

## FOR A NOBLE AND SENTIMENTAL LITERATURE N. STEINHARDT AND THE ESSAY AS A FORM OF FREEDOM

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### Abstract

*N. Steinhardt, the author of Jurnalul fericii [The Diary of Happiness], was not only an exquisite intellectual colporteur, but also an erudite essayist of astonishing spontaneity, who gave his intellectual discourse a remarkable cultural breadth, which places him in the same spiritual family as Alexandru Odobescu, Paul Zarișopol, Mihail Ralea, Alexandru Paleologu or Andrei Pleșu. In spite of the diversity of the themes addressed, the essays of the later monk of Rohia preserve a basic unity, revealed in a coherent modus cogitandi and a defensive ethos, intended to protect individual freedom through recourse to modesty and to what Paleologu called common sense as paradox. Reading Steinhardt's essays is also a powerful antidote to laziness of thought, offering the reader the chance to escape from the narrow horizon of commonplaces. Leaving aside the prison memorial and the texts on religious subjects, which are permeated by the same essayistic vein, we highlighted the fact that Steinhardt understood literary criticism as an ingenious creative activity, polemically anti-positivist, susceptible to new and surprising cultural analogies, incessantly pleading for the rehabilitation of subjectivity, emotion and feeling as essential factors in the process of knowledge, from the perspective of a fundamental humanism drawing from Montaigne's tradition.*

*Keywords:* essay; liberalism; Judaism; Orthodox; discreteness; sentimental; freedom; prison.

### 1. Introduction

Gaining fame only after the publication of his testamentary book, *Jurnalul fericii* [The diary of happiness], which he never saw in print, N. Steinhardt (1912-1989) remained in the public consciousness not so much for his remarkable work as an essayist, but for his testimony of his years in prison, where he found salvation in faith and converted from Judaism to Christianity. Uncompromising in every way, but understanding and tolerant of human weaknesses, the monk of Rohia would later preach Christian forgiveness in his sermons and in everything he wrote, refusing to answer evil with evil and to react according to the primitive law of the Talion. Christian benevolence left a deep mark onto his style of writing, which reads as a singular form of literary criticism that is closer to both the essay and epistle, every comment or review being directed – continuing the dialogic spirit of classical colloquies between Montaigne and his dead friend, Étienne de la Boétie, but also the precepts of Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* – toward an epitome friend, who represents, as Giorgio Agamben suggests, a *hetero-autos* (Agamben, 2012, p. 18). When used, the essayist's *monologue* is not a symptom of self-centeredness, but a subtle dialogue, which is carried further even in the absence of the discursive partner.

Numerous passages in the *Diary of Happiness* refer to Christ's *Boyar-ism* (that is, to His aristocratic manner), a formulation which makes Steinhardt's attitude so singular, so utterly contrastive to the mordant attitude of writers - from Paul Goma to Herta Müller - who have experienced totalitarian repression, condemning communism outright. For the monk of Rohia, however, man remains an improvable being, which explains his defensive strategy of taming and cauterizing evil, without vindictive intentions. Revenge only perpetuates evil, without destroying it, hence the Romanian essayist's need for care (as an antidote of violence), his need for consolation (offered by immersion into language), and ultimately his need for forgiveness, understood by N. Steinhardt not so much as a Christian virtue *stricto sensu*, but as an ethical conduct that expresses the need for freedom, as George Ardeleanu has eloquently shown in the most substantial monographic study devoted to the writer so far (*N. Steinhardt și paradoxurile libertății* [N. Steinhardt and the paradoxes of freedom], 2009).

According to Steinhardt's exegete and editor, the theme of freedom is, in fact the very *center of his existential project*, built in the spirit of conservative liberalism that the young Jewish intellectual had theoretically appropriated from the writings of French doctrinaires,<sup>1</sup> as well as from his assiduous attendance of Anglo-Saxon culture in general (in addition to numerous references throughout his work, he also translated from English writers such as Kipling and David Storey), whose spirit reflects the harmonious relationship between the individual and the community. The preference for the contested space of the essay-forms should thus be interpreted neither as a reflection of an egotistic, self-centered personality nor as the emanation of an individualist dogma, but primarily as a tactic of dissidence, of profound *resistance* (Wittman, 2022, pp. 101-105), used in a totalitarian regime, whose primary target is the very sense of selfhood.

Steinhardt's essayism also encourages us to rethink - in line with Mario Aquilina's chapter in the *Edinburgh Companion to the Essay – the I of the essay* as still *ineluctable*, but as an entity or, better, as a voice

fluid, fragmented and marked by the inevitable trace of 'the other' in a way that questions our thinking of the essay as primarily self-centered. The 'I' of the essay is not an absolute singularity or a self-contained unity but depends on relations of contestation and affinity with others that simultaneously establish and problematize – without erasing – its insistence on individuality and singularity (Aquilina, 2022, p. 21).

One of the premises for opening the essayist's selfish *I* toward an integrative *we* comes from the so-called *two-ness*, that is, the *I* that is marked by a *double-consciousness*, endowing it with 'a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others'. (Du Bois cited in Aquilina, 2022, p. 21). Such considerations, as well as Steinhardt's assumed *two-ness* – a Jew converted to Christianity; a supporter of liberal conservatism and of conservative liberalism; a professor of freedom within the totalitarian daily-life confines; a lover of what Barthes calls *the neutral* – , lead us straight to the profoundly explicit title *Prin alții spre sine* [Through others towards one's self] (1987) as well as to its resonances into other titles chosen by the monk of Rohia for his collections of essays such as *Critică la persoana I* [Critique in the first person] or *Dăruind vei dodânda* [By giving you'll be given].

Based on the conviction that 'traditions and customs not only did not hinder progress but strengthened the sense of human dignity'<sup>2</sup> (Steinhardt, 2008, p. 73, our translation), Steinhardt then became involved (together with his friend Emanuel Neumann, whose

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<sup>1</sup> Steinhardt's doctoral thesis was published in 1936 and was entitled *Classical Principles and New Trends in Constitutional Law. A Critique of the Work of Léon Duguit*.

<sup>2</sup> 'tradițiile și obiceiurile nu numai că n-au împiedicat progresul, ci au întărit simțul demnității omenești'.

convictions would later turn to agnosticism) also in religious issues, especially those of Jewish spirituality (see the volumes *Essay on a Catholic Conception of Judaism*, 1935, and *Jewish Illusions and Realities*, 1937, reprinted by Polirom), in an attempt to identify on rational grounds, beyond any form of mysticism, the sociological and legal foundations of religious life. As George Ardeleanu (2009, p. 202) points out, the later conversion would not contradict the Jewish roots of the writer's faith (the monk of Rohia used to say that his conversion was 'not to something, but toward something'<sup>3</sup>, our translation); it is rather the consequence of a genuine *vocation of assimilation*, which the entire Steinhardt family manifested in various circumstances, mentioned time and again by commentators: for instance, the writer's father, Oscar Steinhardt, was decorated by the king for his heroism in the First World War; then, the author of *The Diary of Happiness* recalls that his family attended both the synagogue service on Saturdays and the Orthodox church service on Sundays; then, N. Steinhardt had also learnt how to keep an exemplary ethical conduct from his father, preferring to go to prison so as not to become, like so many others, a collaborator of the Securitate (Secret Police) and a traitor of his close friends.

Speaking from the angle of classical liberalism, the essayist was skeptical about the bounty of democracy, but he was, in harsh times of socialism, a defender of democracy to. By this nuanced attitude, the young Steinhardt resembles in many ways E. Lovinescu, the theorist of Romanian modernity, whom he praises on several occasions, considering him to be the greatest Romanian critic, a critic of bourgeois culture *par excellence* (Steinhardt, 2008, pp. 107-112). Steinhardt paid frequent visits to Lovinescu's famous house on Câmpineanu Street, and, as attested by Lovinescu's *literary agendas* edited by Gabriela Omăt after 1989, he also enthusiastically participated in the meetings of the *Sburătorul* circle (Lovinescu, 2001, p. 83), more as a witness and observer of the literary phenomena, without playing a leading role in Lovinescu's entourage. The great critic, who expressed dissatisfaction with the excessive manifestations of the 'cowardly' Eugen Ionescu and of other writers with 'foolish genius claims' (such as Ion Barbu and Camil Petrescu), sympathized with the young Steinhardt, appreciating his serious culture and, above all, his good manners, so rare in others (Lovinescu, 2000, p. 328). In fact, the key of Steinhardt's personality is *discretion*, that is the avoidance of dogmatic affirmation of any particular belief; therefore, the author never occupied a leading position, contenting himself with participating in the cultural life of his time as an ideal interlocutor gifted with the discrete genius of receptivity. Monica Pillat's testimony is emblematic of this personality trait:

On those enchanted evenings with my father, Sergiu Al.-George, Theodor Enescu, Alecu Paleologu, Sebi Muntenu, I used to watch Nicu Steinhardt listening. He avoided speaking, but the exaltation with which he participated in the discussions of the others was so immense that, although he did not utter a word, it seemed to me that he had not been silent for a moment<sup>4</sup> (Pillat, 2001, pp. 108-109, our translation).

## 2. Good-sense<sup>5</sup> as Paradox. Beyond Commonplaces

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<sup>3</sup> Original text: "nu de la ceva, ci spre ceva".

<sup>4</sup> Original text: "În vrăjitele seri împreună cu tata, cu Sergiu Al.-George, Theodor Enescu, Alecu Paleologu, Sebi Muntenu, îl urmăream pe Nicu Steinhardt cum asculta. Se ferea să vorbească, dar exaltarea cu care participa la discuțiile celorlalți era atât de imensă, încât, deși nu scotea niciun cuvânt, îmi părea că nu tăcuse niciun moment".

<sup>5</sup> The English *common sense* would only partially convey the meaning of the Romanian 'bun-simț' as it also indicates a type of retractile politeness. Alexandru Paleologu, one of the most gifted Romanian essayists, has made the distinction between the general phrase *common sense* and the French *bon sens* [good sense], the latter being considered a unique and quite rare feature of humankind: "Descartes nu are dreptate când afirmă că bunul-simț este *la chose du monde la mieux partagée*. Din contra, mie mi-a apărut întotdeauna ca o însușire de excepție; întâlnirea cu superiorul bun-simț, care îți deschide ochii în fața vastelor și profundelor evidente, mă zguduie ca prezența geniului. Bunul simț nu e, cum crede lumea, o formă primară a

It is precisely from this perspective, of good manners and good-sense [the French *bon sens* and the Romanian *bun-simț*] - as a paradox, according to the formula coined by Alexandru Paleologu (Paleologu, 1972, pp. 10-12) -, that Steinhardt criticizes his contemporaries (The Criterion Association, the Avangarde, etc.) in the pages of *Revista burgheză* [The Bourgeois review]. He points at extremism of any kind, in the line of a healthy and enlightened rationalism, inspired by the *Junimea* Circle and Titu Maiorescu. It was not by chance that the future monk's debut volume, *În Genul Tinerilor: Exercițiu de Stil Asupra Unei Generații Neortodoxe* [Imitating the young generation: An exercise in style concerning an unorthodox generation] (1934) resonates and synchronizes with Eugen Ionescu's debut with the volume *Nu* [No] that was awarded a prestigious jury prize. Steinhardt's contribution is explicitly placed under the cultural aegis of Titu Maiorescu and his *Criticism*, in which negative examples erred because of banality, while the writings targeted by Antisthius's parodies are 'guilty' not only of 'word drunkenness', but also of the most elementary lack of common sense. For instance, in one place, 'the non-commonsencicality of the young generation'<sup>6</sup> is bluntly indexed. The comparison is clearly to the disadvantage of his contemporaries, Steinhardt identifying precisely the symptoms of a disease and then prescribing a remedy - a return to the classical tradition:

Nowadays, stylistic impudence is far surpassed by the sickening audacity of thought. What is more, the sick used to be pitied, the uneducated despised and kept in their place, the mad locked up. Today the normal man is looked down upon, madness proclaims its right to rule, intelligence is a thing of shame<sup>7</sup> (Antisthius, 1934, p. 8, our translation).

The young writer's parodies, read at Lovinescu's literary circle, were well received, although the book did not acquire the critical reception it deserved, being overshadowed by the polemical brilliance of Eugen Ionescu's debut volume.

What distinguishes Steinhardt-the essayist from almost all his contemporaries is his tolerant, lucid and common-sensical attitude, his *centrist* extremism (to use a paradoxical ideological formula, in the wake of Adorno's 'radical non-radicalism' or 'methodical non-methodical-ity'), the ideas of a conservative liberal, which protected him from the temptations of utopia and from the fascination of any ideologies promising 'salvation'. What still keeps him in the company of the interbellum intellectuals might be - as Arleen Ionescu points out in a very consistent contribution on Cioran's essay-ism - the shared option for a discontinuous, fragmentary and incomplete literary form so as to signal

the dramatic changes that occurred in the aftermath of World War II, when thinkers such as Maurice Blanchot, Emmanuel Levinas and Adorno, among many others, attested *de*

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inteligenței, un succedaneu inferior al acesteia [...]. Se confundă mai întotdeauna bunul-simț cu simțul comun; e adevărat că merg o bună parte de drum împreună, pornind de la constatări elementare. Dar simțul comun cade repede în aporii sau platitudini, în vreme ce bunul-simț își urmează fără greșală drumul ajungând la descoperiri senzaționale ca postulatul lui Euclid sau teoria lui Copernic" [Descartes is not right when he says that good sense is *la chose du monde la mieux partagée*'. On the contrary, it has always seemed to me to be an exceptional asset; the encounter with superior good sense, which opens your eyes to the vast and profound evidence, shakes me like the presence of genius. Good sense is not, as people think, a primary form of intelligence, an inferior successor to it (...) Good sense is more often than not confused with common sense; it is true that they go a good part of the way together, starting from elementary observations. But common sense quickly falls into aporias or platitudes, while good sense follows its own path without error, arriving at sensational discoveries like Euclid's postulate or Copernicus' theory].

<sup>6</sup> Original text: "nonbun-simțismul tinerei generații".

<sup>7</sup> Original text: "Or, astăzi neobrăzarea stilistică e întrecută cu mult de îndrăzneala bolnăvicioasă a cugetării. Mai mult: înainte bolnavul era compătimit, incultul disprețuit și ținut la locul lui, nebunul închis. Astăzi omul normal e privit de sus, nebunia își proclamă dreptul la conducere, inteligența e lucru de rușine".

*facto* to the failure of the Enlightenment project and ushered in a new historical era in which morality, ethics, forgiveness and representation changed meanings completely (Ionescu, 2022, p. 344).

So, beyond the dramatic episode of his *conversion*, beyond the heroism shown in the communist prisons, even beyond his astonishing intellectual performances, Steinhardt's humbleness remains remarkable - a discrete virtue assumed not only from the posture of a monk (practicing daily humility), but also as a *sui generis* form of affirmation of the bourgeois ethos, polemically exalted since his youth, in contrast to the iconoclastic *trăirism* - 'a radical passion' (Tismăneanu in Bejan, 2019, pp. ix-xii), a form of Romanian vitalism<sup>8</sup> - of his fellow writers. I believe that it is precisely because he has adopted the spirit of bourgeois morality, which values work, family and friendship (as an expression of sociability *par excellence*), that the author of *The Diary of Happiness* managed to choose the right path, resolutely, avoiding despicable compromise and betrayal of his fellows. Steinhardt's exemplary behavior during his imprisonment should not be justified, as it happened in the past, exclusively on religious or supernatural grounds, since it is not due to a factor added to the essayist's personality, to a sudden *enlightenment* that led to his conversion. On the contrary, the conversion seems to us to be only a secondary consequence, a mere epiphenomenon in relation to the dramatic experience of the bourgeois ethos, radicalised in the terrible conditions of prison. Such process would better account for Steinhardt's *humanity*, for his tolerance, and explain why the monk is much more *liberal* than the Jewish debutant, and why he writes with equal pathos about everything, praising the writers he parodied in his youth and enthusing, often childishly, about the Romanian literature of the eighties. It also resonates with his forgiving attitude towards all those who have done him wrong, towards weak or spineless people who have lost their honor here on earth and were grieving the good Lord in heaven.

The entire biography of N. Steinhardt, whose work faithfully reflects his personality as a Montaignean essayist, free of any kind of prejudice (in *The Diary of Happiness*, the monk of Rohia comments eloquently on the rock opera *Jesus Christ superstar*), opens towards all fields of knowledge, and it is based on ethical coordinates such as tolerance and common sense. This is why, in an interview, he would recommend reading as a way of life; he made this recommendation in a different way than Noica, in the posture of 'the Cathar of Paltiniș', pleaded for *specialist* and *disciplined* reading: 'Read indiscriminately, catalogues, advertisements, dictionaries, fiat books, treatises, zodiacs and books of every time and place... Wander, roam, enter the vital circuit' (Steinhardt, 2010 a, p. 154). The interest in concrete life and the assumption that writing is a complex activity with a psycho-moral purpose thus brings the monk of Rohia closer to Montaigne. In this way, Steinhardt's thinking implicitly draws from the Goethean model, in a way that makes him resonate with Alexandru Paleologu's attitude in his polemical article *Amicus Plato... sau Despărțirea de Noica* [Amicus Plato... or parting with Noica] (Paleologu, 1981, pp. 7-68), but also with the higher dilettantism and the humanism celebrated by Virgil Nemoianu in his studies, from *Micro-Armonia* to *Triumph of Imperfection*. The generation of *authenticist* writers of the interwar period has in common *trăirism*, that is to say, 'the affirmation of the indissolubility of the life-culture couple,' because for the young scholars of the past, regardless of their ideological choices, 'there was no hiatus between culture and life, but a symbiosis that almost

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<sup>8</sup> While the concept of 'trăirism', formed from the Romanian verb *a trăi* [to lead one's life] + the suffix *-ism*, might suggest the sheepish emulation of philosopher Nae Ionescu (1890-1940) as well as the nationalist ground, Cristina A. Bejan suggests that scholars should always take into consideration the nuances added by the members of the Criterion Association and the preference, in some cases, for the more translatable concept of *experiență* (2019, pp. 25-57).

went as far as to merge the two' (Steinhardt and Pintea, 2009, p. 47). He continues in the same spirit:

None of them ever imagined that one could conceive of culture as anything other than another aspect of life. Or, possibly, as a perspective from which life can be seen, analysed and observed as a natural phenomenon in full effervescence<sup>9</sup> (Steinhardt & Pintea, 2009, p. 48, our translation).

This explains why Steinhardt repeatedly states, in opposition to structuralist theories, that the life of great writers is always the source of their work, that there are no great writers, only great people, and that *discretion* is appropriate to unimportant authors. With such statements, the essayist implicitly sanctioned the *immoralism* of some of the stars of the modern literary scene, such as Wilde and Gide, but also the simplifying manner in which Proustian theorizations of Saint-Beauvian biographism were subsequently popularized. Out of the prison in 1964 and returning to literary life in 1976, with the volume *Between Life and Books* (dedicated to Vladimir Streinu, also a victim of totalitarian repression), the essayist showed a polemic-subversive attitude towards fashionable theories, and explicitly claimed to be part of the tradition of interwar essayism and humanism, presenting himself as 'a dilettante' (Steinhardt & Pintea, 2009, p. 59), who comments only on books he likes, with an undisguised accomplice-like receptivity. The exegetes have also stressed the ethical dimension of his admiration exercises, which transforms the analytical-interpretative labor into an occasion for perpetual euphoria. His choice of essayism and fragmentary writing then reflects the intention to remain authentic, which calls for the practice of paradox as 'gymnastics of the mind' and a therapy designed to unravel the ankylosed *langue de bois*.

Placing himself, in a polemical spirit, similarly to Alexandru Paleologu, at the antipode of the intransigent elitism of the 'Cathars of Paltiniș,' Steinhardt deliberately assumes a marginal and subversive position, since he chooses to do so in the midst of communism. In Noica's words, his is 'the work of a hooligan [derbedeu]'<sup>10</sup>, that is, an eminently subjective criticism - *Critică la persoana I* [Critique in the First Person] is the title of a volume of essays from 1983 -, consisting of 'wandering freely among ideas, images, books, memories and dreams'<sup>11</sup> (Steinhardt, 2011, p. 47, our translation). All these are genuine essayist gestures: looking for 'the thingness' that resists and then fighting against the kind of objectivity that sees 'bare things' (Plunkett, 2022, p. 70). In his most recent Steinhardtian exegesis - an exhaustive study that rounds up the monographic perspective of the George Ardeleanu's contribution and that builds up on the critical edition of the works recently published by Polirom -, the critic Adrian Mureșan comprehensively integrates the writer's essays in line with a type of cultural criticism 'with elements from the history of ideas, which works polyphonically and as a whole'<sup>12</sup> (Mureșan, 2020, p. 28, our translation), while revealing the 'strategies of subversion' that shape Steinhardt's entire oeuvre in a particular way. This basic anti-dogmatism becomes a working method appropriated as such by the author in the preamble to the volume *Incertitudini literare* [Literary Uncertainties] (1980), in which Steinhardt sanctions reductionist thinking, 'the demon of theory': 'I have chosen a title intended to mark a reaction, a protest (very modest, of course) against a tendency towards

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<sup>9</sup> Original text: "Niciunul dintre ei nu și-a imaginat vreodată că s-ar putea concepe cultura altfel decât ca o altă ipostază a vieții. Sau, eventual, ca o perspectivă din care viața poate fi privită, analizată și constatată drept fenomen natural în plină efervescență".

<sup>10</sup> Original text: "operă de derbedeu".

<sup>11</sup> Original text: "a hoinări liber printre idei, imagini, cărți, amintiri și vise".

<sup>12</sup> Original text: "cu elemente de istoria ideilor, care funcționează polifonic și integrator".

dogmatism, arrogance and towards what Jean Paulhan has called ‘literary terrorism’<sup>13</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 a, p. 55, our translation).

The explicit reference to Jean Paulhan’s book *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou La Terreur dans Les Lettres* [The flowers of Tarbes or the terror in literature] (1936) is by no means coincidental, the reflection on the relationship between cliché and authenticity, as well as the principled anti-dogmatic attitude equally defining the works of both writers. In both one can identify the humanist ethos of forgiveness: Paulhan, who fought in both World War I and World War II (as part of the French Resistance), publicly spoke out in favor of absolving the guilty collaborators (Paulhan, 2015, p. 25); Georges Duhamel, the well-known novelist, who served as a medic in both wars, was praised by Steinhardt for his moderation (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 83). The difficulty of such a conciliatory, irenic attitude is always difficult to metabolize, and exegetes have rightly emphasized the praise of imperfection as a form of humanising essayistic discourse and, by implication, as a form of opening the critique of abstract-utopian thinking. It is worth mentioning Adrian Mureșan’s incisive and nuanced critical approach, which places Steinhardt’s writing under the sign of subversion and ‘deconstruction of utopias,’ while placing the author of *The Diary of Happiness* in the family of *anti-modernists* (Compagnon, 2008, p. 16).

### 3. A Lover’s Reading. The Ethics of Melodrama

A writer with a serious legal training and an impressive literary culture, Steinhardt was an outspoken Anglophile, but he read French books with equal competence, at one point establishing himself as a professional theater chronicler. A confirmed individualist, he defiantly went against mainstream opinions both in the interwar period (when he decried the anarchist tendencies and political radicalism of his peers from the positions of conservative liberalism, criticising avant-garde of all kinds and advocating classical values) and in communism (when he was actually much more in touch with contemporary literary events, writing enthusiastic comments on young writers’s books). In this respect, we found relevant Steinhardt’s reassessment of Geo Bogza’s youthful writings (*Geo Bogza – un poet al Efectelor, Exaltării, Grandiosului, Solemnității, Exuberanței și Patetismului* [Geo Bogza - a poet of effects, exaltation, grandiosity, solemnity, exuberance and pathos] 1982) and the avant-garde phenomenon in general, in which the essayist deciphers *a posteriori* the ‘thirst for events and the joy of living’ characteristic of the *crazy years* after the First World War. In this way, emphasizing the author’s osmosis with his youth’s age (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 300), Steinhardt was indirectly paying homage to the interwar period, seen as a period of creative freedom and vital exuberance, in a context where freedoms of all kinds were drastically curtailed by the communist regime.

While removing the avant-garde from the umbrella of any ideology, Steinhardt was able to identify in all its representatives a ‘robust optimism’, for ‘they all showed longevity, success in life, creative power to the depths of their youth, skill and solid common sense’<sup>14</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 301, our translation). In exactly the same terms, Jean Paulhan interprets the phenomenon of *terror in literature*, perceived in an ambivalent key, both as an expression of a negative attitude towards tradition and towards literature as a rhetorical system, and as a manifestation of vitality and creative freedom, which implicitly calls for the critical sanction of cliché, of the commonplace (Paulhan, 2015). In the end, however, authenticity becomes a cliché like any other, *terror* proving to be a transitory moment in the

<sup>13</sup> Original text: “Am ales un titlu merit să marcheze o reacție, un protest (foarte modest, desigur) împotriva unei tendințe spre dogmatism, trufie și ceea ce Jean Paulhan a numit *terorismul literar*”.

<sup>14</sup> Original text: “au dat mai toți pildă de longevitate, reușită în viață, putere de creație până la adânci cărunțețe, îndemănare și solid bun-simț”.

dynamics of the literary phenomenon, just as madness has a very close relationship with wisdom (Erasmus speaks of this very thing in the *Laus Stultitiae*, showing how the wise man should relate to life). In his recent critical synthesis, *Scurtă istorie: Panorama alternativă a literaturii române* [Short history: An alternative panorama of Romanian literature], Mihai Zamfir also regards the avant-garde as a picturesque phenomenon, specific to our bourgeois culture, fully configured during the interwar period (Zamfir, 2017, pp. 189-210) - rightfully labeled as the *golden age* of Romanian literature.

Dedicating to Al. O. Teodoreanu ('The Cheerful Păstorel') in one of his last volumes of essays (*Escale în Timp și Spațiu* [Breaks in time and space], 1987), Steinhardt was in fact claiming an illustrious but subversive ancestry. Like Alain (Émile Chartier), whom he translated into Romanian, he styles himself as an aristocratic and epicurean scholar ('author-lover', he writes in a Barthesian vein), who considers culture a form of happiness, the direct expression of livelihood. Hence, the monk of Rohia does not preach for a frowning and austere morality – 'I have never been indifferent, nor has my anger ever turned into acrimony'<sup>15</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 37, our translation), looking indulgently at the small joys made to relieve the poor people's daily bitterness. This pinpoints Steinhardt's surprising appreciation of melodrama, a species discredited in modernity on the grounds that it would easily satisfy the modest demands of an uneducated public in search of easy thrills. Contrariwise, the monk of Rohia sanctions the elitism of modern art, which has dehumanized itself (in his famous study, *The Dehumanization of Art*, Ortega y Gasset promptly pointed out the phenomenon) and has taken refuge in the austere cult of pure forms, turning its back on life, with all its so-called trivial emotions and feelings.<sup>16</sup> Nowadays, with the revival of interest in melodrama, the essayist's humanist position of is worth exploring; indeed, he does not interpret literature from a purely aesthetic angle, separating the work from biography, but from a broad cultural perspective, as an existential document with multiple relevance, of interest to philosophers and sociologists, historians, psychologists and so on.

At a time when Romanian criticism was dominated either by historical positivism ideologically directed by censorship, or by the theoretical paradigm of structuralism, which allowed doctrinal evasionism (by the use of *close reading* or by the affirmation of the autonomy of aesthetic values), the polemical rehabilitation of melodrama has the significance of a recuperative gesture, of re-evaluation in a humanist spirit of emotions and feelings. Obliquely, the essayist also signals the process of the social devaluation of literature, also hinted at by William Marx in the volume *L'adieu à la Littérature: Histoire d'une Dévalorisation XVIIIe-XXe Siècle* [Farewell to literature: History of a devaluation 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries] (2005). Since Balzac and Hugo, literature gradually parted with life, turning into an elitist *feast of the intellect* (as Paul Valéry coined it) celebrated in a cryptic and obscure language, accessible only to the initiated ones. Steinhardt's plea for 'a noble and sentimental literature' once again confirms Peter Brooks's considerations in *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (1992), in which the critic convincingly demonstrates the viability of the genre, which by no means ended with the nineteenth century, but continued to survive in specific forms and modes (as an *experimental genre*) to this day.

Sensing that the aesthetics of melodrama satisfies a deep human need to dream and live, by compensation, in an ideal world (Patraș, 2013, pp. 51-95), Steinhardt actually draws attention to the aesthetic relevance of the ethic core of literature, in line with the ancient ideal of *kalocagathia*. Feeling is thus understood as the intellectual processing of emotion, in a

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<sup>15</sup> Original text: "indiferent n-am fost niciodată și nici supărarea nu mi s-a transformat cândva în acreală".

<sup>16</sup> Radu Vancu's study, *Elegy for the Human* (2018) is based on the same premises.



circuit that harmoniously connects soul, spirit and body, instinct and reason, culture and nature and so on. Melodrama would express, says Steinhardt (2012 b, p. 238), ‘the long-standing dream of mankind, that evil - perhaps - is not true, and that troubles - in the end - will end in good; the hope, the desire, the conviction that the bad guys have only played some roles and that in the end everything will be cleared up and reconciled’<sup>17</sup> (our translation). The Olympian Maiorescu, who admired Charles Dickens and refused to read the naturalists, and the cynical sentimentalist Ioan Luca Caragiale, who confessed somewhere that he always preferred ‘a good, warm melodrama’ to modernist creations (considered ‘insipid’), were prone to melodrama. It is interesting that Steinhardt reveals in the works of the two Romanian classics a happy conjunction between local and European culture and a synthesis of liberalism and conservatism (both are, says the essayist, ‘aristocratic bourgeois’), despite the profoundly different personality structure of each of them, Caragiale being close, according to the author of *The Diary of Happiness*, to Nietzsche, and Maiorescu - to Mozart.

#### 4. Rehabilitating Naivety: Why Crying for Ridiculous Liberal Ideas?

Steinhardt’s interpretation of Caragiale’s work, as an expression of ‘bun-simț’ [*common sense* or, even better through the French ‘*bon sens*’, *good sense*], was otherwise received with great reservations by most critics. Our great playwright remains in the consciousness of posterity, whatever one may say, rather as a cynic than a sentimentalist, since it has become a commonplace of exegesis to characterise him as a satirical, anti-romantic, radically conservative writer, who ridiculed liberal values, showing an acute misanthropy and an irony amplified to the point of cruelty towards the most tender aspects of existence (love, childhood, etc.). To give an eloquent example, appreciating his exceptional talent, Negoïtescu held Caragiale responsible for the deplorable moral state of the nation, on the grounds that the mixture of cynicism and aestheticism in his work had influenced Romanians for the worse (Negoïtescu, 1991, p. 119). Caragiale’s work has been evaluated in this negative grid of radical criticism and extremely caricaturing stylization, with the socialist Dobrogeanu-Gherea reproachfully pointing out the absence of ethical and social ideals in the playwright’s writings, a deficiency that can also be seen in his minimalist aesthetics, which models a humanity that is far too schematic and elementary, reduced to a set of automatisms and stereotypes and, as such, lacking psychological depth (Gherea, 1956, pp. 66-91). Even the playwright’s most ardent admirers (Zarifopol, Eugen Ionescu) later drew attention to the pessimism and grotesque visionary-ism (considered the dominant feature of his talent, reducible only superficially to irony), which robbed Caragiale’s characters of any shadow of humanity (Mironescu, 2014, pp. 38-40).

In contrast to such reductionist interpretations, the monk of Rohia offers us a sentimental and even tender view on Caragiale, a hypostasis that would be traceable even in his most representative comic creations, whose ‘secret’ the author of *The Diary of Happiness* seems to have uncovered since childhood, if we are to take his word for it. Steinhardt confessed that both his mother and he burst into tears at the end of the performances of the play *A Lost Letter*. Republished in *Articole Burgheze* [Bourgeois essays], the essay entitled *Secretul ‘Scrisorii Pierdute’* [The secret of The Lost Letter] first saw the light of print in 1945, in a historical context that was to seal the end of the democratic regime, while provoking nostalgia for liberal ideas and a world in which the rights of the individual were not empty words. Steinhardt broadly recalibrates the characters of Caragiale’s comedy in a positive light and, with them, the exalted romantic rhetoric of the 48’ Revolution liberals,

<sup>17</sup> Original text: “visul dintotdeauna al omenirii, după care răul – poate – nu este adevărat, și necazurile – până la urmă – se vor termina cu bine; speranța, dorința, convingerea că cei răi n-au jucat decât roluri și că la sfârșit se vor lămurii și împăca toate”.

vehemently discredited by Maiorescu's *Critice* [Pieces of criticism] and by the *Junimea* members. Exaggerations should not be deemed as undesirable *by default*; they should be banned only if they serve a bad idea. Instead, if it is meant for a good purpose, even the exaggerated melodrama reveals 'a noble face.'

From this perspective, discussing Caragiale's emblematic character Cațavencu, an epitome of hypocrisy, Steinhardt notes that 'Cațavencu's ideals, nebulous and deformed, start from the great principles of freedom, rights and progress which, much as they may be mocked, forced and pushed beyond the limits of right reason, they are still noble things'<sup>18</sup> (Steinhardt, 2008, p. 732, our translation). Opposed to the *theories* that Cațavencu so patently and incoherently advocates (with the caveat that liberal ideas 'remain human and express an aspiration'<sup>19</sup>), the critic places the 'brutal and terrorist theories that were extolled by the previous years'<sup>20</sup> that is, by the extremist ideologies of the interwar period, and that 'will never leave the tender-hearted impression that liberal ideas, corrupted and minimized as they are, can produce'<sup>21</sup> (Steinhardt, 2008, p. 732, our translation). If we apply this reading grid to Caragiale's comedy, with the contextualization associated (the end of the Second World War and so on), we can easily understand the tears of the spectators at the end of the play, whose conflict is sorted out not by the extermination of the adversary, but by a general reconciliation intended to illustrate the characters' deep humanity, their capacity to forgive or at least to reconcile and accept compromise. In times of war or of totalitarianism, this is a sign of tolerance and wisdom. As George Ardeleanu states, the commentary boils down to 'the misery of utopia'<sup>22</sup> (Ardeleanu, 2009, p. 351, our translation) and, no less, to the benefits of imperfection; the playwright imagines a world dominated by a 'cheerful relativism,' which makes Caragiale's heroes ethically superior to, for instance, the blackened Hamlet, the prince who, by taking revenge, 'returns to the fullest normality of inferiority'<sup>23</sup> (Ardeleanu, 2009, p. 351, our translation).

No doubt this is also a typical Steinhardtian twist, as exegetes have morally sanctioned Cațavencu's versatility, blaming it on the character's incapacity to evolve. Moreover, the final reconciliation has also generally been seen as a petty barter in which the characters, going through different experiences, eventually cheerfully accept their villainy as a matter of course. Perhaps it was precisely from this observation, which highlights the circularity of comedy, that Eugen Ionescu came to see the radically tragic, grim fatality of comedy. It is worth noting that, only a year after the publication of Steinhardt's article, Călinescu revises in Steinhardtian vein (see *Domina bona*), his chapter on Caragiale from *Istoria Literaturii Române de la Origini Până în Prezent* [History of Romanian literature from origins to present], and judges the characters' verbal incontinence as 'the pathos of the idea,' that is, an attitude which might be considered ethically superior to any instance of argumentative lucidity or sophistry (Călinescu, 1990, pp. 137-184).

In fact, a correlation between Steinhardt and Călinescu should be established not only by bringing closer their comments on Caragiale, but by discussing their contributions as parts of a broader (and perhaps unconsciously brought to the fore) critical project aiming to rehabilitate the emotion, the passion, in order to rethink literary history from the perspective of what Aby Warburg called *Pathosformel* (*pathetic form*). Incidentally, the 'nameless

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<sup>18</sup> Original text: "idealurile lui Cațavencu, nebuloase și deformate, pornesc de la marile principii de libertate, drepturi și progres care, oricât ar fi luate în răs, siluite și împinse dincolo de limitele dreptei rațiuni, tot lucruri nobile rămân".

<sup>19</sup> Original text: "rămân omenești și exprimă un elan".

<sup>20</sup> Original text: "teoriile brutale și teroriste pe care le-au preamărit anii din urmă".

<sup>21</sup> Original text: "nu vor putea da niciodată impresia duioasă pe care o produc, corupte și minimalizate cum sunt, ideile liberale".

<sup>22</sup> Original text: "mizeria utopiei".

<sup>23</sup> Original text: "reintră în cea mai deplină normalitate a inferiorității".

science' that Agamben spoke of in one of his 2012 studies, referring to Warburg's pioneering work, refers strikingly to Călinescu's definition of literary history as an 'ineffable science' (Călinescu, 2008, pp. 430-470), with at least two beaoning principles: the anti-positivist attitude and the wide interdisciplinary opening. In this vein, the rehabilitation of emotion and feeling, to which Steinhardt also contributed significantly, acquired for Călinescu the significance of a theoretical presupposition consistently illustrated throughout his work in various forms and nuances. Călinescu's generally overlooked theoretical attempt in *Poezia 'Realelor'* [Poetry of Real Things] to classify writers into two distinct categories ('realists' versus 'idealists') according to their gender (Călinescu, 1971, pp. 263-302) is also significant in this framework, albeit the multitude of details related to life and everyday practices (clothing, food, reading, etc.), invoked as determining factors in the creative process. Călinescu is also one of the *realist* writers who sees Petrarca's indirect influence on Conachi and on the Văcărești poets, but also on Caragiale's character Trahanache, that is, on those who believe in the mystical, noumenal reality of love, thus ignoring its concrete-phenomenal incarnations. Admirably, Steinhardt seems to have perceived with extraordinary intuition - as Negoïtescu (1991, p. 188) did later - this sensualist-vitalist, naive-elemental, refractory to any kind of ideology, side of the personality of Călinescu, appreciating (see the monk's commentary on *The Wedding Book*)

this feeling of participation in the external reality, of euphoria, of Goethean acceptance of the world, of merging into entanglements, of anticipatory fulfilment, ... which is particularly intense and is one of the least researched aspects of a writer who has otherwise been so thoroughly analyzed (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 280, our translation).

Moreover, Steinhardt deliberately ignores the much-touted canonical stance of *the divine critic* in order to highlight his personality as an artist *stricto sensu*, a creator whose work 'is nothing but joy, love of life and peace'<sup>24</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 282, our translation). Consequently, as in the case of Caragiale's characters, Călinescu's emphasis on pathos and emotion actually overshadows this idea. The predominant note of his personality is - Steinhardt concludes in line with his own humanist creed - 'an attitude devoid of criticism, reservations and malice towards life'<sup>25</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 280, our translation).

This explains why Steinhardt is so vehemently against criticism and especially against dissolving irony (deemed as 'a second-rate quality,' derived from lack of soul involvement, and excessive rationalism) designed to nip any mobilizing impulse, and all the more so because discretion does not suit it and because it is often used 'with ostentation and system' and is usually confused 'with contemptuous intelligence'<sup>26</sup> (Steinhardt, 2010 b, p. 358, our translation). Stressing instead that 'art particularly rewards the creators who add a *warm* substance [sentimental, inspired, etc.] and those who do not know the dilemma of soul or spirit' (Steinhardt, 2010 b, p. 358, our translation), the monk of Rohia pleads strongly for 'a noble and sentimental literature'<sup>27</sup>, deeply rooted in life, in which the ethic core acquires a spectacular aesthetic brilliance. If modern literature has evolved from melodrama to irony, from Balzac's visionary realism to Flaubert's critical realism, the resurrection of melodrama is in fact a wise reconnection of literature to its most fertile source, namely life. This is why Steinhardt is always keen on sanctioning the modern heresy of segregating the work from the

<sup>24</sup> Original text: "nu-i decât bucurie, dragoste de viață și pace".

<sup>25</sup> Original text: "atitudinea lipsită de critică, rezerve și malițiozitate față de viață".

<sup>26</sup> Original text: "cu inteligența disprețuitoare".

<sup>27</sup> Original text: "o literatură nobilă și sentimentală".

writer's biography, as we have previously demonstrated, without exalting, nonetheless, vulgar biographism, that is, an approach that ignores the aesthetic specificity of literature and art.

### 5. The Writer and his Shadow. From Life to Oeuvre

There are authors, however, in whom the links between life and work do not illustrate a harmonious unity, but rather the most serious distortions, betraying the desire for celebrity at all costs. The most illustrious examples cited by Steinhardt are the 'uncertain' Oscar Wilde - about whom he conjectures: 'he misunderstood the undeniable truth: the artist's task is to scandalize. He believed that the artist can and must scandalize by his life. Which shows a childish conception and is completely false'<sup>28</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 406, our translation) - and the sterile André Gide, a bourgeois spirit and failure as a novelist, as the essayist decrees mercilessly. Like Wilde, Gide theorized scandal, exaggeration with method:

as a child, he simulated nervous attacks. 'I'm suffering!', he cried, and he was writhing. Uncle Charles didn't believe him, shrugged his shoulders, read his diary further. André remained the same today. He wants to frighten, to enrage, to conquer in this way, indirectly. Let's not believe him when he wants to be worse than he is<sup>29</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 133, our translation).

Compared to Gide and Wilde, Dickens was deemed as more valuable, because he neither sought to scandalize nor to theorize unnecessarily, preferring instead to try to make people better, to write for the many and the oppressed. Melodramatic in the fullest sense of the word, the English writer's work appears to the monk-essayist as a literary analogue of Origen's theology (Steinhardt, 2012b, p. 239), who advocated through the idea of *apocatastasis* (a key concept of his doctrine), the salvation of the whole universe, including the Devil and the wicked and sinful. Calling for compassion for the afflicted, but also for forgiveness, for the forgetting of evil, Dickens's melodramatic literature surpasses in importance the work of any other modern writer, and is appreciated by Steinhardt as the gold standard in relation to the series illustrated by those authors 'who make a method and a creed out of goodwill'<sup>30</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012b, p. 238, our translation), such as Alphonse Daudet, Jules Romains, Thomas Mann, Mihail Sadoveanu, Ionel and Păstorel Teodoreanu, Calistrat Hogaș and D.D. Pătrășcanu and many others. In our literature, Steinhardt opinions, 'the culmination of art's aspirations toward goodwill and endearment' is represented by the work of Brătescu-Voinești, the essayist considering that the novel *Călătorului îi Șade Bine cu Drumul* [The traveler fits the road] would have a 'formidable significance for the characterology of the Romanian people,' because here the concept of *comesenie*, sitting together at the table - an autochthonous variant of *conviviality* - is exemplarily illustrated<sup>31</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 236, our translation).

The re-evaluation of Brătescu-Voinești from this unusual angle deserves Steinhardt's attention, the novelist enjoying the appreciation of the critics of his time (at the time, H. Sanielevici considered the novelist's work a model of classicism, and Ibrăileanu dedicated an

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<sup>28</sup> Original text: "a înțeles greșit incontestabilul adevăr: menirea artistului e să scandalizeze. El a crezut că artistul poate și trebuie să scandalizeze prin viața sa. Ceea ce vădește o concepție copilăroasă și e cu totul fals".

<sup>29</sup> Original text: "Copil, simula atacuri de nervi. Sufăr, striga el, și se zvârcolea. Unchiul Charles nu-l credea, dădea din umeri, își citea jurnalul mai departe. André a rămas același și astăzi. Vrea să sperie, să înfioare, să cucerească astfel, indirect. Să nu-i dăm crezare când vrea să fie mai rău decât e".

<sup>30</sup> Original text: "care-și fac din bunăvoință o metodă și un crez".

<sup>31</sup> Original text: "o formidabilă însemnătate pentru caracterologia poporului român", deoarece aici e ilustrat exemplar conceptul de *comesenie* - variantă autohtonă, s-a spus, a englezescului *conviviality*.

applied study to him, published in a booklet), only to be excluded from the canon later on thanks to the minimizing opinion of G. Călinescu (Călinescu, 1982, pp. 575-581), who places him in the category of minor prose writers, who practised literature occasionally, as a work of *leisure*. Remarkable and surprising are also the connections that Steinhardt makes between the literature of the ‘anti-absurd’ Eugen Ionescu (placed within an autochthonous tradition, as a descendant of Creangă, Caragiale and Anton Pann) and popular literature, dominated by the common sense of the Romanian peasant, which is also evident in the work of the great playwright. In fact, all of them seem to share ‘the right thinking... that which breaks the veils, inspires the steady utterance of truths and puts things in their place’<sup>32</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012b, p. 351). Steinhardt finds Alexandru Odobescu’s literature to be ‘noble and sentimental,’ and he also discovers deep popular roots in it, ignored by exegetes who have stubbornly tried to highlight the author’s erudition and who have discredited, for example, the *Bisocean’s tale* on the grounds that it is an irrelevant addition to the subject matter of the ‘false hunting treatise.’ In reality, Steinhardt remarks with exceptional acuity, *Pseudokynegetikos* presents itself as ‘a genuine treatise on culture and distinction’<sup>33</sup> mainly because it succeeds in ‘the somatic taming and mixing of refinement and folk inspiration’<sup>34</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012b, p. 186, our translation), the writer’s performance being similar to George Enescu’s *Third Sonata (for violin and piano) in Romanian style*, or Nicolae Grigorescu’s self-portrait. Unlike contemporary critics, therefore, who have removed Odobescu’s essays from textbooks because they read as too complicated, Steinhardt exalts the highly pedagogical value of reading this difficult text; he deems this reading as a necessary propaedeutic for unravelling the relationship between low-brow and high-brow literatures:

I for one - the essayist comments - , if I were a Romanian teacher, would have my students read and comment on *Pseudokynegetikos* before others; [*Pseudokynegetikos* is] the cultural response to the memories and stories of the popular Creangă<sup>35</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012b, p. 188, our translation).

The same harmonious confluence between the popular and the cultured background can be noticed, says the essayist, in the version of *Miorița* rephrased by Vasile Alecsandri, where we are dealing with an ‘essentialist stylization’<sup>36</sup> that projects the text of the ballad ‘from a miscellaneous fact to splendor’<sup>37</sup>, straight into Mihai Eminescu’s or Lucian Blaga’s poetry (Steinhardt, 2012b, p. 175, our translation).

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the way Steinhardt interprets psychoanalysis, the hermeneutic reductionism of the new science (which had the indisputable merit of having emphasized the importance of the subconscious in psychic processes) placing it, along with Marxism, in the category of secular religions, *i.e.* discursive practices of a fundamentalist type. The monk of Rohia therefore attributes Freud’s discovery to the spiritual climate of Belle Époque, marked by the vogue of occultism, theosophy and all those mundane practices with which ordinary people spent their time – ‘a world of well-being, tranquility and a sense

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<sup>32</sup> Original text: “dreapta socotință este aceea care rupe vălurile, inspiră statornic rostirea adevărilor și pune lucrurile la locul lor”.

<sup>33</sup> Original text: “autentic tratat de cultură și distincție”.

<sup>34</sup> Original text: “îmblânzirea somatică dintre rafinament și popular”.

<sup>35</sup> Original text: “Eu unul, dacă aș fi profesor de limba română, le-aș da elevilor mei să citească și să comenteze *Pseudokynegetikos* mai înainte de altele; [*Pseudokynegetikos* este] răspunsul dat de culturali amintirilor și poveștilor popularului Creangă”.

<sup>36</sup> Original text: “stilizare esențialistă”.

<sup>37</sup> Original text: “de la fapt divers la splendoare”.

of security'<sup>38</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 409, our translation). Ignoring the dogmatic presuppositions of psychoanalysis, Steinhardt makes original considerations about the erotic behavior of Emil Codrescu (see the article *Cinci Cazuri se Seniorie* [Five Cases of Senior-Like Behavior]), a character who belongs to the illustrious category of literary heroes such as the Princess of Clèves, Dominique, Adolphe or Tatiana Larina, characterized by 'self-control', 'nobility' and 'sense of honor' (Steinhardt, 2012 b, pp. 289-296). The essayist also places the work of Marcel Proust (Steinhardt, 2012 b, pp. 154-171), admired for its 'finesse of social analysis'<sup>39</sup> and for its classicism, which takes it beyond the horizon of reductionist interpretations (along the lines of Freud-Bergson). Steinhardt's observations are in line with those of Garabet Ibrăileanu in *Creație și analiză* [Creation and Analysis] and confirm once again the opinions of the most learned Proust exegetes, who have emphasized the geometric-architectural vision of the narrative construction of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* [In search of lost time], as well as the overcoming of Bergsonism in the spirit of the postulates of Husserl's phenomenology. After noting that time is Marcel's 'source of sadness and unhappiness', Steinhardt asserts: 'Glorification of the absence of time, glorification of eternity, could anything be more anti-Bergsonian, a more faithful literary affirmation of the classical metaphysics of the static?'<sup>40</sup> (Steinhardt, 2012 b, p. 167, our translation).

## 6. Conclusion

From all the examples presented in this article, it is clear that the author of *The Diary of Happiness* was not only 'an elite intellectual colporteur'<sup>41</sup> (Negoîtescu, 1994, p. 416, our translation), but also an erudite essayist of astonishing spontaneity, whose intellectual discourse was embedded within a remarkable cultural breadth. This places him in the same spiritual family as Alexandru Odobescu, Paul Zarifopol, Mihail Ralea, Alexandru Paleologu or Andrei Pleșu. In spite of the diversity of the themes addressed, the essays of the monk of Rohia preserve a basic unity, revealed in a coherent *modus cogitandi* and a defensive ethos, intended to protect individual freedom through recourse to modesty and to what Paleologu called *bunul simț* – *the good sense* as paradox (Paleologu, 1972, p. 10).

Reading Steinhardt's essays is also a powerful antidote to laziness of thought, offering the reader the chance to escape from the narrow horizon of commonplaces and to see the harmonious way in which the author's life is mirrored in his work. This outstanding sample of humanity provides for Romanians a strong symbol of anti-totalitarian resistance. Leaving aside the prison memorial and the texts on religious subjects, which are permeated by the same essayistic vein, we highlighted the fact that Steinhardt understood literary criticism as an ingenious creative activity, polemically anti-positivist, susceptible to new and surprising cultural analogies, incessantly pleading for the rehabilitation of subjectivity, emotion and feeling as essential factors in the process of knowledge, from the perspective of a fundamental humanism drawing from Montaigne's tradition.

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<sup>38</sup> Original text: "o lume a bunăstării, a liniștei și a sentimentului de siguranță".

<sup>39</sup> Original text: "finațea analizei sociale".

<sup>40</sup> Original text: "Glorificare a lipsei timpului, preamărire a veșniciei, se poate ceva mai anti-bergsonian, afirmare literară mai fidelă a clasicei metafizici a staticului?".

<sup>41</sup> Original text: "un colporteur intelectual de elită".

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