

ABSTRACT

Key words:

typological affinities, similarities, pre-romanticism, the era of sensibility, Graveyard School, poetry of graveyards, night, vanitas vanitatum, fortuna labilis, Ossianic elements

The present thesis, *The Influence of English Pre-romanticism upon Romanian Literature. Correspondences, Synonymies, Elective Affinities*, is the outcome of a personal desire or better said of an acute interest in both literatures (English and Romanian) to trace a parallel among the literary papers of the era preceding the romantic movement, that is the “the era of sensibility” or “pre-romanticism”. Therefore, we are trying to trace the important elements of the literary current which opened the taste towards a new expression of feelings in a way as sensible as possible. Our paper includes some of the most representative creations of both literatures, offering examples as well as a thorough study of the poems that form the object of the present thesis.

Taking into consideration the large reservoir of creations which coloured and improved the development of literature, we limited ourselves over some of the creations which represented real opening gates towards the expression of new sensibility. Of the English literature, we stopped over “Graveyard School” with its promoter Thomas Gray and his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* in order for later our attention to be forwarded towards “The English poet of nights” – Edward Young and his *Night Thoughts*. We couldn’t exclude from our study a series of poems which opened the gate towards tradition, myth in terrifying Northern scenery haunted by shadows, songs incorporated by James Macpherson in *The Poems of Ossian*. Of the vast territory of authors and creations pertaining to Romanian literature, we have selected some of the poems representative to our theme. We have focused on Grigore Alexandrescu, Ion Heliade Radulescu, Vasile Carlova or Alexandru Macedonski. Our study was inevitably extended over the literary period of 1848 revolution, trying to offer examples from the

Romanian literature through the creations of Gheorghe Asachi, Alecu Russo, Dimitrie Bolintineanu or Costache Stamati. We have tried to emphasize, as much as possible, the resemblances between the English and the Romanian literature, as well as the inherent differences determined by the originality of each author. Establishing a contact between the creations of the above-mentioned literatures is based both on subjective motivations as well as on scientific works, necessary to any PhD thesis.

A continuous study of the writings has led us to the conclusion that the literature between the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century presents common features in different geographical areas, united by a strong desire of revolt against the norms imposed by the classical period. The English writers as well as the Romanian ones introduced in their writings similar elements determined by the necessity of expressing a new thinking. England generated the group of so-called “poets of ruins” who express their thoughts in lyrics full of musicality contributing to the changes of classic tendencies in the literature of the entire Europe. The same accent of revolt is found in the Romanian poets, who, based on a revolutionary patriotism, contributed to the forming of a new taste pertaining to the afterwards Romantic literature.

Starting from the principles of comparative literature, we have tried to cover the sources of interpretation of the analyzed works, which have helped us form a common working ground whose orientations were incorporated into a structure based on six chapters, all having as main purpose the emphasizing of common features of the poems involved in the present study.

The first chapter, “Introduction. The Permanence of a method. Between the old and the new comparative studies”, is dedicated to a global view on comparative literature, discussing both general and particular features of the old and new comparative method. Though at the beginning of literary criticism, influences were perceived as the direct relationships between two works of art or literatures, throughout time the literary perception has been changed considerably, critics emphasizing the typological affinities between two works of art without endangering the reception of a literary work. The wide reception that “The Graveyard School” met in the worldwide literature cannot but demonstrate its value and its expressive power throughout literary evolution.

The second chapter will try to offer a synthesis of European Pre-romanticism, a current which changed the poetic thinking of the entire Europe. The transition from reasoning to feeling was determined by pre-romanticism which rises as a revolt against the order of contemporary world. The exacerbated sensibility founded on a scenery dominated by ruins, fogs, graveyards and graves, was spread on the entire Europe – in France by the translations of Le Tourneur, in Germany by Herder, an admirer of Ossian, and Goethe who translated in *The Sufferance of Young Werther* “Selma’s Songs”, and in Italy by *The Graveyard Poem* of Foscolo. The pre-romantic thinking reached Romania at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, determined by a stringent need of a change, forming a real esthetic pleasure which arises from the perception of realities.

The pre-romantic character presents the first features of the further morbid romantic, he/she is characterized by sensibility, passion and melancholy on the basis of solitude found in nature. The pre-romantic is attracted by simplicity, by elementary life and, starting from these assertions, he/she is inclined towards contemplation and meditation. The problem of death and human destiny doesn’t offer peace to the pre-romantic character, often placed in front of God, interested in finding good from evil, trying to find the path towards immortality.

“The Graveyard School” chooses as main poetic themes the graves, the ruins, death and phantoms, succeeding in placing itself beyond reason in order to emphasize expression. At the same time, the English pre-romantic era formed a new taste for Gaelic remains, for Northern mythology dominated by fog, empty rocks, stones covered by mosses and phantoms of the past.

The same inclination towards sensibility and myth connects the Romanian literary creations to the exploration of inner life and the place of man in the universe. Barbu Paris Mumuleanu, Gheorghe Asachi, Iancu Vacarescu, Vasile Carlova, Ion Heliade Radulescu, Grigore Alexandrescu succeeded in combining in their works both meditations and powerful patriotic feelings. They cultivate pre-romantic themes, loneliness and melancholy in a darkened scenery dominated only by moon light.

The opening of a gate towards the unity of European pre-romanticism invites us to search in detail the similarities between the poetry of graveyards of Thomas Gray – “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” and Grigore Alexandrescu – “The Shadow of

Mircea. In Cozia”, “The Graves. In Dragasani”. The third chapter thus presents a parallel between the poems of the two important figures of English and Romanian literatures on the basis of promoting the value of sentimental literature in sceneries dominated by graves and graveyards.

Grigore Alexandrescu and Thomas Gray start their meditations in graveyards, simply portrayed in their works, places where the ancestors continue their sleep under stones with no fast, a sign that, in their opinion, man ends in the same place no matter the wealth in his life. The ground is the one which receives their bodies and not imposing monuments which have no value any more. Both poets share the hope of memory by the next generations. Gray’s simple man, Alexandrescu’s heroes, they all represent models for the generations to come.

The scenery is also typically pre-romantic – night falling in *Elegy* or night in Alexandrescu are brought into scene from the first lyrics of the poems. And, in such sceneries both poets express their sadness and loneliness, the only feelings that accompany them. Antithesis is also present since it has the purpose of drawing attention to the value of lost generations.

Besides a series of similarities and elective affinities brought into discussion, we cannot ignore each poet’s originality, the purpose for which they express their inner thoughts, a purpose which differentiates the powerful social character of Gray’s *Elegy* from that of patriotic structure of Alexandrescu.

In a similar sad mood, we continue in our fourth chapter with the poetry of ruins. *The Night Thoughts* of Young had a large echo in the Romanian literature so that poets as Vasile Carlova, Ion Helade Radulescu or Grigore Alexandrescu found the scenery dominated by death favorable to their own thoughts. The ruins praise the past, the simplicity and the heroism of ancestors.

Young’s *Nights* reach the lights of the Romanian literary scene by the translation of Le Tourneur and then of Simion Marcovici, the Romanian reader taking contact with the interpretation of a new sensibility. Faith plays a major role both in Young’s inner thoughts and in Carlova’s, the Romanian poet who praises the victorious past of the nation. Both poets use the antique theme *fortuna labilis* in the presentation of their ideas on the basis of a dream and melancholic scenery of night. Everything is ephemeral, death

is obsessively present in the poems from whose lyrics a powerful feeling of melancholy emerges.

The biblical mysticism, the exacerbated cosmic feeling, together with the intensity of inner thoughts bring Ion Heliade Radulescu close to the European pre-romantic sensibility, and in particular close to the English expression of feelings. Both Heliade *A Night on Targoviste's Ruins* and Young *Night the Ninth*, praise old times, sadness emerging beyond the power of words. The world is impassible to both poets' pain, they express their sadness alone in front of the ruins of missing towns (Young) or of supreme monuments represented by graves (Heliade Radulescu).

The patriotism of Carlova, Heliade Radulescu and Alexandrescu is stronger than that of the English poet. The last is more obsessed with finding the meaning of life, with finding immortality while the Romanian poets use their sadness to glorify the example of the past.

The tenebrous atmosphere dominated only by moon lights is found in Grigore Alexandrescu as well, often compared by critics such as Heliade Radulescu, George Calinescu or Paul Cornea with the English pre-romantic poet. *Targoviste's Ruins* awake the melancholic genius of the Romanian poet animated by an exacerbated patriotic feeling.

The theme of night extends over Alexandru Macedonski as well, and, the next chapter passes from "the English poet of night" to "the Romanian singer of night". The hope in eternity together with the closeness to God, are often presented in the lamentations of both poets. Night bears the attributes of silence, darkness and mystery, perfect for the meditation upon man's nothingness. Moonlights bear the inspiration that poets need so much in expressing their restless thoughts. The funerals of friends, relatives and even the own funeral viewed by Macedonski offer a sinister picture of extreme beauty in the pre-romantic poetry.

The last chapter is dedicated to "Ossianism" since, starting from the translation of James Macpherson, long-time disputed by the critics, we extend our study over the Romanian revolutionary period of 1848. We focus on the literary works of Gheorghe Asachi, Ion Heliade Radulescu, Grigore Alexandrescu, Alecu Russo, Dimitrie Bolintineanu or Cezar Bolliac.

The Romanian literature couldn't borrow directly the image of fog, the emptiness of scenery as it is presented in Ossian but used a series of elements which molded on the realities of the Romanian people.

Lead by an intensive desire to awake the patriotic feeling among their contemporaries, the Romanian writers present important figures of history in a manner resembling that of the Northern bard. These figures are placed in wild and grandiose sceneries where the empty rocks and the stones covered by mosses form an incredible image. The phantoms, the shadows are often brought into scenery in order to encourage the heroes in Ossian and to be an example for present generations in the Romanian writers. Women are often used since the ideal of beauty appears incorporated into the image of young girls with white faces and beautiful hair who wait for their lovers to come back from battles or follow them in fight disguised in warriors. The inspiring harp joins Ossian and the Romanian writers along their presented heroic actions.

Thus, throughout our study we were accompanied by the splendor of melancholic genius derived from the poets' meditation reduced to themes such as *fortuna labilis*, *vanitas vanitatum*, mingled with a powerful feeling of loneliness.

The paper ends with the conclusions of this study followed by a bibliography which played an important role in presenting our inspiration sources. Among the critical studies we enumerate those of George Calinescu, Tudor Vianu, Alexandru Cioranescu, Paul Cornea, or Alexandru Dima, together with the critics and theorists of English literature such as Andrew Sanders, Jonathan Culler and especially Samuel Johnson. They all played an important role in reaching our difficult goal that we have proposed.

Despite our desire of presenting as many common aspects of both literatures, the present thesis doesn't exhaust the vast interpretation and investigation modalities of the creations brought under the lights of criticism. We hope that this study will represent the opening towards more complex interpretations of the literary works, being a first accent of drawing a parallelism between the two literatures.