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**Imagining the national language in the XIX<sup>th</sup>  
century Romanian poetry**

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The main objective of this study is to investigate the way in which the national language is perceived in the linguistic and poetic imaginary of the nineteenth century Romanian writers. Having been studied inconsistently by the critics so far, this issue is, by contrary, from our point of view, one that is worth being analyzed systematically. In the first place, a wider panoramic approach of the subject unwraps us a substantial perspective of the way poets characterize the national language in the epoch. Features such as uniqueness, harmony, beauty and noble origin are the most common arguments advanced in the polemical debates that have at the core the question of the national idiom. Secondly, studying the national language from an aesthetic lookout as a poetic idiom, enables us to get an insight into how the transition from an objective, ideological language to a more subjective, personal, creative facet of it is made. The immediate question that arises here is how the conversion is done? Are the two alternative forms of language part of the same idiom or not? Thus, another important part of our investigation is the study of the way in which the pre-modern and modern writers conceptualized the national language. We choose to explore this matter, pointing out the changing of patterns within the poems which were selected chronologically.

The beginning of our research involved the study of the “imaginary” concept, among the various writers consulted being Jean Jacques Wunenburger, Gaston Bachelard, Gilbert Durand and Jean Paul Sartre. From this panoramic view of the subject, in the second chapter, we started narrowing the hermeneutic circle to the investigation of “the perfect” language throughout history. In this sense, Umberto Eco’s book *The search for the perfect language* has been a cardinal reference in revealing the story of the multiple utopian language projects that man created over time. Afterwards, we investigated the national languages process of normalization viewed in the context of the European literary nationalisms. While researching about the issue, we have noticed two contrasting attitudes against language: the first one is the need felt by the theoreticians to highlight the harmony and the uniqueness of the local, national languages and to differentiate them from other more powerful languages which dominated them. Another attitude is one of rejection: the linguistic elements inherited from other civilizations are perceived by philologists as threatening to the development of the national idioms. For example, if we take into account the creation of the French language, from all the various dialects spoken in the rural areas of the country such as the *picard*,

*normand, bourguignon, poitevin, champanois*, the one used in the centre, the perimeter of Paris, triumphed. Called *francilien*, after a word composed of *français* and *ancienne*, its imposition in the areas with a patois-speaking population encounters resistance from the inhabitants. The answers in the well known outline of Grégoire demonstrate how local communities consider a foreign language that is imposed from outside. From their perspective it is an idiom that has negative features, while the local one is characterized by the nobleness of its old age, by its harmony or its sweetness. The Norwegian language appears due to the linguistic reforms undertaken both by Ivar Aasen, who creates an idiom of dialects called *landsmål*, which originates from the ancient languages spoken by the Norwegian people, and by Knud Knudsen, who proposes a Norwegian literary language, named *boksmal*. Also, the birth of modern Serb-Croatian is due to the emancipation of the Serbs, who support the ancientness and the authenticity of the language and distinguish it from the Russian, thus constructing a national language underpinned by the *Stokavian* dialect used by Serbs, Montenegrins, Islamic Slavs, and a part of the Croatian.

The following chapter interrogates the national language as a lyrical, poetic language highlighting its main traits in a very brief summary, while the next one is assigned to questioning the specificity of poetry from two main directions of research. In the first one, it is viewed as an art that is created from the inner lyrical ego, while, in the other, as a creation built inside the limits imposed by the language. Also, we considered necessary to add to our study an insight into the manner in which writers conceptualize poetry because we believed that investigating the features that poets assign to it, gives us a primarily insight into their conception about the poetic language.

Given the complexity and the extent of the chosen subject, it was necessary from the start to bring it down into certain temporal limits. Thus, we chose to refer only to the nineteenth century as it is, in our opinion, an interesting period in terms of the polemics that have at their core the national language genesis. As we have discovered, the point of view that the poets have about their lyrical writings lies between two antithetical poles. One extremity is characterized by a broader, impersonal focus, and the other, by a more subjective, personal view. Illustrating it briefly, we assert that for the first writers, poetry is seen as an instrument of persuasion created mostly for the amusement of women, or as a way of conforming to a trend. In this case, writing is born not from an inner impulse, but rather from the urge to

create a national literature and to offer the Romanian culture a literary heritage. Then, the 1848 revolutionary wave writers exploit the social, reforming side of the poetry, while their emphasis on the Latin origins of the Romanian language underline its noble roots. The images of the antique ruins that are keeping traces of the forgotten ages of glory become the most common places in the Romanian revolutionary poets meditations. The poetry written by them turns to be an ideal way in epoch to celebrate the national heroic hypostases. Starting with the poetic imaginary of Mihai Eminescu, the aims that poetry has to achieve no longer belong to everyone, to the nation that must be "awakened", but on the contrary, they turn to the lyrical self instead. As such, for Eminescu, poetry represents the individual fight of the creator with the old language, to whom he wants to give a new shape. At the same time, poetry is, from the poet point of view, the expression of a true emotion.

As far it is concerned the second major division of our study, it is assigned to the analysis of the national language imagined in the poetry of the pre-modern and the first modernity writers. Like in the first part, we started each chapter with a theoretical framework. The diachronic research of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century Romanian poetry provided us with a rich material of poems from which we had to operate a selection taking into account the need to preserve only those texts in which the poetic language is the subject of the writers' meta-discourses. The texts submitted to the interpretative process are heterogeneous from the point of view of the literary species they belong to. Thus, the material we have analyzed is made up of elegies, sonnets, meditations, satires, odes, or pastels.

The first writers who are imagining the poetic language in their verses at the beginning of the Romanian literature put the emphasis on the signifier, not the ideas transmitted, which means they create a sentimental poetry that has pathetic, bold accents. Wearing the burden of the development and the improvement of the Romanian language and literature left by his grandfather, Iancu Văcărescu manifests in relation to his instrument of work, the language, a series of insecurities and fears. What we could notice in his case is a lack of a sense of responsibility regarding his own writing, that makes him considering only the muses guilty for the precariousness of his lyrical narrative, which, from his point of view, must be holy, beautiful and moderate in expressions. For Costache Conachi, the native language and the language of poetry are one and the same language. For instance, in its conception, the former must be made up of short words in order to be easily used by writers.

Moreover, in his view, the national language should be a motivated idiom regarding the relation between the expression and the meaning it conveys. This fact reflects again that the poet imagines the language as a harmonious, even poetic construction.

If at the dawn of the national literature the writers look at language as to a burden, once with the generation of poets belonging to the 1848 revolutionary wave, the distrust in the pragmatic force of words became, quite the contrary, a strong belief. From the theoretical perspective of Gheorghe Asachi, the national language is not only poetic, it is as well, the sister of Italian, a culturally superior idiom, with a noble and prestigious origin. According to the poet, the use of the Latin alphabet, the borrowing of Italian words adapted to the specificity of the Romanian language and the valorization of the church idiom, are among the main objectives that the mother tongue should mark in its road to becoming a national idiom. In the writer's view, these measures must be taken by a committee of grammarians from Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia. At the same time, Asachi finds inspiration in the Italian literary model as well because of the lack of classical patterns in Romanian. Therefore, the poet chooses to approach the Italian language, from which he adopts the rules of poetic art, which, according to his views, fit better with the Romanian poetry. Imagined by the poet as a dual expression, which implies both reason and feeling, the language of poetry must possess an essential characteristic, namely to be harmonious.

I. Heliade Rădulescu enlarges the theoretical palette of language representations scale. The linguistic purism and the Latin descends of the language are the most important features the national language must have from his point of view. What is more interesting about this writer position regarding the topic is that he is attentive not only to the ideas he is transmitting, but also to the way in which his message is delivered to the public. In order to convince the community of the validity and importance of his language theories, he is aware that he must talk their language. Therefore, proving to have a good knowledge of his readers, Heliade does not hesitate to play with them and to offer them not only a language theory, but a narrative, a story tale, instead, which most of the time is either humorous, comic, or, ironical and preachy. For example, Romanian is described by the poet as a lady dressed inadequate because of the heterogenic origin of the pieces of clothing she is wearing. Of course, in this case, Heliade makes reference to the existence of the foreign elements in the language,

considered by him redundant, because, as the poet says, the mother language has enough expressive material and does not need other borrowings.

To the same extent as he takes part in the national language scene play, Heliade seems to retreat into the backstage, leaving another character to lead the so complicated orchestration of the mother tongue setting: the genius of the tongue. The latter is perceived by Heliade as a superior character that knows what is the ideal path that language has to follow, also its functioning mechanisms and, thus, can protect it from foreign influences that only distort and corrupt it.

Regarding the national language as a poetic idiom, in Heliade views, this one should be written in moderation, in a skillful, high and simple style. In addition to the idea that a writer ought to limit its inspiration to the chosen subject and do not outreach it, a thesis that Heliade himself cannot comply with in his verses, the poet recommends to others to respect the sound harmony of the poetic language when they are writing.

On the other side, compared to Heliade, Grigore Alexandrescu is less interested in commenting upon the issue of the national language, preferring rather to meditate in his lyrics on the poetic language instead. Portraying himself in epistles and satires like a romantic individual, characterized by a tendency towards reflexivity and dreaming, the poet illustrates in his verses various dialogues with his creative self, with his own thoughts, or with other writers considered in the epoch literary models to which he relates with reverence. The textual space gives him the opportunity to reflect on his own creative nature, on his status as a writer, but also on the act of writing itself, which emerge, as the author confesses in his poems, against his will. In addition to the multiple dialogues that he engages with in his writings, such as the one with his lyrical character perceived as a creative instance, or the one belonging to the poetic language or to the other contemporary writers, there is also a case in which the poet describes himself with irony. And by saying this, we make reference to the connection between him and the modern society, where he feels, as he says in the lyrics, like an intruder, an inadequate character.

For Cezar Bolliac, too, the national language must preserve its Latin linguistic heritage and avoid the adoption of outside elements, either of Greek or French origin, for instance. While imagining a tongue adorned with foreign features, the poet foresees for it a grim future, because, if the language continued developing towards a wrong path, in time,

communication would make no sense, the speakers of such a language would no longer understand each other. Moreover, according to the frightening prospect of the poet, with the loss of its language, the Romanian nation will no longer have traditions, an history or a religion, in other words, the nation will live in a deserted homeland. Once having had been deprived from their national identity, the people become strangers in their own land. Probing, undoubtedly, a true revolutionary romantic spirit, Bolliac believes that the main aim of poetry is to reform the society and the individual, to restore justice and order in the community, to promote equality before law, or to cancel censorship, etc. In the poet's view, such art can only be written in a "magic" language that alleviates the sufferings of the poor and at the same time, it criticizes the materialist passions of the rich.

Occurring in the theoretical imaginary of Dimitrie Bolintineanu too, the question of the national language is nevertheless not a major one, the poet is being rather interested, like Bolliac, for instance, to reflect on the literary problems of his time. Moderated in expressing his views on the linguistic issue, Bolintineanu merely emphasizes the importance that the words have in the human beings fate. Having a conception similar to the one expressed by Cezar Bolliac on poetry, the poet considers that the latter must illustrate not only high feelings, but is also obliged to arise in the Romanian people the emergence of the national consciousness. Regarding the poetic language, according to Bolintineanu, this must have an impact on changing the destinies. Moreover, as it can be seen in his legends, the language proves there its pragmatic power in the sense that the rulers are determined by the heroic discourses of other characters to return to the battlefield, therefore, winning the battles against the invaders. However, trusting in the force of that words have to shape reality is not the only attitude that the poet expresses; on the contrary, there is a certain skepticism, illustrated, for example, in the *Conrad* dramatic poem, where the language of poetry crosses a crisis, being perceived by the main character as a weak, unnatural language, thus, incapable of expressing ideas.

Compared with the last two analyzed writers, Vasile Alecsandri has a greater interest in theorizing the national language. Thus, this issue is being discussed in his correspondence, in the prefaces of his works and, also, in various articles and pages of literary dictionaries in which he criticizes the excess of the Transylvanian linguists to build a national language that has a Latin shape. In building his ideas about the language, the writer proclaims to follow



three principles: the creative intuition, the language harmony and the inspiration. Stating this, the theoretician delimits himself from a scientific, rigorous view of the national language creation, promoting a rather subjective, even poetic perspective.

According to Alecsandri, the popular idiom, the principal component of the national language, must be shaped in order to express modern, urban, not just rural realities. The poet considers that the peasant language is an invaluable and original cultural resource that needs to be discovered, brought to light and protected. Like the other writers of his generation, Alecsandri militates for the removal of foreign language elements, because he considers that the time has come to speak Romanian-Romanian, not Romanian-Greek or Romanian-French. On the other side, according to the poet, the language model proposed by the Transylvanian scholars is based upon etymological principles which he considers to be wrong. Calling the linguists who follow those rules the "Romanian pedants, infernal clues", (Alecsandri, 1974, 320), Alecsandri believes that they are assaulting the common sense, the aesthetics and harmony of the Romanian language, replacing the idiom with an artificial, unnatural one.

The national language perceived as a poetic language also appears in Vasile Alecsandri lyrical creation, without being, nevertheless, a predominant subject. Instead of this, the writer prefers to reflect upon and comment, rather, the stages of the creative process or the poet's role in society. From his point of view, the language in which poetry must be written has a divine harmony. In other words, as Paul Cornea points out, "such an accessible and transparent art that does not install barriers between literature and life seems to suggest that the access to the great elevations of the soul is not embedded and does not require an initiatory spin". (Cornea, 1980, 169) If in Vacarescu imaginary the poet is portrayed as a laborer on the empty field of literature, for Alecsandri, the artist is a bohemian, a favorite of the Muses, who are waited in an atmosphere of calmness and peacefulness. That is what the poet needs in order to write a lovingly verse. Therefore, the impression that the poet wants to convey is that he is sovereign of his writing and that he dominates the poetic language.

According to Mihai Eminescu point of view, the most suitable national language has to be the product of a past time, to which only those who see it with the child's innocent eye have open access. In various journalistic pages, the poet gives an account of the Romanian language history, mentioning that the elders who were living in the medieval times had the fortunate intuition of choosing the Wallachian dialect as the basis for the construction of the

literary Romanian, thus, creating an unitary, simple and harmonious idiom: "Taking the language as it grew up in her own individuality, the old men created a spelling for the Romanians, as it doesn't exist in any of the modern languages". (Eminescu, 1974, 61) However, once it was caught in an apocalyptic temporality, the national language became an exclusively imaginary, fictional construction, which had no connection anymore with the framework of reality.

Treated by the poet as an ideal projection, the language is included in an heroic past, has a history and features characterized by modesty, morality, creativity, attributes that he no longer encounters in his contemporary society. In contrast, Eminescu believes that in the society in which the social values are turned upside down, the authentic language of ancestors is transformed into a gibberish speech promoted and used in journals, while the idiomatic expressions, the authentic forms and the old-fashioned language gradually disappear. His main ideas regarding the national language creation conduct to the preservation of the ancestral linguistic specificity, to the prudent adoption of neologisms and to the preservation of the phrasal idioms. Besides, Eminescu considers that an important role in the process of building the national language plays the Romanian Orthodox prints, also the practice of writing and, last but not least, the poetic language. From the poet point of view, the printing forces language to normalize itself, process which will, eventually, assure the fastening and strengthening of it. Once engaged in the writing practice, the language enriches its vocabulary by receiving expressions that are to be adopted if it does not contradict its nature.

Similarly, the poet sees archaisms as a way of enriching the national language. If the old sayings are promoted as essential elements in the construction of the idiom, then, on the other hand, a language created after etymological principles is considered by Eminescu to be harmful, because the freedom of pronunciation leads to the weakening and the corruption of language. Instead, the poet proposes the phonetic uniformity. Regarding the idea of adopting the foreign words, the theoretician has a moderate attitude, drawing the attention to the fact that the purification of language means using expressions already assimilated in its structure, which may harm its unity. Apart from that, from the poet perspective, the enrichment of the Romanian language through the adoption of neologism synonyms does not lead to the evolution of the language as long as they have the same meanings as the substituted ones. Therefore he condemns the use of the Latin expressions utilized in exchange for the local

words which have the same significance. From his point of view, the entrance of the neologisms should be permitted only when there are new realities that need to be expressed through language.

As outlined, Eminescu vision of the poetic language is characterized by an insistence on the language roots and the mythical past. The first attitude that we noticed regarding the artistic language is the nostalgic remembrance of a primordial, paradisiacal language, where there is no arbitrary relationship between the expression and the meaning that it is communicated, but a natural, motivated one. The language spoken by nature can be understood by the lyrical voice only at the innocent age of childhood, when the world is still perceived in a naive way. In the poem "The epigones", the poetic language of the pre-modern poets who believed in their writings is compared to the "honeycomb" (Eminescu, 1964, 37), which would mean that Eminescu imagines a geometrically perfect language. Also, in the poem "Why are you whispering so mysteriously"? the words of the beloved woman, the muse of his poems are a "source of sweet songs". (Eminescu, 1964, 272) It is interesting to notice that this kind of ideal language can be remembered only through the poet dream and belongs to a former time. That is why the figure of the bard who is composing lovely sweet songs will be replaced by a profile of a rebellious poet who interrogates his language, reveals its limits and, in the end, denies it, choosing instead of the poetic utterances the silence. The poet engaged in the adventure of searching the perfect poetic language ends his road desiring to find the other half of its divided self. But as the first layout of the poetic tongue still remains a remote romantic dream, it is equally probable that Eminescu wish to regain the lost harmony may be fulfilled.

The last chapter that interrogates the Eminescian poetic universe analyses the manner in which the poetic language is born in its most critical moment: when it has to name a reality that does not exist yet. In other words, we asked ourselves how the emergence of the universe is expressed in Eminescu cosmogony imagery. In our interpretative approach we have been able to watch the poet at work, since the study of the successive versions has given us the possibility to follow how his ideas are born, shaped, or changed. The poet's solution to express the indescribable is to use discursive methods in order to create a language that gradually loses its expressive material, its substance, a language based on contradictions, negations, or rhetorical interrogations, made up of parts of speech which are lacking the

elements of connection. A reality that does not exist yet, the nothingness is illustrated with a silent language within the limits of grammatical logic. The poetic word has a linguistic charge, but once it is placed within the structure of the verse and in relation to the other words, something strange happens: its signification is erased. The tension of the discursive oppositions reproduced as in a mirror another tension, that belongs to the primordial matter being about to emerge into the chaos at the birth of the world.

Aiming to illustrate the historical-literary route of the language perception in the Romanian XIX<sup>th</sup> century poetry, we have noticed that at the starting point of this evolution there is a poetic language understood as an "adornment", characterized by an emphasis on the versatile mastery of the poet in finding the beautiful word that embellishes the ideas expressed. Next, following the literary history wire, we noticed how the poetic language leaves more and more behind the rhetorical exercise label, which has been experienced at the beginning of the epoch. Instead of this, we see a more subjective, lyrical criterion, focused on the unique, individual experiences of the poet. The revolutionary poets create the ideological, nationalistic language with a social and a political thesis. Thus, the poetic language has received the power to move communities of people, to return rulers to the battle and, thus, win over invaders, to create and strengthen national identities, to bond people with the same history and traditions. This kind of poetic idiom that has such a social power will no longer be a viable option for Mihai Eminescu. Fighting with the language, revealing its weaknesses turns to be, eventually, a positive point, in the sense that in this way, the language finds its autonomy and singularity. The direction towards which the poetic idiom evolves is a post-romantic one, in which its limits and its vain struggle to express are the main features. In the end, Eminescu believes that the word creates meaning based on the rigorous metric patterns of the fixed form.

Taking everything into account, it is our belief that a history of the way the national language has been imagined by its creators in the nineteenth century poetry reveals the dual dimensions of the language viewed firstly as a creator of national identity, then, as a language created in the artistic laboratory of the poet. In the writers imaginary, the limits between the two facets of the language are sometimes transgressed, the national language being sometimes a poetic one, and, also, the latter having social and political roles in the epoch.