Myth and Identities in Romanticism – The Role of "Forerunner Identities"

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Abstract

Neither the romantic identity nor its spirit belongs to the romanticism itself. They aroused in earlier movements of cultural, religious, and political character. At the cultural level, the birth of romanticism was preceded by great intellectual movements: Humanism and Renaissance; at the social and political level, the powerful repercussions of the French and American revolution preceded the "awakening and growing of the idea of solidarity between individuals of one race, one language and one nation". At the ecclesiastical level, however, such were reformation and counter-reformation. These premises represent the *forerunner identities* of romanticism. They provoke its birth and determine its character. Only above them, romanticism revived the myth of common culture, paved the way for the formation of national languages, and institutionalized the awareness of the national state. This paper deals with this everlasting relationship between the romanticism and *forerunner identities*. The paper analyses the presence of the aesthetical premises in writing history in humanism and the transformation of this archetype in Romanticism. We also analyse the way how the Renaissance futures were transformed into a principle for history recognition and recreation of the myth in Romanticism. Closely, we will analyse the "identities" from which the romantic myth was born. The paper also discusses the idea how pre-existing ideologies of Humanism, Medieval Period, and how philobiblistic or pre-romantic authors influenced the creation of a romantic awareness and influenced the birth of the romantic myth.

Keywords: Romantic identity, Romantic myth, Forerunner identities, Earlier movements, Humanism, Renaissance, Philobiblists, Pre-romanticism.

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I. From Humanists to Pre-romantics

Humanists have promoted aesthetic and identity relationship in the grounds of universal culture and aimed at an aesthetic presence in writing history. The model of history writing was that of *narrative histories*. The humanists treated alterity mostly at the level of myths and considered it as an opportunity only within the universality of (humanist) values. Thus, the Renaissance enabled powerful ties between medieval and modern history, extending the alterity to universal culture.

Romanticism regained this Renaissance feature and transformed it into a principle for history recognition and recreation of the myth. Within the framework of political movements of the time, the French and American revolution created the idea of communities that are distinguished by culture, myth and different history, but united by language, blood and territoriality. Religiously, the Church of Rome (within the counter-reformation platform) enabled the liturgy in national languages, and, as mentioned in the study of humanists and philobiblists, it represents the first step towards the homogenization of religious communities on the ethnic and cultural premise: the language.

The universal Church of Rome, with Latin as liturgical language, did not see any risk in spreading the word of God in the national languages of any country (Çabej, 1998, p. 515). Therefore, the freedom to use language sparked the will to cultivate cultural and religious identity. The language quickly became a tool for cultural homogenization of religious communities. The Church regarded the bloom of national languages as a means to keep nations tied with the Catholic religion (Çabej, 1998, p. 515).

Romanticism thus turned into a realm where more "identities" were intertwined and interdependent by a multitude of socio-political, cultural, and religious factors. It developed as a constant intersection between these concepts. This should be the reason why romanticism did not have the same image throughout all Western culture (Çabej, 1998, pp. 519-520). In this sense, Albanian romanticism is closer to the Italian one. It was not only born into the cradle of the Italian culture (with De Rada), but was also inspired by it. Similar to the Italian romanticism, it was created above the renaissance of ethnic myth and memory recollection.

But what are the "identities" from which the romantic myth was born and how pre-existing ideologies influenced the creation of a romantic awareness on the *authority of the tradition* and of the *ethno-symbolic distinctive repertoire* (Smith, 2009, p. 23) as two greatest impulses to the birth of the romantic myth for the nation?

In the era of humanism, the awareness on "identities" influenced the emergence of the story-writing model in terms of confessions, layered in recollection and confessed in words. This type of historical oral narration served as a source for the first text written with an Albanian subject, but in Latin language, the *History of Scanderbeg* by Marin Barleti. In writing the "narrated", Barleti revived the memory of the splendour of the epic deeds of the era and reinforced a sort of symbolic motivation (territory, tradition and customs). Barleti confessed his own people's evoked history, their epic deeds, as he remembered it or as conveyed to him by others in the form of *oral narratives*, transforming his epic hero, Skanderbeg, not only into an epic hero, but also in hero of confessional discourse, bound to the ethnic substrate.

Philobiblists sought a kind of identity that was no longer referring to the greatness of epic deeds, but to the reflection of biblical confessions in the cultural life of members of their ethnic and cultural communities. They avoid the aesthetics of epic characters and focus on reflecting on biblical symbolism. Hence, they do not seek to develop the ethnic ideal, but the cultural and religious one. Religious communities were the first nucleus of research and fulfilment of common identity. They represented the first motivating foundation to seek common identity through cultivating a sense of language, tradition and common culture, including religious culture. By working to convey these textbooks to their members in their own language, and by taking care to lay the great biblical myths on the ground of tradition, they reinforced the ethnic

identity (only indirectly), but gave a great impetus to strengthening of the idea of cultural affiliation around the common language, traditions and customs. Accordingly, they raised the awareness of *motivational cultural symbolic* type.

Consequently, the philobiblists contributed to the creation of a cultural awareness that strengthened the religious communities as a nucleus of creation and preservation of linguistic, religious and cultural distinction. And, by reinforcing these communities, they reinforced their awareness of interdependence as a cultural premise and helped the birth of a literary tradition. Later, in romanticism, it would burst in the form of a cultural enterprise for national identity, although in essence, it would maintain the powerful medieval cultural root. Furthermore, the cults upon which the ideological platform of romanticism is conceived will be those of humanity (the cult of the hero and of the language, as well as of tradition and antiquity). Except that, in contrast to the Middle Ages, romanticism also marks it with seeking political identification signs: political independence and the state as a patron of juridical right. According to the Romans, members of a nation are members who have cultivated this hereditary culture through generations and united by language, blood and territory. This inherited connection constantly turns the attention of romantics to the search for their ancestors (hence the extraordinary tendency to cultivate the myth of the antiquity of the nation). According to the Romans, members of a nation are those who have cultivated this hereditary culture through generations and who are united by language, blood and territory. This inherited connection constantly turns the attention of romantics to the search for their ancestors (hence the extraordinary tendency to cultivate the myth of the antiquity of the nation). They believe, as A. Smith points out, in some predecessors, be they the ethnic leaders or the leaders of their wider family - kinship (Smith, 1999). But they associate these predecessors with the particular territory where they lived. *Territoriality*, therefore, becomes not only a sign of ethnicity, but also a symbol of its existence and of the right to the existence of the nation. The demand of romantics for an ethnic state (extended to the scope of the nation) is therefore a demand to use *territoriality* as a principle for the nation's fulfilment but recognizing the principle of ethnicity as fundamental to the understanding of its existence.

In contrast to the Middle Ages, when these distinctive signs required the consolidation of a religious or linguistic culture, in romanticism they arise not only at a level of awareness of the nation's existence in history but of its fulfilment through political institutions. Thus, romantics, alongside the emphasis on national identity, would also require the right to an independent state and a free life among other nations. So, political institutions would be the determinants of legal identity, but ethnicity would remain the fundamental determinant of the nation's character.

II. The latent pre-romantic consciousness on identities

As it is well known, the emergence of the political idea for the nation is strongly related to remembrance and ethno-symbolic signs, on the one hand, and their awakening and awareness of the political situation of ethnicity, on the other. The cultivation of language, as well as the historical return to the ancient nation and its inherited values has given rise to articulation of the idea of the political consolidation of the nations. This is the linguistic archetype, capable of transmitting the legacy to a progressive ideological platform, which aims to cultivate language and history as a tool for the nation's moral rebirth and for an "aesthetic game" as Schiller would describe it. According to him, language, culture and history turn into an aesthetic goal for a great literary discourse, which involves both the aesthetic game that Schiller aimed, and the "spirit of seriousness" and common moral principles, as Nietzsche claimed (Kaiser, 2004, p. 1).

Since language is the most powerful identity tool, reinforcing the idea of it as an identity tool also served to reinforce the idea of religious identity. The people who spoke the language of the romantic author were

God's chosen ones. Thus, language and religion, and nation and religion are inseparable. The language thus turns into a great impetus of the birth of the romantic myth of affiliations.

Thus, language takes on the role of the medium carrying political ideas, moral inheritance and aesthetic principles, and aims to express them together in a highly aesthetic discourse. In addition, this discourse cannot be separated from the fundamental impetus for its creation: the development of political ideas, which are conveyed and articulated by language itself. This creates an inseparable romantic knot between language and culture, language and ideology, by *totalizing* discourse and moral and political principles for an ideological purpose: the political development of the nation.

In literary terms, this suffocates the development of a clear discourse. In romanticism, literature could not evolve from political ideas. This experience was transferred to romanticism by great pre-romantic ideologists (enlighteners, mainly). But, in contrast to the earlier currents, in romanticism these ideas are closely linked with individual experience. Thus, Romantic literary discourse develops mainly between these two situations: infinite focus on individual subjectivity, on the one hand, and on the elaboration of ideas for collectivity, on the other.

The aesthetic views of some thinkers, like Schiller firstly, stand out in the foreground of this goal, who required that these two states be merged into an aesthetic aim for a "high" literary discourse (Keiser, p.2). For Schiller, it was expected that the aesthetic perspective would stimulate and further develop the individual subjectivity and collective political state (ibid.). This discourse, articulated through language, strongly enhances the relationship of literature with the ideas of collectivity, especially in circumstances like those of the nineteenth century, when, in harmony with the tendency for the consolidation of the political categories - the nations, the romanticists (even the Albanians, though delayed compared to the European romanticism) recognized the founding national identity character of the language. To them, the language is the identifying pillar of the formation of the *nation*. It created and preserved the national substance. Therefore, linguistic consolidation implies hereafter the national consolidation. That is why Kamarda, Kristoforidhi, S. Frashëri etc., feeling the significance of language in the creation of the national spirit, devoted themselves to the compilation of its grammar. These grammars, then, were key to the development of romantic literature. So, with romantics, language and literature are identified as signs of national existence, while giving the nation the seal of existence and influencing the creation of affiliations.

III. Revival of "early relicts"

Powerful organic impulse pushes compatriots to seek identifying marks, such as territory and language, chimney and house, and recognize them as indisputable authorities in their intention to legitimize their presence in a given territory as well as their cultural affiliation. Ethnic communities therefore need not only to revive the early relics, the myth of memory, the language and the territory, but also to replicate the historical motive of their revival so that these symbols can be transformed into a sustainable foundation to reach their historical goal to enshrine their ethnic culture. This creates the organic impulse, which keeps alive the cultural spirit and echoes the earliest cultural artefacts. This impulse, as it has been proven, is heterogeneous in the Middle Ages: more religious, rarely cultural, and here and there ethnic. That is why in that period the first attempts to create self-awareness came from religious communities themselves. They made sense of seeking self- awareness and reflection of this awareness in art, but never raised to an undisputable level of self-consciousness and in seeking legitimacy of ethnicity in a political structure.

Only at the 19th century the organic impulse would shape the legitimacy of cultural self-awareness. Motivated by cultural movements all over Europe, which aimed at consolidating the nation as a political notion and national culture as an ideological impetus, Albanian romantics tried to "institutionalize" these relics within the consciousness of raising the nation as a structure that consolidates the cultural quest for

identity. As it has already been emphasized, it was in the tradition of the Romans to rely their goal of nationalizing the nation in history, by looking for *historical ancestors*, which Albanian romantics found in medieval Albania, called "Arbëria". In doing so, they revived not only the past, but the myth about it too. And, myth, in addition to narratives and history, requires tools to link the goal for the nation's fulfilment to the legacy upon which that nation could be fully resurrected (Grosby, p. 8). This time trajectory that connects the 19th century to the Middle Ages (mostly with the Skanderbeg Century, XV) created the *temporal depth* (Grosby, p. 8), which could not be reproduced as a full story, without its revelation in a mythical and narrative insight. Thus, the deeds of the medieval hero, but also its whole era, within which the idea of divisiveness was formed, will be transformed into a substrate upon which the romantic myth will be created, and within which will evoke a narrative that will confess the past from the perspective of its remodelling. To narrate the past, for the romantics, it means to revive its myth in a confession and turn it into a premise for a cultural and political platform. That is why the myth about the Moti i Madh (the Great Age) of De Rada centres around the awareness of the state of the nation and its consolidation.

IV. Conclusions

In contrast to the Middle Ages, also driven by the pre-romantic clash (the Enlightenment, mainly), romanticism would abandon religious tutelage and return to the belief in the human autonomy. The authority referred to by romanticism is no longer the medieval (religious) authority of eternal culture, but the spirit of reconciliation of being with nature, knowledge and humanity. Likewise, the tutelage under which romanticism acts is no longer religious but historical and appears as a tendency for common rebirth. This rebirth, on the other hand, would not be possible without the profound transformation of medieval cultural consciousness into historical consciousness on commonality. This consciousness seeks national rise, while reviewing history as a reshuffle in a national project. The authority of the tradition slowly gets rid of religious dominance and its place is occupied by the authority of historical and cultural memory.

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