

PARALLEL LIVES IN MARXIST POSTERITY

Ion MILITARU*

Abstract: The old exercise of ancient culture, illustrated by Plutarh, had reduced efficiency as it was chronologically situated at the end of antiquity. Transferred in the methodological field, the outcome of such practice results, in the Marxist posterity, in an extended signifying capability of the Marxist practice and doctrine. The parallel comparison of the Marxist and Communist lives and doctrines in the Marxist posterity led to signalling the uniqueness and originality of the peak masterminds and the protagonists of the communist power.

Keywords: history of ideas, communism heritage, Marx, style.

A genre which gained only minimal recognition. A surprising appearance in late antiquity, when there was not much left in its analytical stock, *parallel lives* seemed to be a solution, a key to read the world. The Idea, which had dominated the entire ancient culture, has already given ground to history. And it is personality that arises on this field.

In a somehow meteoric way, a providential appearance of a new method which, having lost the metaphysical vocation of the Idea, replaced it with the personality deciphered in the mirror, this type of exercise was not going to be a long lasting one. Perhaps the last light cast by the antiquity self-awareness on itself, *the parallel lives* are based on comparison. A life resembles another, they have something in common, there is a universal meaning unifying them, making them exponents of the same genre. Nothing more than the old assumptions of Greek metaphysics.

With such a *weltanschauung*, Plutarh's discovery remained the exclusive property of his time. The world itself became different, it grew larger, its dimensions expanded. In an infinite universe, parallel lives can no longer exist. At the most, in such a world which had dissolved its limits, there can be non-Euclidian lives in which two parallels never meet. Not even with Plutarh definitely parallel lives exist. There are common points, lives intersecting in a horizon which is, however, common.

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In this type of exercise, forcing its limits beyond time, which place could Marx take in the world of parallel lives? Who could stand next to him?

Marx has never been a leader, whereas the *parallel lives* are, with Plutarh, the lives of great leaders, not parallel lives of women, famous wives or dancers. We could hardly find a figure similar to Marx in this universe. To whom could he be compared? Who could stand next to him regarding starting point, development, results, consequences? Lenin, whom he resembles through his capacity of ideological thinking, has nevertheless appeared by a legacy, on an already existing ground, with a capacity of maximum assimilation, with a reason already recorded on the cadastral map of history. Lenin created no ideology, but he benefitted from one which he practised in all the possible and impossible directions. On the other hand, Lenin applied ideology – a fact that makes the difference. He created a socialist – totalitarian state, being however defeated by his own creation, Stalin, in a scenario worthy of Victor Frankenstein. A little simpler could be the situation with the descendants.

Lenin – Castro; both are placed at the beginning of the communist system, they make revolutions, destroy a world and make preparations for the birth of another. The newly arisen world is and wishes to be another world, new, perfect... However, they end differently. Lenin is pushed to death by Stalin, Castro is defeated by no one. He retires, gives up power to his family, a unique case in history where, as it is known, family is as a rule removed from power, killed or exiled.

The exercise does not hold good in the case of Lenin – Che Guevara. The stable structure of the former having the idea of limited revolution, does not coincide with the nomadic structure of the latter. Che is the exponent of the idea of world revolution, so he is nearer to Marx than to Lenin. Otherwise, nothing to be compared. Ceaușescu, Honecker, Kadar – minor figures, puppets of a received, inherited ideology and history.

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Marx did not inherit the Decalogue ethics in order to set the outline of the human normativity in the face of reality. He neither inherited the list of commandments to which he would accept the laxity of achievement. Neither Moses nor Jesus has the certainty of message acceptance. Their whole tragedy consists in the gap between what their message demands and what the human being driven away by God really is.

Between these two, the entire religious drama of man is revealed. Here are to be found all the downfalls, all the hopes and all the faith. Not even Kant led further the equation between *sollen* and *sein*, not even with him the moral being was irrevocably united to the normativity of the categorical imperative.

Marx denies both types of equation. For him, the normativity, the *telos* which the working class is supposed to achieve, is given in the historical law itself, it is not an actual normativity. The laws of nature do not have their own *telos*, their

normativity and neither do the laws of history. Consequently, what man should be is not a *sollen* of traditional, kantian or religious type, it is no *sollen* whatsoever.

The idea that the proletariat will overthrow the capitalist world does not come from foreseeing the future or from a moral *sollen*, it is not a prophecy. It is simply the interpreting of the economic analysis undertaken: a law of history. Here is the second perversion of Marx' economic analysis: the setting of the historical normativity, allegedly inferred from the facts themselves.

The logic of false normativity is also the basis for the famous definition of religion as *opium for people*. The aleatorily settles a contingent goal. Not even faith, God's promise escapes contingency. Faith is a free act. Marx discovers this goal in things themselves. The goal exists in the development of facts, it is their direction of moving, their indestructible target which is no longer up to human will. Science itself is the one which points to it. Marx appreciated science for its totalitarian character, indisputable feature.

On the other hand, the laws of history considered together with the laws of nature lead to strange knowledge. We owe them, says Marx, the naturalization of the world of man, getting to know man like we get to know the world of nature. Through the laws of history one knows the final outcome, the point history wishes to get to (though the laws of nature are without relation to time, without a target: there are no laws with an aim, teleological laws in the living world: birth, youth, maturity, old age, death...). Marx stops to an ideal target, a deathless maturity: communism – nature without nature, a nature obtained through self – awareness. In other words, a nature-spirit hybrid. By introducing historical laws on the model of nature laws, Marx advances a confused vision of laws: up to a point the identity between the two is valid, whereas beyond a certain point: the achieving of communism, the historical law ceases. The biological laws are not teleological laws. Only in a far-fetched manner can one grant something in the range of targets to the nature laws.

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After all, it is not the working class which destroyed the bourgeoisie, but it is the bourgeoisie which transformed the working class.

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The separation from Hegel is made in terms easy to understand. Marx replaces the logic, the course of Idea and of spirit with the history an subject of proletariat. What happens with Idea and spirit in Hegel's metaphysics is exactly what happens with proletariat throughout history. With the only difference that, while Hegel's spirit had sufficient resources in the concept, doing nothing else but following the way described by the latter, Hegel's proletariat had to cover a historical route for which there was no concept. History has merely no concept.

The artifice used by Marx in order to fit in the parallel with Hegel consisted in introducing the shaky concept, the pseudo-concept in history. History constructed on the matrix of Procust bed conducts to exactly what the Bolshevik communism led to. From this point of view, Marx' concept of history is bound to end up in Bolshevik communism. History as a concept is a late discovery with Marx. In his early writings, when he was not certain whether to adhere to the socialists' recipes for the future, he lacked this concept¹. Not even later would he provide accurate data regarding communism.

When does this moment come up and what brings it about? Marx was a contradictory character. On the one hand he related to history and to everything that meant parts of it as if it were a mystery, an enigma and he viewed its forces as phantoms, ghosts, unknown factors – from this point of view history is rather in opposition to concept. On the other hand, Marx had always been attracted to viewing history as a solved enigma, an unravelled mystery. It is on this dimension that the concept of history was developed. From here also derives the belief in the possibility of intervening in it, of hurrying up its processes and of discovering its laws.

The striving for knowledge is the trigger for concept, the primary source of Marx' theory on the inevitability of communism. Knowledge is the one which pushed him into developing a concept of history. Completing the concept is what led him to communism as the final stage of history.

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Style is the man! Scientific genius could not take the place of his literary talent: if Marx had lacked in the former, he could have surely benefitted from his literary talent. Moreover, it is not difficult to discover its directions of action: esoteric fiction as mystery fiction. Marx' manner of dealing with science, his conviction that at the end of it there will be the discovery of certain laws that will make everything clear, cannot derive from anything else but this very type of literature. In its essence, mystery is the key while its discovery, the *lifting of the curtain* does not mean the destruction, but the preserving and the alchemic recomposing of the world. In any fiction of this kind, the psychological effect consists in discovering a *modus vivendi* in the proximity of the world foundation, of the presence of god and his benevolent attitude.

Nothing serves this fiction better than a myth. And the very presence of it in the Marx' texts, especially the Greek myth, but also the Hindu, the Persian or the Celtic one, and to a great extent, the Christianity, with all its symbols, is abundant. It is not, as one might first think, about a rhetorical technique, a persuasion method or actually the manner of using general education. We have here one of the sources of undeclared esoteric thinking.

¹ As it is shown in "Contributions to the Jewish Issue".

Like the myth, *The Capital* as a whole is a scenario with two protagonists: the capitalist and the proletarian². The myth relates various happenings with ample, cosmic value or with a human, reduced one. *The Capital* presents the whole phenomenon of history as a script between capitalist and worker, with their entire prehistory from antiquity up to the present. In it there are episodes of cosmic proportions, apocalyptic in the most accurate sense of the word and also episodes of regional ontology. Though the two characters have mythical value – as they lay the foundations of history! – they are nothing else but impersonations of certain human categories with the accompanying active implications.

The capitalist is involved in the process of producing, retrieving and increasing the capital. The worker, as far as he is concerned, is involved in the same process: he asserts the same thing but in the opposite direction! What actually occurs has to a greater extent the mark of the former, as he possesses the economic initiative, the development and the specific culture. Though, what follows, namely the end of the process, eludes them both. They are caught in *iron relations* which lead to the end a mode of production meaning nothing else but the end of the world as capitalist world.

Marx speaks like in an esoteric novel in which the events have their own value and significance. He gives human shape to his categories and processes which as a matter of fact, represent something beyond any narrative possibility. It is an impressive literary device. The economic history becomes clearer, attractive and personal. “By no means do I paint a rosy picture of the figure of the capitalist and that of the landowner. But here it is about **persons** only in so far as they are the personification of some economic categories, bearers of certain class relations and interests”³.

But for what purpose is personification created here on the ground of the most *severe science*? In the sciences admired by Marx, namely physics, mathematics, chemistry, nothing stranger than adopting such a device. He does not even use the personification in the plural: the capitalists (it is very seldom that one can find this!), but in the singular, a fact which makes the economic category a character. Should it be at stake a simple coercion of intelligibility or merely, as I think, the manifestation of an innate nature and talent, of such a propensity as to display his belonging to a *weltanschauung* much more natural than the one built in full view?

² The present characters cannot be easily replaced by a manicheist typology: a good one and a bad one, Ormuzd and Ahriman. The two do not simply represent the own will, the intended identity with the principle of evil and the principle of good, respectively. Though situated on the principle of evil, the capitalist's situation is not wished for, he does not want to be the evil, actually. The historic coincidence in which he is thrown does not belong to him, his role is historically limited. And neither does the proletarian play on the side of the good principle of one's own will.

³ Marx, *The Capital*, in “Works”, vol. 23, Political Publishing House, 1966, p. 16.

And because such a talent and such a nature do not coincide with what Marx *wishes*, that is a nature and a talent placed at the service of science, immediately after making the above specification, a more accurate and precise description follows. Marx becomes retractile, contesting what he has just stated: it is nothing but a literary device, because history favours neither personifications, nor individuals, but only processes and laws. The artificial aim of thinking, its declared, public, official aspect looks worried about what might be the first line of force of dispalying a more powerful spirit. Thus a breach appears between a primitive-innate, vigorous, intermittent nature and a cultivated one, equally powerful and active. “*My point of view, which conceives the **evolution of the economic structure of society as a natural process**, can less than anybody else consider the isolated individual as being responsible for the relations whose social creation he remains, no matter how much he would rise beyond them from a subjective point of view*”⁴.

So, now Marx speaks about a point of view, a mind creation, meaning everything that concerns reason, discernment etc. But previously it was about mere nature, talent which had neither points of view, nor reason involved, nothing that meant elaboration and development on this ground. (I do not advance the decoding of this breach towards a psychoanalytic reading of Marx. This has already been done and has its value. The point I am concerned with has a cultural value and cannot be identified with any Freudian principle, be it the life principle, or the death principle).

What did Marx expect from style? There is an explicit register which does not exhaust the problem, however. In the second edition of *The Capital* there are specifications in this sens. “*First, I am bound to give explanations to the readers of the first edition on the modifications made in the second edition*”⁵, it is said. What do the modifications consist in? *The more systematic division of the book is obvious. All the added new notes are marked as notes to the second edition. Regarding the text, here is what the really important modifications consist in*⁶. There are specifications about *processing, modifications, revising and deductions made with more scientific exactness*. In the end some stylistic modifications are also named somewhat *en passant*, as he says. *It wolud be useless minutely mentioning the sporadic text modifications, which very often are only of stylistic nature. They are spread all over the book*⁷. To bear in mind: these modifications are so numerous, so scattered that they involve the *whole book*. That means the entire *Capital* is in itself stylistics. A revising of it is useless, but also impossible since everything is to be considered. Namely the whole work is seen as a stylistic exercise. Marx says that a mentioning of this kind is futile. I say: also impossible!

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

But they are essential. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why, a sentence below, he provides an addition: *I notice now, while revising the French version which is going to be published in Paris, that certain parts of the German original would have needed, some of them – a more serious working up, others – really important stylistic correcting, and others still a more careful elimination of some lapses that are to be found here and there*⁸.

We learn a commonplace here: stylistic corrections are important. It is banal, and still why does this specification appear if the scientific strictness is held in high esteem? The answer is given at the end of the preface to the first edition of the same book. There it is said: *Any appreciation from the part of scientific critique is welcome. As regards the prejudice of the so-called public opinion, to whom I have never made concessions, my watchword is, now like before, the words of the great Florentine: **Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti!** – Let people talk, and you go your way!* To whom was Marx addressing this recommendation? Obviously, not to scientific critique, whose appreciations he considers welcome. Nor to the public opinion, which he is determined to leave alone, in its pathetic idle chat. Then to whom? Evidently, Marx was addressing himself. And it is not exactly an addressing, as it goes without saying that it was not a subtle monologue, but a return to the primary element of his spirit here approximated in the form of Dante's art! Marx is addressing the phantom of his own spirit which never ceased to follow and haunt him. I approximated the type of fiction practised by Marx if one presumed the absence of scientific spirit, stating it as esoteric fiction. But it takes a little more to identify this genre, even in the situation in which its premises are not without insight.

In the two prefaces to *The Capital* he provides in a typical manner his way of asserting certain truths. I say *certain truths*, namely some secondary ones in comparison with the truth for the assertion of which he makes use of *scientific strictness, statistics and logic*. These secondary truths are not properly asserted, they are not formulated **ad rem**. The working ground of the scientific explanations of *The Capital* is England, its economy and history. It is a logic argument: *A physician notices the nature processes where they appear in their most conspicuous form and are less disturbed by alien influences or, if it is possible, he makes experiments in conditions that ensure the pure carrying out of the process. What I meant to study in this work is the capitalist mode of production and the corresponding production relations and circulation relations. Up to the present, their classical country is England. This is the reason why I have taken this country as main illustration of my theoretical lecture. But if the German reader shrugged his shoulders like a Pharisee, regarding the situation of the English industrial or agricultural workers or calmed down by optimistically thinking that in Germany it is far from being such an awkward plight, I am bound to tell him: De te fabula narratur! – It is about you!*

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

The distance separating Germany from England, the fact that it is about England and not Germany is not a reason to salve consciences. The evil there is your own evil. It is you who is there! – it is not an ordinary method to talk about somebody by describing somebody else to him.

Socrate taught us that the best self-awareness can be achieved not by evading oneself, not by consulting the skies, the gods and their love affairs, on the contrary, the best way to self-awareness is to deepen the understanding of oneself, the direct approach. But, what Marx practises here is something totally different. The Germans should not deceive themselves: the one who describes them the hell as being on English soil, in fact describes their own hell. Certainly Germany is not in the historical stage of a capitalism like the English one. Being far behind it, Germany only apparently does not share its misery.

It is not like this. Speaking to the German reader about the situation in England, Marx speaks to German reader, to the German worker about themselves: *de te fabula narratur!* It is true, Germany does not benefit from statistics like the English one which display misery in figures and data. But so much as it is, these statistics are clear: *they lift the curtain sufficiently so as to be able to catch a glimpse of the jelly fish head which it hides*⁹.

We are in full mythology of hiding. Moreover, with the stylistics about German statistics and the veil it manages to lift in order to catch a glimpse of the jelly fish head, mythology begins to flow in the same river of hiding. But we are immediately given a new episode of the same scenario of the hidden truth: *In order to pursue the monsters, Perseu made use of a miraculous hood which made him invisible. We pull the hood as much as possible over our eyes and ears so as to deny the monsters existence*¹⁰.

The Capital closes the preface to the first edition with the pagan ritual of the belief in signs. In fact it is the same idea: the truth which is hidden, while the way to it is one of going on the road and following the signs: *these are the signs of the time which cannot be hidden by purple cloaks or long black robes. This time the new signs indicate that time has come! The time and hour of change, of pulling mankind out of prehistory and entering the truth, namely the communism!*

Eventually, maybe it is not useless to complete this beginning picture of *The Capital*, a picture of illustrating the esoteric manner of primitive perception of truth, with the way in which the dead themselves participate in this process of hiding. *Beside the modern miseries, a whole range of inherited miseries lie heavy on us, resulting in long lasting of outdated obsolete modes of production, with all their train of anachronistic social and political relations. We suffer not only because of the alive, but also because of the dead. Le mort saisit le vif! – the dead one catches the alive!*¹¹.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 15

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

In various forms, the dead people would haunt Marx all of his life. They had never ceased to do it, even since the drafting of *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, when they haunted him in the form of the ghosts, and would not cease to do it even later, at the climax of his life, when the battle with them as spirits would go on.

Marx had often preferred the hidden truths, pulled out of the hiding place and unveiled, to the truth that really exists, a truth of the type of natural sciences. The circumstances in which he preferred such a methodology and considered it more efficient and appropriate represent still something like a debt to Marxist thinking!

