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BALKAN RHETORICS

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Abstract

By tradition, Rhetorics represents the art of combining parts of speech supported by theory. Unfortunately, the separate study of Rhetorics as a subject taught in schools, sized to exist at the end of the XIXth century, yet it is still crucial for many domains like public debating, politics, teaching, and not in the least, for older literature texts that enable us to perceive reality from a historical standpoint because they need to be persuasive.

The main aim for our research is to analyze the features of the Rhetorics in the Balkan Peninsula as employed by Vasile Voiculescu, a Romanian writer from the beginning of the XX th century. The purpose of doing so sustains the idea that, through literature, one can have access to a certain type of mentality, a particular way of seeing life, such as those practiced in the Balkans for ages. Therefore, by reading Voiculescu's writings, people interested in cultural differences, in habits and customs, in identity issues and traditional communities, overall, can definitely have a great insight into all of the above. So, our paper could be regarded as a journey through centuries, a way of shaping and reshaping ideas, rituals, celebrating cycles of life, a spectacular journey made possible with the help of literature because Voiculescu, as many other Balkan writers, plays the role of a spokesperson for his nation.

Keywords: *Rhetorics, Balkan, mentality, identity, features*

INTRODUCTION

Rhetorics. General description

The existence of Rethorics as a structured discourse, spoken either by warriors, by lay people or by gods, is present in Homer's Iliad, but aknowledging it only comes to be realized in the Classical Period when there were many goods left with no owners because of falling tyrans in the Greek cities of Siracusa or others. The first people to establish the rules of Rethorics were Corax of Siracusa, Gorgias and Isacrate, Greek sophists. The tradition that these forefathers imposed was based on a couple of rules: 1.setting up a discourse plan (foreword, expozition, testimonies, indications, probabilities, revision) which could be revised and decided upon along the way, 2. the judicial-political origin of the art which tried to offer a solution for solving conflicts. Therefore, Rethorics „gets recognition in the practical fields of ethics and politics” (Noul dictionar, p. 282). The starting poin and the birth of Rethorics must then be connected to the appearance of democratic regime in Greece, its main function being holding a speech during democratic trials in Athenes. So, rethorics becomes one of the main subjects in the educational process, being of most utter importance in shaping citizens and politicians.

The third rule of Rethorics, imposed by tradition, is its generic and pragmatic nature or, in other words „speaking is valid only when it serves a purpose and has the power to persuade.” (Noul dictionar, p. 283). Formal discourse events have to adapt to time, place and given circumstances. In this manner, any type of discourse, including the Balkan discourse, is to reflect a concrete situation, one that speaks of a certain cultural environment, of a particular time and location.

Rhetorics is, first of all, a means for people to communicate in public and thus holding „a prime testimony in the Western world on how reflection on the discourse developed.” (Noul dict., p. 284).

On the other hand, there are plenty of downsides some scholars charge rethorics with, most of them due to its clash with Philosophy. Rhetorics focuses on opinion and not on what something that exist. It is the art of verisimilar, of probabilities and it does not aim at the ultimate truth or at logical certenties. Because of its nature, Rethorics seems to be an illusion as long as through discourse, it can play with arguments to induce a subjective opinion to the audience, it can therefore manipulate the listener, make him believe something he could not believe before. Likewise, the rhetor seems to be an hypocrite, indifferent to what he is pleading for, possessing the sole purpose of convincing the audience that he is telling the truth.What had been imputed to the Rethorics is mainly that it is a

„techne”, a technique, a demagogical method of exploiting people’s feelings and emotions as to win their trust and the recognition of its speech: „Rhetorics is the literary method of persuasion with everything bad and good included.” (Noul dict., p. 285)

There can not be a debate about Rhetorics without discussing the rhetoric system of the applied discourse. In his book Rhetorics, Aristotle differentiates between an argument theory, an eloquence theory and a discourse composition theory. Approaching the matter in this manner, there are three discourse types that can be identified, each one of them being typical for its topic, its scope, its criteria, its time and its own arguments. The deliberative category deals with and analyses governmental affairs, together with analysing the members of a public gathering in which being beneficial for the society prevails. For this category, future tenses are used along with multiple examples and scenarios to support the arguments employed. The judicial category has as its main goal defending or accusing someone in a court of law. It utilizes past tenses and *etimena* (a syllogism based on verisimilar premises). The epideictic category targets at either praising or at vilifying largely considering the concept of beauty. It makes use of present tenses alongside augmentation to convince the audience even faster. This is the category that the Romanian writer Vasile Voiculescu employs the most, varying between ornamental and functional purposes.

For both Plato and Aristotle, the epideictic category is linked to Ethics because praising is a reaction to virtue whereas vilifying is a response to vice. As a consequence, the epideictic category mostly consists of a social and civic function being meant to strengthen the moral norms of a community.

Eventhough Rhetorics was initially created to reply to Ancient Greece’s needs of communication, its functions and properties are going to survive and to be efficient in modern times, too. This category is nothing but the summary of varied elements of discourse situations: emission conditions, the status of the speaker, types of audiences (gathered for pleasure or to get advice or to judge a cause or others).

According to Aristotle’s theory, there are to be considered extra-technical proofs, as well. These are proofs that the rhetor uses to persuade the public of him being right and they can be: testimonies, confessions, laws, oaths. The technical ones are : proper arguments arranged in a suitable order, the moral standards of the rhetor (*ethos*), dispositions, reactions or, differently put, the passions and the emotions that the discourse can trigger into the audience (*pathos*). A rhetor cannot reach *pathos* without *ethos*. To revise, these are the three most important conditions for the art of Rhetorics to be efficient: the rhetor convinces through arguments, he is liked because of his morals and he can create emotions through passion.

Aristotle divides Rhetorics into four components: invention, disposition, elocution and action. The first component, invention, has to provide an answer to the question: What are you going to say? One has to find ideas, deeds (real or which could be real) to back up a cause and to make it verisimilar.

The rhetor operates on word order which is a core issue to identify the subject in a sentence and a group of places. A distinction should be made between common places (*topoi koinoi*, *loci communi*), useful in discussing whatever topic and particular places (*idioi topoi*) typical for some topics. These „places” which cannot be understood in their concrete meaning, are, in fact, types of agreement between the speaker and the receiver of the spoken message. Not only that the reasoning is mutual as concerns the rhetor and the audience, but also the *episteme*, the knowledge that the participants in the act of language share. Further more, these so-called „places” can be employed in a huge variety of circumstances, so they can also represent popular themes in literature. Mircea Muthu in his book about Romanian literature and the South-East European spirit discussed the following themes recurrent in the literature of the Balkan Peninsula: Byzantium or the theme of Lost Paradise, the light, the path or the journey, the wheel as a symbol for becoming. All these themes are identifiable in Vasile Voiculescu’s literary pieces and they stand witness to the profile that Balkan Rhetorics has to this day.

Disposition, the second component of the art of Rhetorics, may be described as the art of composition and relates to the syntagmatic structure of the discourse according to which discourse parts are ordered based on an inflexible scheme: a. *exordium*, having the purpose of catching the listener’s attention and curiosity towards the message (*captatio benevolentiae*), b. narrative (*diegesis*)

or the plot of the events, be it real or imaginary, but liable, which need to be set forth in a concise manner, with clarity and viable in order to win the audience onto the rhetor's side. The narrative in question would be even more liable if it borrows the features of real life events. One of the shapes that the narrative can turn into is that of a legendary story, a fable. In Voiculescu's writings, the preferred form is the fable. The scheme also includes: c. confirmation which translates into presenting the arguments as opposed to those of the adversary, d. peroration which is made up of recapitulation and of indignatio, a last call to empathy from the audience's side which should have been emotionally involved in the discourse by now.

The elocution stands in for a significantly large component of the discourse of whose terminology is going to be employed by many different domains such as poetics, grammar, music or architecture. The elocution takes into account the esthetic dimension of the discourse and it can be described as the art of style which refers to grammatical correctness, careful selection of words, rhythm effects, homophony, figures of speech and more. The style that one rhetor adopts has to be clear, correct, relevant for the chosen topic, the ethos, the type of discourse. Not in the least lays the glamour of the style which relates to the field of ornamentation.

Once the discourse has been created, it needs to be learned. Here, the art of memory intervenes, the last recognised component of rhetorics. The employed technique to memorize the discourse relies on remembering a series of „places” and images connected, on which the discourse can be rebuild.

Last, but not least, the discourse has to be spoken thus represented such as a theatre play in front of an audience. The main action consists of adjusting the voice and the gestures of the speaker to the value of the words and the concepts exposed. The action can be regarded as a corporal elocution. Needless to say that this corporal elocution has been mandatory for the art of acting on stage and that every performer should consider it greatly. Using the voice has to be in compliance with the type of passion described in the discourse, at the same time not neglecting mimicry, the speed of speech, the volume, intonation and rhythm.

Having considered all of the above and the transformation that the art of Rhetorics has undertaken throughout the centuries, can we talk about Balkan Rhetorics? We would dare to confirm the hypothesis as long as discourse presents itself as an essential tool to support and to consolidate cultural identity relevant for a defined geographical space and as long as the discourse in question incorporates extra-linguistic elements into it. Besides Vasile Voiculescu, many other Romanian writers such as Eugen Barbu or I.L. Caragiale or M. Sadoveanu practice this type of Rhetorics. Yet, many other examples could be found in other Balkan literatures such as Nikos Kazantzakis of Greek literature to mention just one.

EXPOSITION

Balkan Rhetorics in some examples from Voiculescu's works

Considering the three major categories that Aristotle talks about (deliberative, judiciary and epideictic), we have to admit that Voiculescu prefers the last one because it has a social function and it adds to the morals of the community, maintaining it at the same time. The ultimate purpose being beauty, the rhetor is going to use the discourse to either blame or praise.

All Voiculescu's stories have a moral that is explicit, supported by the narrator's discourse or implicit, supported by the plot, the events that unfold and make up the story. Therefore, in "The Girl from Java", tells the story of uncle Miti who has made a fortune travelling the world and who is now back in Bucharest to teach his young relative some moral values. In this case, the moral is quite explicit and it is based on a comparison between reason and day-dreaming: "instead of the dearly wanted girl from Java, I slept holding in my arms the pillow named after her. This is exactly what you are doing now....you are holding and calling reality which is actually a girl from Java made up of words: poetry." (Voiculescu, p. 64, our translation).

The story named "The Proof" serves the same purpose as the previous one: regulating and imposing society's moral norms. A Greek man who has gained a fortune in Romania, decides to get married to a much younger girl. To end the gossiping concerning him not being the father of his children, he rents the window of a sweetshop in the town centre and exposes his whole family as a proof for his paternity: all his daughters had six toes exactly like him.

The type of audience that the epideictic category requires is the spectator type. The story cannot possibly exist without its spectators. There is an undeniable connection between the two, the storyteller and its audience. Voiculescu's audience becomes Voiculescu's most important character in the story. It gets involved into the narrative, it expands and beautifies it by all means. This audience is intelligent and dynamic and it will not accept manipulation easily. Many of Voiculescu's stories start in a friendly environment, on different occasions such as hunting as it happens in "Dead season".

The same recipe is applied for the story titled "Party at the monastery". The place where the events are about to unfold has to be special, mysterious, similar to those where magic rituals are performed: "Someone was reading a tricky story, with powerful horses and horse thieves." (Voiculescu 305, our translation). Created to be listened to, the story that Voiculescu writes turns into a mirror, an alter ego of the storyteller by the help of which people can rediscover themselves.

The epideictic category that the Romanian writer employs finds its main feature in augmentation. The baroque ornament, the luxury of description, the hyperbolic traits are also typical of the Balkan Rhetorics. The description of the pheasants farm in "Dead season" testifies to the above. The vitality and the magnetism that the pheasant farm unleashes over all creatures represents a good opportunity for Voiculescu, the rhetor, to describe it in superlative terms, by accumulating a handful of words and expressions. Its function is both ornamental and symbolic.

The ornamental description that Voiculescu favours is representative of the Greek-Roman literature being picturesque and excessive when using the superlative and the hyperbole. One example is the gypsy campsite which stands for a pleasure camp in "Sakuntala". Such descriptions were connected to rediscovering the Balkans by the European travelers of the XVth to XVIIth centuries who associated the Balkan Peninsula to heavenly lands, lands of pleasure.

For Gerard Genette, the description is limited to be an "ancilla narrationis" (Genette, 317), a sort of a "slave" of the narrative, necessary, but never fully emancipated. One argument would be that there are no descriptive genres whereas there are plenty of narrative genres like stories, novels, epic poems that incorporate the description, "enslaving" it. Furthermore, the above mentioned researcher has the ability to distinguish between two main functions that the description holds within the narrative: ordering the text in an ornamental manner and ordering the text in an explicative and symbolic manner. One can identify both functions in Voiculescu's works, but the first one is predominant.

The style that Voiculescu cultivates the most is rather archaic, difficult to digest which might seem anachronistic to the postmodern reader having to deal with archaisms and with regionalisms. Using slang is another feature common to all Balkan writers because it points to their identity. Nonetheless, reading its stories transports you to a fairylike magical land where all traditions and mysteries are kept and enriched even more.

On top of that, Voiculescu's style incorporates a lot of feminine figures of speech, of Oriental origin, rather than masculine figures of speech. The love of storytelling, along with embedded stories, the luxurious usage of figures of speech (metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles, oxymoron, superlative forms), the opulence of language, the disputed pair of description and narrative, the excessive ornaments, all of these depict the Balkan Rhetorics.

This art of speech, Rhetorics as it is perceived by the scholars in Group U can be also defined as "a science of the future, moreover, a fashionable science to be met at the joined borders of Structuralism, New Critics and Semiology." (Retorica generala. Editura Univers, București, 1974, p.2) The old Rhetorics, the one theorized by Plato and Aristotle could not possibly be used today as such, as it needs to be revalued in coherence with the modern context.

The new Rhetorics can be described as an argumentation theory which takes a great interest into studying discourse techniques. And because the validation of a metaphor hugely depends on the context, considering this orientation, modern Rhetorics aims at identifying language proceedings typical for literature and at explaining why they are utilized accordingly.

The model that the Balkan Peninsula proposes, in all its artistic forms, is backed up by the literary model. This literary model, representative for the region, comes to fruition through the help of its Rhetorics. Cultivating the characteristic lines of the Baroque discourse, the Balkan Rhetorics and as a matter of consequence, the rhetorics practiced by Voiculescu, focuses on expressing opulence,

ornaments and putting on an extravagant show. The supreme figure of speech in Baroque is the metaphor and thus becoming the star in Balkan Rhetorics as well. It has developed to a such magnitude that it can be regarded as an autonomous composition where the decor is of utter importance, maybe more important than the structure and the narrative. Baroque metaphors stand as very complex as they multiply and support one another, favouring a mobile representation (bird or butterfly). Metaphors can become means for disguising as Jean Rousset puts it in the concept of „metaphor disguise” (Jean Rousset, p.10, our translation).

Trying to contribute to the ontological definition of what it means to be Romanian, Mircea Vulcănescu considers that: “What constitutes a people is a reality to be discovered when history and metaphysics meet, a unity in faith, in destiny, in time, a unity in land, blood, past, law, language, customs, thoughts, belief, virtue, work, settlements, pain, happiness, community, bridges, connections.” (Vulcănescu, p. 15, our translation) For Vulcănescu, the representative Romanians are a syntesis, being made of different historical moments of our existence on these lands. They have also been tempted by other cultures amongs which we can count “the Byzantine temptation” that translates into politics, luxury and tolerance, “the Balkan temptation” that translates into poorer, more trivial Byzantine temptation and “the Oriental temptation” that translates into equilibrium, contemplation, passivity, skepticism and a shameless attitude towards things.

CONCLUSION

Balkan Peninsula has always been seen as a space doomed with uncertainty, insecurity, been torn between whole and fragmentary, between a centrifugal force and a centripetal one. The physical geography of the Balkans is otherwise varied and could be frozen like for a long time. It is our responsibility as researchers to change the negative perception of it.

The political and historical context has given rise to “a fragility feeling” (Babeți, Ungureanu, p.10, our translation) argues Adriana Babeți and Cornel Ungureanu with regards to the Balkans and Central Europe. There is a typical *Weltanschauung* to be identified within Balkan borders, steadily built on history’s ruins to generate the obsession of evil, of falling apart, of bad luck. Literature through its rhetorical means fits perfectly into the picture.

By studying and understanding the birthplace of Rhetorics people can better see the cultural traits of a community, of a given period of time, of a certain perception of life’s matters. Furthermore, by employing methods and strategies typical for the art of speech, we can achieve better results when negotiating, judging or when trying to persuade our interlocutors that justice is on our side.

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