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Nicu Gavriluță - România în Starea Bardo: publicistică şi dialoguri culturale

Romania in the Bardo State: Journalistic Writings and Cultural Dialogs

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Nicu Gavriluta's book brings together articles that appeared in Iasi local press and interviews on TV and on the radio during a special period of time for Romanians, 17 years of transition from a post-communist past to a would-be prosperous future. Let me just mention that even prior to a post-modern Romania of many centers, Iasi was always a powerful point in which one would take the pulse of the cultural life of the country. So, it is no wonder that in Iasi we find Nicu Gavriluta and other important cultural figures that we encounter in this book.

The author uses the "Bardo state" as a metaphor for the Romanian transition. Since etymologically "bardo" means "in between two poles/limits/worlds", this state of in-betweenness defines Romania's position in the passage from "the old totalitarian world to the new, cosmopolitan world of the EU". Romania's "bardo" state of transition is tough reality, and Nicu Gavriluta is a Romanian attempting to make sense of the changes around him. Only in so doing, he has both a critical eye and an open spirit. Gavriluta speaks of things important and approaches questions that are on everyone's mind. He examines social mentalities that may even grow pathological dimensions.

In the rush for prosperity, old traditional values often get discarded. Work is one of them. So, how does one survive when the money is less and the cost of living higher? Gavriluta opposes two types of mentalities. There are the ordinary Romanians who survive the hardships of transition "due to the spiritual significance that work continues to have in their images and representations of the world". Thus, work is a human duty before God. The perception of the sacredness of work goes hand in hand with the belief that human achievement as the fruit of work is a manifestation of God's presence in our world. Gavriluta concludes: "Work becomes a hierophany to the one who has the spiritual eyes to see and enough reason to understand". It is this kind of mentality that the author points to as the good example in the efforts to build a better future. He advocates good work, decency and faith. In reverse situations are those who succumb to the

temptation of avoiding work. They find unorthodox ways and take advantage of the imperfections of a system to get-rich-quick. For them the author anticipates that success will turn eventually into a burden.

Nicu Gavriluta does not hesitate to criticize those tendencies in his fellow countrymen that prevent them from moving forward. Amongst these is the inclination to talk and complain rather than work and do. He sanctions this "chronic mental illness of Romanian transition" consisting in the stubborn hope that we can possibly talk away what is bad in our lives.

In a world upside down, those with the money are opinion leaders and initiators of new 'cultures'. Gavriluta is very critical of kitsch and of the culture en-masse and particularly of the newly emerging human types that others blindly follow and that the media helps multiply. This "media mutant", a "postmodern barbarian", alien to reading and writing, totally engrossed in consuming movies and music, wasting time in clubs, 'reading' porn magazines and playing computer games, is also a Romanian citizen with full voting rights. Gavriluta is worried about the kind of future this new citizen will vote for. The nation's future-in-the-making is a multitude of individual present times and destinies.

The book captures a multifaceted reality in its social, political, cultural and religious aspects. Indeed, in one of his essays, Gavriluta talks about the existence of "several Romanias" as the country turns various faces to the world: a traditional rural Romania, an urban one, formerly industrialized and currently inhabited by the unemployed, an official Romania as part of country reports, a country of football hooligans, hip-hop and local 'manele" fans, etc. It is the general concerns of such a diverse society that Gavriluta focuses on, natural events (like the floods in Moldavia) or cultural ones (the DaVinci Code, or Mel Gibson's film) that the author interprets for his readers with the patience and depth of understanding of his educational background in philosophy and special interest in hermeneutics.

The present collection of texts makes up two rather unequal halves of a book of diverse discourse for a variety of readers. Indeed, Professor Gavriluta wears several hats as author of this book. He is the inquisitive journalist, the objective essayist, to finally take up his academic chair in chapter five entitled "Seven Dialogs on Hermeneutics, Religion and Politics".

This last chapter is a change in register and occasions encounters with Professor Stefan Afloroaei and his understanding of hermeneutics and alterity, as well as of method (or rather lack of) and hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade and others, of cultural models and rapport to failure and evil. Readers of this part of the book 'meet' with Liviu Antonesei and his interest in the relationship between education and culture, and with Nicu Gavriluta as an advocate of the usefulness of philosophy and religion in the contemporary world. Mircea Eliade is also a figure present in Nicu Gavriluta's discourse (itself very Eliadean in spirit). The book ends in the confident tone of Eliade's (and Gavriluta's) view of the wisdom and art of dying, and of the openness of spirit towards otherness in a world of conflict.

I feel that this book review does not do justice to the wealth of the author's personal reflections (so much is left unsaid!), but I am however hoping I have opened a window to Professor Gavriluta's keen perception of the world.