such. But initially the word stood for experience-experiences, for induced trials, for life experiences occurring in the imaginary presumably meant for learning (repeating) in order to assume the real – in a different way. Șerban Cioculescu thought "trials" was fitter than any other word: "we propound trials... if we think of the epithet 'tried' for a man who went through a lot of experiences and derived profit from what life has taught him." The last "essay" in Montaigne's book, On Experience, otherwise said On Trials (i.e. on making trials, or putting to the test), is also very edifying, as it is very close to a discourse on the method of guiding our minds rightly.

Setting ever variable situations, the essay embraces our cultural representations almost entirely, as everything is, after all, just living in yet another experiment. It is not the case of the arts and philosophy alone, but of the "sciences" as well; aren't these, in some manner, equivalent to essay-writing in terms of the imaginary and trials? If so, this is all the more applicable to systematic philosophies. Is not a system another experience?

Distinct genres employing distinct styles, "essay" and "system" philosophy respectively need not contend – in principle – for exclusive authenticity. As the old – paraphrased – saying goes, only precarious "systems" and stumbling "essays" are dull and irrelevant, lacking in worth not through comparison, but through measurement by the genre's standards. Thus, strictly speaking, this is a pseudo-problem: systematic exposition or essay-like exposition. Is dry, levelling, analytical discourse that would drive even the paper it is written on to despair, inherent to philosophy – a discourse that, in Blaga's words, turns gold into lead, like a reversed king Midas? Cantemir's discourses in The Hieroglyphic History, Blaga's trilogies, Cioran's moralistic views, I. D. Gherea's paradoxical essays – which is what essays are about, the more literary, at first sight, but so reflective-philosophical essays of Camil Petrescu and Mihail Sebastian, D. D. Roșca's Tragic Existence, Noica's entire work, including even his studies of logic, Vasile Băncilă's "exercises", and even Crainic's "theologising" are no less philosophical or worse in terms of philosophy because they are "well" written. The Middle Ages perceived the supreme categories – the being, the truth, good, and the beautiful – as converging (conver-tuntur), communicating with one another, and even each as identifying with all the others. Blaga's philosophy is all the more true as it is beautifully fashioned. As a possible world, which is what any philosophy is about after all, isn't it fascinating? Wouldn't anybody like to live in its space? Except "scientific" philosophers maybe – who would never confess to it, though.

Gheorghe VLĂDUȚESCU

Translated by Adrian SOLOMON