

Phenomena Preceding the Literature Ideology-Oriented Textbooks (1944-1948)

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Résumé : Dans la période postérieure à l'événement de 23 Août 1944, le vecteur principal de l'action des communistes a visé la reconfiguration du paysage politique du moment à la faveur de l'institution de leur propre et exclusive autorité dans la société roumaine. Les articles de propagande de la presse communiste se donnent pour but d'éliminer la littérature authentique de la conscience publique. Les termes de « rétrograde », « élitisme », « obscurantisme », « irrationalisme », « esthétisme » caractérisent le langage de la critique dogmatique de l'époque dont l'objet est, en particulier, la littérature du passé. Conformément au même programme politique, les grands maîtres de la littérature de l'entre-deux-guerres (Arghezi, Blaga, Barbu et d'autres) sont exclus des programmes, des manuels scolaires et des cours universitaires, afin d'être remplacés avec les textes « sains » des écrivains « progressistes ».

Mots-clés : idéologie communiste, propagande politique, manuels de littérature, paralittérature

The major vector of the Communist actions in the period immediately following the events on August 23rd 1944 was aimed at the reconfiguration of that period's Romanian political framework in favour of local, exclusive authority education in the Romanian society. Thus, being clearly oriented, these actions took place on the background of a political competition represented by the historical parties whose image was already, up to a certain extent, affected by the attitudes manifested during those few years of dictatorship (first under the reign of Carol the IInd, then under the rule of General Antonescu) that Romania had been under before and during World War II.

In addition to this, the National Peasants' Party manifested, for some time, specific attitudes, without any major changes. These attitudes favoured, indirectly, the taking over programme implemented by the Soviet-supported forces.

Moreover, mention should be made that such attitudes manifested at the political level, but, what is more important for the purpose of the present paper, at the cultural one, where they were more persistent and violent.

It was no later than a week after the revival of the Peasants' daily newspaper on 27th of August 1944 that this quotidian drew the audience's attention with respect to the necessity of purging the Romanian everyday –life and cultural institutions.

Oscar Lemnaru, the author of the editorial „Perna cu ace” (*The Pincushion*) (identifiable in this newspaper issue by the initials O.L.) will use the space allotted to his editorial as a source of accusations brought to some of the most representative Romanian personalities of the time. In fact, the tone and the structuring of the ideas expressed in this first article have all the features of a threatening programme directed towards a series of unmaskings: "In front of this reflector will pass, like in a police station, all evil-doers, all those who, firmly standing on previous confusions, spread hate, lies and imposture with their black rivers of ink. All the writers of the former period will have to account for all their declarations, insinuations and deeds in front of a clearly-minded public [...]. We will look into everything that has been written in the last six years to turn in the people guilty for this disaster. We will reveal what was skilfully hidden by the press and print, we will search in all the dark corners where the tools of a generation of imbecils are lying down and we will place them in the central spot of our contemporary museum of accusations".

The first unmasked people in this article were: Bibiță (D. C.) Panaitescu ("the well-known war reporter, who had worked for the Germans, famous for his instigations to crime and robbery and also a shameful representative of the Romanian writing, in Rome, and who, instead of hiding away and waiting for things to calm down, impertinently sneaked in the daily section *Bazar* (*Bazar*) published in the newspaper «Viața»), Constantin Noica (the one

living his life for life's sake ten years before, who used to make connections between the peoples' musical genius and their historical victories, and gave the Germans as an example of such connections) and, last but not least, Emil Cioran ("who «from the peaks of despair» could see nothing else but the triumph of Hitler and of the Iron Guard")¹.

Other personalities were under focus in the next issue (September 3rd 1944). Among them, "Mircea Eliade, the one who had asked, not to long before, for blood and death" and "Emil Cioran, a Hitler's propagandist", and a day later, the whole generation of the inter-war writers who were in favour of literary mysticism and had gathered around the magazine „Gândirea" (the name of this magazine is not specifically mentioned by Oscar Lemnaru) was pinned on the wall. "The books of this ecstatic generation contained «strong» declarations and opinions written in an apodictic style, as well as extraordinary thoughts retrieved from the fantastic world of an enthusiastic imagination. The sentences were bizarre but ungrammatical, the words were floating in the kingdom of the ethereal suspicions and the letters, themselves, were stolen from the alphabet of the human imbecility, with the aim of building steps which the poor reader could climb on, as if he were a sleep walker, so as to grasp, like in a decorum depicted from another world, the black atmosphere of the agonizing souls. For this was an agonizing world which caused unimaginable disasters in its last moments of life, by chaining the freedom of conscience, suppressing dignity, raising crime and infamy at the level of supreme dreams."²

Alongside Oscar Lemnaru, Nicolae Carandino, who was writing for the same newspaper, also contributed to this process of unmasking. He wrote in the same issue on published on September 4th the article called *At Liviu Rebreanu's tumb*, an article which came out the same day the novelist died. It was not praiseful. On the contrary, the article was highly accusatory:

„The author of *Ion, Pădurea spânzuraților (The Hangmen's Forest)*, *Răscoala (The Uprising)* betrayed his people from Năsăud³ for honours and silver-money and destroyed the solidarity of the people living in Ardeal⁴ by including his name, a name dear to us all, on the list of country hunters.

This was followed by official trips abroad, medals, banquets, meetings of the Romanian- German association, alongside with photographs published in the Reich's well-known newspapers, shares, chips, wages, councils and the whole filthy bog of gold and mould which a conscience and a name were gradually sinking into.[...]

It is not surprising that his personality still preserves the aura of betrayal that the enemy has put there.

From now on, the times when Apostol Bologa became a member of the Gestapo instead of hanging himself will bring back painful memories to Rebreanu.

And the moment when our troops will free the province of Ardeal, we will search for him among the Germans and the Hungarians, there where he put himself, by easily forgetting his origins."

Mention should be made that that these incriminations are neither outside, nor against the European spirit of the moment: the membership to a fascist group (the Romanian ironguardists), and the colaboration with political or cultural entities of this type or with the German invaders are severely punished, not only from a moral point of view, in all the European countries in which they manifest.

Considering Romania, this phenomenon is defined by an unfortunate convergence with the political interests of the Communist Party and with its programme designed to impose its unique ideology. The elimination of any factors that are connected to other ideologies, whether the factors are real or hypothetical, is essential for fulfilling the objectives of this programme. The ironguardism incriminated by the newspaper „Dreptatea" and by other publications, as well, is only one of these factors.

Terms like reactionarism, reactionary, elitism, obscurantism, irrationalism, aestheticism, etc. also become, by extension, great culpabilities which can lead to the elimination of "all those who are guilty", both from the public life and from the collective conscience. Many of the terms mentioned above were used in the field of the artistic creation, in literature to be more specific. Under the circumstances, the fact may be easily grasped that actions such as those taken by the newspaper „Dreptatea” or by other publications, whether apolitical or of any other political orientation, met with those of the newspapers subordinated to the Communist programme which envisaged a reform of the structures and of the cultural orientations, thus increasing the intensity these actions and favouring the achievement of the intended effects.

The proof of such a convergence (which may also be called „common front”) is easily visible. The assaults targeted at Liviu Rebreanu will be followed soon enough by those directed towards Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Ion Barbu or other writers that belonged either to the modernism or to the inter-war traditionalist movement. Arghezi, an inconvenient and rebel spirit, who rejected the new politics is one of the illustrative examples. He became the target of many aggressions, some which were very violent and which were published, generally, in the Communist newspapers. One of the most violent critics of his works is Miron Radu Paraschivescu, who published the article “*Un impostor: d. Tudor Arghezi*” (*An impostor: Mister Tudor Arghezi*) in “România liberă” in February 1945. We consider the following fragment relevant: “Mister Tudor Arghezi is one of those gallery poets who die too late; after they have compromised themselves so badly that not even a miracle can take them out of this situation; not even their talent.

And if the dead poets’ destiny is painful in times of illusions, the fate of those who will not leave on time is even sadder. Until it becomes embarrassing. Like his fate is right now.

He was and –slowly and surely - he will no longer be the praise and the shame of a generation, that of the young readers of last-war poetry. But Mister Tudor Arghezi has rather been the error of this generation if not of two generations. The man is nothing but an impostor.

If a great deal of our young people stopped seeing Arghezi as a great poet, their mistake would be made out of generosity, thinking he is a great man, too. It is true that the master has always tried, but he has never succeeded to become one.

And if a brighter history of literature has to prove to prove the insignificant place occupied by Arghezi’s lyric in the Romanian modern poetry, the author of “Cuvinte potrivite”(The Right Words), and especially right, does not miss any chance to prove that his manly and citizen-like figure do not surpass the dimensions of the letter he is a master in.”⁵

Such aggressions will frequently take place, which explains the need to make a selection. Miron Radu Paraschivescu continued to write articles against Arghezi all throughout 1947: *Drumurile unui poet: T. Arghezi* (*The Roads of a Poet: T. Arghezi*), in „Scânteia”, March 3rd 1947, and *De la Dealul Mărțișorului la... Iasnaia-Poliana* (*From Mărțișorul Hill to ... Iasnaia-Poliana*), in “Scânteia”, March 5th 1947.

Regarding the former article, special attention should be devoted to the fragment on how and to what extent a writer can become dangerous for the new political power and why he must be eliminated, under such circumstances: “We are not interested in Tudor Arghezi the man – we repeat that so as to be clearly understood - but only in the degree to which the poet’s personality can communicate and can be, in a certain way, part of the public conscience, or of the lack of public conscience. Today we are only referring to this side of mister Arghezi, because his writings might have – and of course they have – access to the public, because his words may have an influence – a bad one – on a part of this public that

has not still escaped the darkness and all those bad things intentionally pointed towards them.”

I will also quote a fragment from an anonymous text so as to prove how easily the accusations against a writer's work and thought could be associated with the greatest faults, i.e. that of being an "agent of the imperialism" and, implicitly, that of being the "people's enemy": "The imperialism spreads an obscurantist, reactionary ideology which is aware of the fact that it can maintain its positions just by blocking the illumination of the oppressed people, by sinking them in the darkness so as to exploit them, or by making them fight against each other by means of mystical instigations. Following these paths, the imperialism tries to justify the presence of the «pacifist» troops in India and Palestine. There is nothing «odd » about the poisonous pill which Arghezi is offering in this moment when the imperialist troops are trying either to mine or to distroy the world wide culture or to forbid it. The biggest poet from the Mărtișorul Hill proved, during Hitler's period, that he can still find the right words and to make them rhyme according to « the sound »⁶.

The assaults against Arghezi, and by using him, not only against the inter-war modernist literature, but against the entire authentic literature, culminates with the huge anti-Arghezi text signed by Sorin Toma⁷.

Such a text, which apparently criticises a certain sympathy or adherence, whether real or imaginary, towards one of the ideological movements from the inter-war period which were condemned in the postwar period, are designed to exclude the literature from the public conscience. According to this programme, enough writers are taken out of the curriculum, from the textbooks and from university courses, so as to be replaced by some worthless or doubtful writers who produce the so-called "healthy" texts. The existence of an actual programme is proved by an article published in "Scântea" in 1944. Although it focuses on geography textbooks, this programme states things which are valid for the entire curricular area: „Applying a new politics and new teaching methods which would correspond to the cultural needs of the masses of people in Romania is conditioned by this purging – which must be done with manly determination. Alongside the people's purging, the purging of the textbooks is needed. As it is an action which must be transparent, we bring to the light all those criminal texts which have encouraged young people to bear a chauvinist hate and which have educated them to be anti-Soviet, anti-Hungarian and anti-Semite. By using these means, we are asking the teachers, parents and pupils to expose all those who are guilty for the young people's loss on the path of reaction imposed by the traitors working at the Ministry of Education”⁸.

The Education "Reform" will take place in 1948, but an article from „Contemporanul" shows that the immediate results were not quite pleasing for the regime, if we were to take into consideration the fact that the highschool textbooks made by Al. Rosetti, I. Byck and Perpessicius were referred to with violent accusations.

An extensive quotation can be taken from this text: " Those old textbooks which were trying to produce the history of the Romanian literature are still fresh in our memory. Lacking any scientific conception and any methodological effort in interpreting the literature, despising even the most elementary scientific integrity, faking the real content of our literature, isolating it from the social forces, the old textbooks were, for years, the instruments for the reactionary, obscurantist education which had been applied on young people. Alongside the social and political changes which are taking place in our country, the textbooks concerning the history of the Romanian literature are expected to get a new content.[...] Among the textbook writers, mention can be made to Al. Rosetti, I. Byck and Perpessicius, who made up a series of textbooks for high school⁹, published by Forum printing house. In order to understand better the circumstances under which these textbooks were created, we consider it necessary to give some quotations. Thus, at page 97, the

textbook for the seventh grade states that Titu Maiorescu was by everything that he had written and done «the clearest, the tidiest, the most persevering conscience ». At page 98 it is said that «The New Direction is a programme, a profession of faith, a standard around which all the literary and scientific values of Romania have gathered for decades ». And at page 82 Maiorescu's aesthetic conception is embraced. It is not a secret the fact that this conception has kept our writings away from the people's aspiration for decades, being the unequivocal expression of the reactionary interests of the Romanian landowners. Backed up by the Romanian exploiting classes, Maiorescu, <<the clearest conscience>>, made severe attacks against Gherea who had tried to introduce the method of historic materialism in interpreting the Romanian literature. These assaults were not so much targetting Gherea, but the positions occupied in the field of culture by the young members of the Romanian proletariat. By stating their position, the authors of those textbooks, gathered «around the standard» carried by Maiorescu, are trying even nowadays to educate the young people in the spirit of a conception which has been for a long time defeated and considered to be too old.[...] Another aspect of the circumstances under which these textbooks were made is the tendency to minimize, to pass over in silence or even to forge the ideological and literary contribution of the progressive writers.[...] On the other hand, the authors of the textbooks which were mentioned above confess their preference for I. Eliade Rădulescu, the traitor of the masses of people during the 1848 Revolution, who is presented as a central figure of this Revolution, as a persecuted person because of his political beliefs (??). They do not mention a thing regarding the reactionary direction that Eliade Rădulescu gave to the 1848 Revolution. In fact, they attach greater importance to I. Eliade Rădulescu than to Bălcescu, if we were to take into consideration the two and a half pages dedicated to the former, and the half page devoted to the latter, in which Bălcescu's work is "explained".

Another example of forgery in the progresist content of literature takes place when interpreting Caragiale's work. The criticism brought by Caragiale to the bourgeois-landlord society of his time and to its corrupt politicians is reduced to the mere criticism of some human defects which are generally found in every society.[...] These examples illustrate the attempt made by the authors of these textbook to minimize or to disfigure the progresist writers of our literature. They went even further: they emphasized the figure of some decadent and reactionary writers, they underlined some obscurantist parts from the works of our writers. For instance, they do not give priority to Eminescu's lyric and to its scientific explanation, but they embrace his ideological prose which, as we all know, was inspired by the reactionary conception of the great conservatory landowners.[...] While advocating that <<individualism is found at the basis of any fecund literary attempt>> (p.184, the eighth grade textbook) the authors will embrace the individualist antisocial poetry which is kept away from the masses. This preference is manifested by introducing poets such as Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Ion Barbu, Al. T. Stamatiad, I. Pillat, «the critic» M. Dragomirescu, or prose writers such as Gib Mihăescu and Al.O. Teodoreanu in the eighth grade textbook [...]. We believe that the textbooks created by A. Rosetti, I. Byck and D.P. Perpessicius are today, when the new Education Reform is being applied, a dangerous attempt to lead the pupils towards what was once reactionary in our literature, an attempt to educate them in an opposite direction than the one which best fits the people's interests.”¹⁰

”The shortcomings” signalled by the author of this article will be ”improved” in the immediately following period and many studious generations will be formed in the spirit of these improvements, which means leaving out Arghezi, Blaga, Barbu, and a lot of the progresive writers, but preserving some selections from Eminescu and many others, texts which were selected according to the grid of the „scientific socialism” and which were interpreted only partialy. That is to say, the students will not have any contact with the authentic literature.

Notes

- [1] Oscar Lemnaru, while inaugurating a new column called: *Perna cu ace* (*The Pincushion*), in „Dreptatea”, the IInd series, the Ist year, number 7, September 2nd 1944
- [2] Oscar Lemnaru, *Misticismul generației trecute* (*The Mysticism of our Past Generation*), in „Dreptatea”, the IInd series, the Ist year, number 9, September 4th 1944
- [3] *Năsăud is a Romanian city*
- [4] *Ardeal is a Romanian province*
- [5] Miron Radu Paraschivescu, *Un impostor: d. Tudor Arghezi* (*An Impostor: Mister Tudor Arghezi*), in „România liberă”, February 21st 1945
- [6] *Cuvinte potrivite și „motive sunătoare”* (*The Right Words and „Sonorous Motives”*), an anonymous text, in „Scânteia”, October 18th 1947
- [7] Sorin Toma, *Poezia putrefacției și putrefacția poeziei. Răsfoind volumele lui Tudor Arghezi* (*The Poetry of Decay and the Decay of Poetry. Looking through Arghezi's Volumes*), in „Scânteia” January 5th, 7th, 9th and 10th 1948.
- [8] *Despre unele manuale de geografie* (*About Some Geography Textbooks*), an anonymous text, in „Scânteia”, October 16th 1944
- [9] Until the middle of the 20th century the school was organized into primary school and high school. The later was made up of 8 classes: the today's gymnasium (from the 5th to the 8th grade and it was the so called *inferior classes of high school*) and the *superior classes* (from the 9th to the 12th grade)
- [10] Ion Mihăileanu, *Pentru o concepție științifică a manualelor de limba și literatura română din învățământul mediu* (*For a More Scientific Approach to the Textbooks of Romanian Language and Literature Used in the Secondary Education*), in „Contemporanul”, September 10th 1948