

Marius Jucan

Marius Jucan, Associate Professor, Ph.D, Faculty of European Studies Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania Author of the books: *Fascinatia fictiunii sau despre retorica elipsei* (1998) *Singuratatea salvata. O încercare asupra operei lui Henry David Thoreau din perspectiva modernitatii americane* (2001) *The Complex Innocence A Phenomenological-Hermeneutical Approach to the Tales of Henry James* (2001
E-mail:marjucan@yahoo.com

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Jean-Francois Mattei Barbaria interioara. Eseu despre imundul modern On Inner Barbarity. An Essay on the Modern Vile

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The meaning of *barbarity* and *barbarous* have left indelible traces in praising or criticizing modernity. The modern man portrayed himself as a victor over a world or a time in the evolution of society when barbarity was imagined to have reigned. European civilization identified itself as having curtailed barbarity or the rule of barbarian habits or customs. Barbarity covers more or less a style of life (or actually the lack of any style) thought to be crude, savage, brutal or simply primitive. Barbarians often appear in European (Eurocentric) imaginary in a vivid contrast to nomads, usually peoples who were in bad need for civilization's assets, or quite on the contrary, who destroyed civilizations and cultural assets due to their incapacity for praising otherness. In this way, the prevalent meaning regarding barbarity and barbarians is hopeless inferiority, quite often transferred into racist or ethno-centric views and / or opinions. Dealing with barbarians and barbarity, Europeans have too often taken pride in sprucing themselves up with the mission of having saved other peoples or communities from their base condition. But, not surprisingly, the notion of barbarity has traveled to other parts of the world, for instance in China, where peoples in the Western part of the world were usually regarded at the celestial court as nothing else but barbarians.

The figure of the "new" man, whether inspirited by religious or ideological beliefs, the idea of modern justice, rights, technological advancement, gradual social progress, good political governance enabling change in human society, definitely depart from the picture of barbarity. The "new man" has always proclaimed his severance from the barbarian times. In a classic description of the civilizing process, Norbert Elias wrote about how warriors transformed themselves into courtiers, and how "courtisation" embraced Europe between the 12-th and the 18-th centuries. In this way, overstepping barbarity meant leaving behind the dominance of the warrior caste and the rise to power of other social actors, within an ample cultural ring of changes. Following Elias's description of the civilizing process, one cannot stop thinking about similar changes (sociogenetic ones) occurring within colonial administration or within the communist nomenklatura, where the "purist" types were eventually surpassed by more sophisticated, creolized and gentrified models.

Ancient Greeks and Romans hurled the crushing weight of barbarity over the boundary of their city walls (*limes*). They thought that the barbarous could not live but inside the undeveloped language and customs of the foreigner(s), which always raised besides the pride of being different, the anxiety of not falling under a base, lawless, or inhuman order. The idea of a constant cultivation of an urban way of life, was destined by Cicero to the cultivation of the soul, which was philosophy's task. But cultural sequences intertwine, at least

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in Europe, in an engrafting manner. The fundaments of modernity are articulated on different cultural grafts as for instance the Christian one, for which the old distinction between the civilized and the barbarians did not work any longer. At the crossroads of another cultural sequence, Schiller reviewed the historical roots of the question, distinguishing between the savage and the barbarous, attempting to clarify the matter in relation to the idea of nature and freedom. Nietzsche (and almost all of the modernist thinkers) warned about the advent of "modern barbarians", portraying the destruction of the very concept of man, claimed to have been transformed into a mindless robot.

Jean-Francois Mattei provides in an interesting and highly knowledgeable volume recently translated in Romanian a genuine contribution to a nuanced understanding of notion of barbarity, making room not only for a necessary recapitulation of cultural values, but also to an engaging intellectual debate on it. In fact, Mattei reviews the interpretation of what was perceived as *barbarous*, first of all starting from the ancient distinctions made in the world of Greeks and Romans, so that the reader might grasp more intuitively and at the same time in a documented manner what *barbarity* should mean to the modern man. Before Enlightenment caused a rupture with the world of feudal tradition, the notion of barbarity had been operating already with clearly marked distinctions, either between ethnic groups, or between urban and non-urban communities, highlighting the importance of laws, political organizations, moral values, development of arts and letters, the status of citizens, the issue of education and least but not last, amenity in manners. The issue of barbarity and barbarians knew an unprecedented popularity in modernist times, when modernity was looked upon by a great number of writers and thinkers as being simply barbarous, in the sense of dislodging and perverting the authentic substance of man. The cult of primitiveness in the artistic vanguard at the beginning of the 20-th century was a sign of condemning the establishment values considered for long as being a barbarity. The bourgeois was seen as the "new" barbarian. Under his well-off way of life or easy circumstances anti-bourgeois attackers of all folds (from anarchists to socialists) found vulnerable spots, especially the way in which the bourgeois order parceled and policed power and representations. From the bourgeois, or from the Establishment view, any innovatory move, especially the artistic but also social ones were often describes as "barbarous", including fashion in clothing but also political rights. The 20-th century reposited the issue of barbarity almost on every level: not only the encompassing tragedies of the two world wars which raised its toll to an unprecedented figure, but generally the increasing relativisation of human values and the process of globalization rekindled the interest for these rather old notions.

The original point of view brought into discussion by Jean-Francois Mattei is a crucial one : whether barbarity is exterior or interior, in other words whether we should depict the barbarian world outside ours. The issue of locating barbarity beyond a wall, border, limit, or that of imagining it as an inside dimension of man leads to rethink the nature of man. From this point of view, Jean Francois Mattei employs a revisionist technique in order to persuade us that modernity has performed in a clandestine way a passing from a substantial culture to a procedural one. According to Charles Taylor, the present-day world is mostly a world of procedures which impoverishes the substance of man, resorting only rarely and symbolically to human and humanist culture, pushing into oblivion the complex tradition about man and the sense of living. Criticizing modernity for enchaining man rather than emancipating him, siding thus mainly with the Enlightenment critique and its inheritors, Mattei points out to the self-destruction of mythical reason, reminding us what Vico said that barbarity lies not only in senses but also in reflection. Going further, Jean Francois Mattei unfolds an ample and convincing demonstration about his major theme, namely that it would be simplistic to find the realm of barbarity in somebody's else's country and place, or to think that barbarity disappeared due to technical inventions. Mattei reiterates the self-destructive, implosive trait of barbarity, in what regards eventually the annihilation of human individuals and values, as in the case of totalitarian regimes. For him barbarity



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should be transcended in a proper cultivation of the cultural tradition which should be respected as such, and not diverted to instrumental usages, detrimental not only to the education of younger generations, but also to the very preservation of human memory. Subjective individualism on one hand and over-socialization of man on the other, fragmentation of human ideals have paved the way to a highly relativistic status of man which are dealt by Jean-Francois Mattei in a grave and even alarming tone as for instance in the respective chapters on barbarity and education, culture and politics. The whole book conveys the tone of a passionate urge to keep modern man within the world of humanity.

A word for the quality of translation belonging to Valentina Bumbaş-Vorobiov.

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Matei Călinescu
Cinci fețe ale modernității. Modernism, avangardă, decadență, kitsch, postmodernism.
Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-Guard, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism

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When visiting the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, in the spring semester of 2001, professor Matei Călinescu was perhaps ready to undergo a twofold experience: that of rekindling reminiscences of past times when revisiting the town where he had defended his doctoral thesis, and of continuing his work to mould in a more comprehensively way his encompassing study of modernity and its representations. For students and academics, the professor's stay in Cluj yielded in two memorable courses offered at the Faculty of European Studies and the Faculty of Letters. Those interested in mapping and remapping modernity and at the same time willing to witness the practice of hermeneutic experience in reading