

**REDEFINING (THE) ROMANIAN (PEOPLE)**  
**-MIHAI EMINESCU'S AMERICA VS TODAY'S MULTICULTURALISM-**

**SORINA GEORGESCU**

University of Hyperion, Bucharest

As the title of my paper suggests, my inquiry attempts to reread/redefine Romania as a nation, together with the people that composes it, by making a comparison between two very different and at the same time similar ages in our history: Mihai Eminescu's age on the one hand, and today's rediscovering of Romanian's history on the other hand. The first will be discussed in relation to the idea of herderianism and will be exemplified with Ronetti Roman's *Manasse* (1900) and the second will be put in relation to Multiculturalism and exemplified with the last performance of Victor Ion Popa's *Take, Ianke si Cadir*.

My thesis is that Herderianism, understood as ethno-culturalism, was adopted by Romanian intellectuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because it fitted the Romanian dream very well: it promoted the idea of self-awareness and self-confidence in the national values at a time when parts of today's Romania were under foreign rule. On the other hand, my paper will try to show that *Take, Ianke si Cadir* may be seen today in the light of the Multiculturalist trend understood as a pledge for ethnic tolerance.

In his 2004 book *Conceptually Mystified: East-Central Europe Torn Between Ethnicism and Recognition of Multiple Identities*, Victor Neumann identifies two distinct European trends in defining what we call today 'people', 'nation', 'state'. The first appeared in France after the French Revolution, and went the same way to England and Dutch, while the second appeared in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and expanded to Central and Eastern Europe. The first was termed *le peuple* by historian Jules Michelet and was concerned with the masses, with continuity between present and past and totally opposed Augustin Thierry's assumptions about racial origin as an important reference. Rather, it underlined the very principles of the French Revolution, 'liberte, egalite,

fraternite' under the veil not only of freedom but also of a 'melting pot' among various races-tribes such as the Celts, the Romans, the Germans that made France:

A people that claims to be a 'champion of freedom' not only cannot believe about itself that it might be racially determined, but it is persuaded that such an assumption is contradicted by its own historic evolution. (Neumann 26).

The second was termed *das Volk* by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, for whom language was the main issue, especially when regarded as the 'mother tongue':

He thought that the tragedy, having led to the retardation of human groups populating Europe, could have been rooted in imposing a foreign language for over one thousand years: it is the Latin language. Herder is deeply convinced that this explains the lack of execution or disappearance of monuments and the nonexistence of a code of laws of the motherland to ensure a distinct governance that would conserve 'national history'. (Neumann 88).

Herder's vision is explained by Neumann as the Romantic, idealistic way as opposed to the French rationalism. And here he defines the most Romantic element in Herder's theory, namely the *kulturation*, the search for the "ideal of the 'heroic man', the sense of 'heroic life'. And perhaps the most important distinction between France and Germany in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries will be the type of education people received in schools, as remarked by French Jules Michelet: where France teaches sciences, Germany preaches history and philosophy.

There is however a scientific element in Herder's theory that Neumann remarks and opposes: the difference of species exemplified through the permanence of certain characteristics in the Jews. And here we have Neumann's conclusion: "Marrying history to an ideology that intended to define identity in monocultural understanding becomes the first choice of the Herderian discourse." (Neumann 101).

From here Herder derives key ideas such as 'motherland' understood as only one people, and the 'savagely-mix human species' as being unnatural. And the reference will be to the Habsburg monarchy, "the multi-ethnic states around Prussia that dominated wide areas and that were kept together by principles inconceivable to the fantasies of such ideologists", in Neumann's words.

And here comes a very plausible explanation of Herder's attitude towards nationalism, which, in my view, will make a possible context for explaining Romanian herderianism. According to Neumann, Herder reacted against the intellectuals in Berlin

for whom French had become the language of the royal house and of the bourgeoisie during Enlightenment. This is why Herder's patriotism will be "cleaning oneself from slag".

And, again, Neumann's own conclusion:

Herderianism was a turning point to all those scholars-ideologists that supported ethnic differentialism, using it to build their national doctrine. This is how the idea of promoting the interests of their segment of society, namely feudal aristocracy was developed. They treated collectivity as a fiction, using – with some noticeable exceptions – ethno-cultural propaganda to have access to power. Imitating a cultural and political model generated by the German intelligentsia, the East-Central European elite was unable to generate more than a limited emancipation restricted to the aspirations of a privileged group. Ignoring the gaps between themselves and the masses of their own regions, the elite advocating the *volksgeist* theory was unable to develop a liberal movement such as the Western European one. (Neumann 107).

So the main point in Neumann's theory is to oppose the Herderianism being translated to 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania. But what was the real 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania? A possible answer would be, in my view, one of the perfect places to fit both the context and the need to cultivate and promote it.

How do Berlin intellectuals and their royal house fit 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania? Well, in my opinion, if we read the literature and drama of the time we will notice two important parallel trends. On the one hand, the Austrians were ruling Transilvania and Bucovina and the German Carol I ruling Romania together with the Liberal Party. On the other hand we see the Liberal progress understood as the import of the French language, institutions and life-style by the young Romanian bourgeoisie, as in Vasile Alecsandri's 'Coana Chirita' or Ion Luca Caragiale's characters. A Liberal reaction would be a quotation from 'Despre Ranile Nevindecate' published in 2004 by Horia Roman Patapievici, in the volume called *Discernamantul Modernizarii* where he tells about his family in a very simple, non-propagandistic way:

If my mother's village was pure, ethnically speaking, being isolated from the rest of the world [Oltenia], my father's village was extremely varied [Bucovina]. There was an harmonious combination of Romanians, Ukrainians, Carpatho-Russians, Jews, Poles, Austrians, Germans and Russians; all this amazing combination living under royal administration, depending directly on the Habsburg family. There was no family with pure blood, since mixed marriages made the rule, not the exception. My grandmother must have been an Ukrainian-Pole, while my grandfather was an Austrian-Romanian. I don't know exactly. From my family stories I learned that life was joyful, varied and very unpredictable. There came actors and opera singers from Vienna.....[...] Even though German was the official language, people understood each others in Ukrainian, Romanian, Yiddish, Russian and Polish. It

was, if one can imagine, not a traditional village, but a cosmopolitan one.  
(Patapievici 17)

Reading such a delightful passage one might justly wonder what would be the connection between this reality and herderianism. And a first answer might be the German language as the official one in a Romanian province. According to Dumitru Murarasu in his *Nationalismul lui Eminescu* (1932), the years 1871-1879 were of extreme importance in the Moldavian history, especially for Bucovina. It is the time when the German Liberal government comes to power, made by Germans and Jews. Now all favorable decisions for keeping Church autonomy are broken and a German University is founded in Cernauti. In 1870 Gheorghe Hurmuzachi was afraid of losing under the Liberals all that Romanians had recovered from the Turks and Tartars. (cf. Murarasu 37)

This is the time when Mihai Eminescu, the son of a Romanian peasant from Moldavia, visits Bucovina and Transylvania in order to see the places where our most important fighters for the Romanians' rights lived and wrote. While in school, he had learned from his teacher Aron Pumnul all about being a Romanian and he had passionately read the works of our first historians. According to Dumitru Murarasu he was simply in love with Romania as defined by the pure Romanian peasants and the old Romanian aristocracy. He was a very complex personality and understood nationalism as a religion that must be deeply felt and not pronounced at random. And he compared it with the God of the old Hebrews:

Nationality must be felt in our souls and not only spoken. What we feel and respect deeply we seldom speak! The old Hebrews were not allowed to pronounce the name of their God! (Eminescu, *Adevaratul nationalism*, qtd. Murarasu 24)

According to the same Murarasu he studied philosophy and history in Vienna and Berlin, and returned to Romania in order to organize the celebration of the Romanian Medieval ruler Stefan cel Mare and pledge for the spiritual union of all Romanians. According to Titu Maiorescu, "his past and his present are the result of his innate genius, too powerful in itself to allow unhealthy inferences." (Maiorescu 272) According to George Calinescu in his *Istoria Literaturii Romane de la Origini pana in Prezent* he studied in Vienna and Berlin only because Titu Maiorescu sent him there and paid for his studies.(cf. Calinescu 445). Whatever might be the case, it is admitted that he was an extremely informed person and he adopted the one philosophy that could promote the

Romania of his dreams: herderianism and Darwinism. And there are passages in his articles where he applies Darwin's evolutionism to the development of the Romanian nation in order to oppose, like Titu Maiorescu, the way foreign institutions were imported without any critical judgement:

And if we want to see the true cause of this evil, we will see this is the liberalism, as taken from abroad. Nature is conservative; most creatures do not progress; those creatures inferior to man are stationary. The human being possesses, through his nervous system, a progress tool, but he cannot progress all of a sudden, but slowly and step by step. A people needs time to acquire new qualities, because his old qualities are no longer adequate. One cannot make a fish leave the water because it will die; one cannot simply change the economic and social conditions of a people over night, without leading the people to death. Both the individuals and the people are the result of two contradictory principles, first the heredity, the conservative principle, that makes one cherish the past traditions and customs, and continue what his parents began, the second is the adaptability, that makes a people seek new skills, according to the new environment he lives in. If the environment changes slowly, if progress is made step by step, everybody has the ability and the time to adapt himself, but if the change is spontaneous, only a few can progress, most of them remain behind and face great difficulties. This is the truth, according to Darwin, for all organic world, human beings included." (Ms.Ac.Rom. 2264 fol. 284, qtd in Murarasu 193)

He is also quoted in George Calinescu with his term "rassa romana", a combination of pure Darwinism and herderianism (cf Calinescu 458). So, what did he understand by 'rassa romana'? What did Herder understand by motherland and mother tongue? Like all Conservative Party to which he belonged and like his newspaper's *Timpul* doctrine, he dreamt of an official Romanian language, a Romanian literature and a Romanian economy. So he charged the Liberals for being foreigners, for supporting the Jews and for tolerating cosmopolitanism.

Like I've already proved with Patapievici, there was no official Romanian language in Bucovina even if Romanian was tolerated. We also had Transylvania about to be hungarized through education..

But what could have made him so herderianist and even Darwinist about our economy? Pamfil Seicaru gives us an answer that will be met in all of Eminescu's articles concerning Jews and Liberals. It seems that the origins of Romanian anti-Semitism can be traced only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Transylvanian Dionisie Pop Martian publishes a book about economy *Gandirea Economica in Romania*. Here he notices that the main part of the business, defined as trading and lending money with interest, was practiced and conducted by Jews supported by foreign influences and the Liberals. (cf Seicaru

135). Considering the huge number of Jews emigrated in Moldavia, I think Eminescu's reasons become clear. We'll see his protests in many articles, but the space here allows me only one quotation from 'Din marea unitate a tracilor' in 1879:

When we see the disastrous results of Jewish rule in Galitia, when the kingdom's official newspaper shows that 800000 peasant houses were sold only in five years to pay the debts, if we take into account that the whole population of this country is only 3 millions with the Jews and that this terrifying figure represents all of the Christian family-heads in the villages, when we see a whole disinherited people about to leave the motherland to go to.....America..... (Eminescu 98)

America was for him the one country where cosmopolitanism ruled and everyone could go. But it was not in the positive sense we see it today. Quite the opposite, as we can see in 'Cu cat trec una dupa alta zilele' from 1879:

Politically speaking, what the Romanian nation has done ever since 1848 was to systematically give up her traditions and authorities, to throw away any thing that could have been accounted for as original in her national life. At the same time she adopted all the reforms and the cosmopolitan theories, all international standards regarding politics, intellectual life, language and style, even more passionately than all the American colonies. Liberty without limits for any individual, for all the slag that would come from all over the world, both in Romania and in America; brotherhood and equality between humanbeings; big and small republics and presidents at every corner of the street and in all cafes houses, both in Romania and in America; cunning, frauds and cynicism – the virtues of a citizen; speculation – the purpose; and humanitarianism – the means. All these politically speaking; economically speaking, nothing, clearly nothing; unfortunately this is where we totally differ from America. We can see the result, but we may see it too late. (Eminescu 109)

Speaking about 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania I think we should also see a Jewish point of view. And here I will give the example of a herderianist Jew in Moldavia, the very Ronetti Roman who studied in Berlin and wrote at *Timpul* at the same time with Eminescu and Caragiale (cf Calinescu 554). According to Calinescu he was an intelligent person who tried to understand and objectively judge his own race. His most famous play, *Manasse*, was written at 1900 and it is the saga of a Jewish family presenting the mentalities of three generations, which is why the message is not very clear. The first generation, Manasse, is from Moldavia and he is the true conservative and herderianist character in the play. He keeps the religious tradition like a Rabbi and, just like Eminescu, dreams of his family being united only with Jews. In Romanians he can see nothing but hatred and prejudice:

Lea! There is a limit in everything! Where do you think you are? In what home? A young lady in the house of a foreigner! What world were you about to enter? What do you know about that world, you, a Jewish woman? There is nothing there, but

hatred. The disastrous hatred against me, against you, against every Jewish thing.”  
(Ronetti 30)

The second generation is that of his son, Nisim, who makes business in Bucharest, and has a Jewish wife and children. Nisim and his wife are much modern and tolerate Romanian friends. They have already forgotten some of their family traditions.

The last generation is that of Lea and Lazar who will marry Romanians. Lea is very fond of Manasse but she is totally in love with a Romanian lawyer. She is not a businesswoman, but she likes to play the piano. Nisim opposes her Romanian lover and finds her a Jewish one, described by Ronetti Roman as an extremely practical and business-oriented person, someone sensitive Lea could not possibly fall in love with. At the end of the play she marries the Romanian lawyer, while Lazar marries the lawyer's sister, against Manasse's advice. The result will be devastating: Manasse dies.

For George Calinescu the message is ambiguous and he identifies Ronetti with Manasse instead of the young generation (cf Calinescu 554). I think Ronetti presented the true conflict between Romanians and Jews in Eminescu's Moldavia: even if a mixed marriage is accepted as a possible solution, he also answers to the nationalist politics by being herderianist for the preservation of his own race: Manasse, the real Jew, will never accept this mixture. I think it is his friendship with Eminescu and Caragiale who puts this touching words in Lea's mouth: “we should not define one against each other, but we should all be the same, humans, Romanians, no matter the religion or the ethnic group we belong to.(Ronetti 108)”

This was a drama that didn't remain without an answer. In 1930, the Romanian Victor Ion Popa was writing his *Take, Ianke and Cadir*, in the same region, Moldavia, with the same problem: a Jewish woman marries a Christian. But this time it was a story with a happy ending and in the comic key. Unfortunately it is Victor Ion Popa's play that remained so many years without an answer in the view of our critics until its last performance in 2002.

In order to understand the impact of this play we are forced to use only very recent comments that see it as an extraordinary pledge for interracial tolerance, even when working with stereotypes.

The three main characters are the representatives of three different ethnic communities in Moldavia: a Romanian, a Jew and a Turk. They all are businessmen in the old sense of the word: they have their own little shops. Here I think we should take into consideration that Victor Ion Popa was a Romanian, so let's regard his description of the three characters and their relationship as a Romanian point of view.

There is a series of houses. There are three little shops, just like in a little provincial market town. The first shop belongs to Take, the second to Ianke, and the third and the smallest, to Cadir. The first two houses are built exactly the same way, but they have different paintings. For instance, Take's house has red walls, white roof, while Ianke's house has blue walls and red roof. Take's sign: "La Take" (Take's) is black with yellow letters, while Ianke's sign is yellow with black letters. Cadir's little house and sign took a color from each of them. For instance, the walls are red, the roof is black, and the sign is yellow with white letters. Take and Ianke sell the same kind of goods, colonial products, a little ironmonger and other stuff. Only Cadir sells specific Turkish products: coffee, a specific Turkish sweet, and all sorts of sweets. It's summer time. All three little shops have curtains, of course each of them of a different color. (Popa 7)

So what does this imagery suggest? In my view these identical houses with different colors, or the same colors placed differently, show how three apparently different nations, or ethnic communities can live in harmony in one and the same city in Romania. What we have here is the mainstream Romanian 'Take', the Romanian Jew 'Ianke', same houses, different colors, and the Romanian Turk, 'Cadir', a synthesis of the others two.

In what follows the author underlines the symmetries in the scenery, and the "border" between Take and Ianke as just a "sort of bay window with the doors open". The fence that separates them has the "little gate open", too.

Besides the colors of the houses and the "perfect symmetry" in the houses and yards, there is another very important element that expresses today's idea of 'unity in diversity': the old tree in the last act.

The same settings as in the second act, but with a fence in front. It is in fact a view of the two courtyards, through the little path that passes behind them, separating them from the railroad we have mentioned before. Of course, each little courtyard has its own little gate, one on the right side and the other on the left side of a big old tree – planted along the fences. Around the tree and under its shade there is a crude wood bench. But the courtyards reached this point by growing narrow. As if they all had started – even Cadir's courtyard – from the old tree's root. So that both the tree and the bench belong to the three courtyards at the same time. (Popa 85)



So what we have here is symbolism in order to identify the main reasons for three different ethnic and religious groups to be able to tolerate each other in today's Romania. At least this is how this play is seen today by both Romanians and Jews.

Both the houses and their jobs make the three of them friends. And there is nobody in that market town to challenge it. Unlike Manasse's case, the second generation has the same preoccupations, only at a different level: Ana and Ionel are ASE (Economy) graduates. So the friendship is already there, as already natural in the era the play was written. Take loves Ianke's daughter, and Ianke loves Take's son. Only Cadir is completely alone, since he didn't have the courage to marry a Christian, something he deeply regrets. This might still be debatable today, since the play was written by a Romanian and not by a Turk. One might argue that the characters are only stereotypes. This might be, on the one hand, meant to represent a general idea about to refer and expand to other regions in the country. On the other hand, the only thing we can find out from George Calinescu is that Popa was very fond of using dialects in his plays (cf Calinescu 555). And I think the stereotype here is mainly through language, since the standard image of the old Jew as it appears in Andrei Oisteanu's book is either a Rabbi or a businessman with side whiskers, something we do not find here. It is true, though, that Popa presents Ianke as the best shopkeeper, as opposed to the Romanian Take, and Ana respects the pattern of a very beautiful woman.

And still, is it all right for a Jew woman to marry a Christian men? A grandfather like Manasse would have clearly forbidden it. But perhaps Romanians and Jews have changed, even in Moldavia, perhaps once Romania already a nation and Eminescu's dream fulfilled, there is no need for intolerance, and perhaps those who appreciate this play today, move from (extreme) herderianism to multiculturalism and tolerance.

I conclude my paper with the last dialogue, which might be considered the message of the play, and which can be the literary proof for writers like Lucian Boia, who calls Romania a "cultural mosaic" (Boia 23) or Constantin Schifirnet who tries to reread our most nationalist, even anti-Semitic writers and politicians as only well-meant Romanians.

Ianke: [...] How about the children?

Ionel: We'll make two of them...

Ianke: At the same time?

Ionel: Yes - one for daddy, one for you...

Ianke: Ok. But why don't you have them make an association and make a double?  
We won't fight! The only reason for our fight was your happiness... lucky us a  
Turk was here to pay for the damage. But what are you going to do with the child?  
Ana: *A human being*, papa! Let's not think about the future! (Popa, 103)

#### WORKS CITED

Boia, Lucian. *Romania. Tara de Frontiera*. Bucuresti: Humanitas, 2002

Calinescu, George. *Istoria literaturii romana de la origini pana in prezent*. Ed. Al. Piru.  
Bucuresti: Minerva, 1985

- Eminescu, Mihai. "Cu cat trec una dupa alta zilele...". *Ne e sila. (Scrieri politice)*. Ed. Cornel Brahas. Bucuresti: Editura "Soroc", 1991
- . "Din marea unitate etnica a tracilor". *Ne e sila. (Scrieri politice)*. Ed. Cornel Brahas. Bucuresti: Editura "Soroc", 1991
- Maiorescu, Titu. "Eminescu si poeziile lui". *Din Critice*. Ed. Dominica Filimon. Bucuresti: Editura Eminescu, 1978.
- Murarasu, Dumitru. *Nationalismul lui Eminescu*. Ed. Oliviu Tocaciu. Bucuresti: Editura Pacifica, 1994
- Neumann, Victor. *Conceptually Mystified: East-Central Europe Torn Between Ethnicism and Recognition of Multiple Identities*. Bucuresti: Editura Enciclopedica, 2004
- Patapievici, Horia Roman. *Discernamantul Modernizarii. 7 Conferinte despre situatia de fapt*. Bucuresti: Humanitas, 2004
- Popa, Victor Ion. *Take, Ianke si Cadir*. Bucuresti: Editura Univers si Teatrul National I.L.Caragiale, 1972
- Ronetti, Roman. *Manasse*. Bucuresti: Hasefer, 2000.
- Schifirnet, Constantin. *Geneza Moderna a Ideii Nationale. Psihologie etnica si identitate romaneasca*. Bucuresti: Albatros, 2001
- Seicaru, Pamfil. *Politica aistorica a Romaniei*. Ed. Mircea Colosenco. Bucuresti: Editura Elion, 2002