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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



**Claudia MATEI**

# Poezia rezistenței în perioada ocupației sovietice a Basarabiei



*Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române*



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Claudia MATEI

**POEZIA REZISTENȚEI ÎN PERIOADA OCUPAȚIEI  
SOVIETICE A BASARABIEI**



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**POEZIA REZISTENȚEI ÎN PERIOADA  
OCUPAȚIEI SOVIETICE A BASARABIEI**

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Lucrare realizată în cadrul proiectului „Valorificarea identităților culturale în procesele globale”, cofinanțat din Fondul Social European prin Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007 – 2013, contractul de finanțare nr. POSDRU/89/1.5/S/59758.

Titlurile și drepturile de proprietate intelectuală și industrială asupra rezultatelor obținute în cadrul stagiului de cercetare postdoctorală aparțin Academiei Române.

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ISBN 978-973-167-162-8

Depozit legal: Trim. II 2013

Claudia MATEI

# **Poezia rezistenței în perioada ocupației sovietice a Basarabiei**



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române

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**Titlul proiectului:** „Valorificarea identităților culturale în procesele globale”

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## **ADDENDA**

### **Summary**

#### **The Poetry of Resistance during the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia**

The poetry of resistance against the Soviet communist regime in Bessarabia (Moldova) is a phenomenon that has only been addressed partially or tangentially in the literary criticism and history of the last three decades, and has not been fully investigated in correlation with the resistance of the Bessarabian population against this regime. And in the general Romanian context, this fascinating theme – the literature of resistance, which allows the advancement of novel viewpoints on this controversial cultural landscape of an era – was investigated only in fragments, the lyrical genre being ignored.

We have established from the very beginning the present state of the research for this topic, noting that literary criticism in Bessarabia has offered no debate on the issues of literary resistance against the occupying Soviet communist regime – addressing this issue has been fragmented, timid or superficial. The general background of the problem was outlined by M.Cimpoi in *An Open History of Romanian Literature from Bessarabia* and was not surpassed by some subsequent studies (Andrei Țurcanu, Anatol Moraru, Alexandru Donos, Catinca Agache, Mihai Dolgan, Adrian Dinu Rachieru), while addressing this aspect of post-war literature in Bessarabia by some literary critics and historians in Moldova and Romania (Constantin Ciopraga, Calin Constantin Theodor Codreanu, Ion Simut, Valeriu Matei, Andrei Hropotinschii etc.) was with reference to the work of particular poets.

The goal that I pursued in writing this first thesis on the poetry of resistance against the Soviet communist regime in Bessarabia was to help



change the general picture of Romanian literature in this area, opening new perspectives for addressing the problems of Romanian literary history and of literary resistance as a Romanian and European phenomenon of the twentieth century, with moral and ethical value, and to answer a number of questions that remained unsolved, regarding:

- the fate of many writers of interwar Bessarabia,
- the role of Romanian literature in this region in preserving and perpetuating the civic and national awareness of Romanians to the East of the Prut,
- the way and manner in which Soviet culture and the dogmatic precepts of socialist realism were imposed, writers then being impassible towards the genocide triggered by the regime,
- the role of the poetry of resistance during the national and artistic resurrection at the end of the eighth decade of the last century.

For a more complex image of the poetry of resistance, I use the comparative and multidisciplinary method – during the investigation, literary information is supplemented with historical data, references to folklore, sociology and philosophy. I divided the work into four chapters and 11 sub-chapters, introduction, conclusion and bibliography, covering the entire spectrum of literary life in Bessarabia, from the interwar generation (30s of XX century) until April 1990, when the Parliament in Kishinev, through its decisions, canceled, from the Constitution Articles 7 and 49 regarding the leading role of the Communist Party in society.

The major archives and libraries where I did my research were: The Socio-political archive of Moldova (former Communist Party funds), the Security Archive and Information Service of the Republic of Moldova (former NKVD and KGB), the Archive of the Study Centre *Mihail Kogalniceanu* in Kishinev, some private archives, the library of the Romanian Academy, the National Library of Romania, the National Library of Moldova, the Scientific Library of the Academy of Sciences in Moldova, and during my research internships at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Institute of Literature of the Academy of Latvia and Riga University and Vilnius University, I visited the Municipal Library of Thessaloniki, the Aristotle University library, the National Library of

Latvia, the Latvian Literature Museum Archives, the archives of the Museum of the Soviet occupation of Riga, the Vilnius University Library, the National Library of Lithuania and others.

As a result of my research, I can affirm with confidence that the presentation of the Bessarabian postwar literary phenomenon as integral and coherent, as part of the general evolution of Romanian literature, is not true. Disturbed by the entrance to communist hell, the evolution of Romanian literature in Bessarabia in the postwar period was unnatural, obvious being not just the lack of coherence and stylistic unity with the interwar period, but also the lack of a conceptual unity of literature from the period of communist occupation.

Although the postwar development of this literature has seen times of apparent liberalization (the period after Stalin's death until Brejnev came to power), in reality this liberalization was diversionary, as the unique party had the chance to intervene whenever and to punish those who had taken seriously the liberty promised, and so it did in 1959, in 1962 to 1963 in 1965 or in 1970.

Even if we can establish a few stages in the literary life of the communist period - 1940-1941, 1944 - 1954, 1955 - 1959, 1960 - 1964, 1965 - 1987, 1987 - 1990 – the literary process was unnatural, its stages being determined, to a great extent, by the internal politics of the single party, because the authoritarian dictatorship controlled the situation and could not allow its efficient means of indoctrination of the population - literature and art in general, to get out of control.

We note here that "the desire for normality and ignoring the distortions arising from political interference, critics have given credit to the idea of a chaining of generations" in the literature of the communist period. Under totalitarianism, "not the usage of modalities and the change of generations (in the biological sense) led the course of literature, but more so the political events and their ideological consequences." I used the conventional criterion of dividing the postwar Romanian literature into four generations, taking into account, however, the fact that the communist occupation regime led to grouping writers according to other criteria rather than the aesthetic ones.

Before proceeding to investigate the phenomenon of literary resistance in Bessarabia, in Chapter I of the paper, structured in three sub-chapters, we have referred to various aspects of literary resistance in the twentieth century, the various forms and types of resistance *in* or *through* literature, in order to eliminate any contradictions in terms that emerged in debates on resistance, debates that have seen a living resurgence in Central and Southeast Europe after the collapse of communism. I pointed out contradictions in terms, which persist at every step, insisting on essential questions around which discussions were focused and which relate to the content and definition of several terms: *resistance in literature* and / or *resistance through literature*, *survival through literature*, *dissent*, *opposition* or *subversion*. Examining the poetry of resistance against the totalitarian communist regime in Bessarabia, we can distinguish three different manifestations of the poetry of resistance: *escapist lyricism*, *subversive and dissident poetry*, such a separation of the lyricism of resistance being derived from various proposals for "division" of literature in the communist period (Ion Simut, Mihai Cimpoi etc.).

A sub-chapter is devoted to the literary phenomenon of resistance against totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. We refer here to the literary resistance to communist regimes in Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Cuba, Latvia and Lithuania (developing a broader study on Latvian and Lithuanian poetic resistance), as well as to the poetic resistance against fascist regimes, military regimes or the occupation of Italy, Spain, France and Greece (I developed thus the first study of the Greek poetry of resistance).

I dedicated the third section of Chapter I of my work to a few aspects of Romanian literary resistance: a complex and varied phenomenon, encompassing all literary genres and knowing various manifestations, much discussed in post-December decades.

Chapter II, entitled *The Soviet occupation of Bessarabia. Resistance through literature during the period of the Soviet Proletarian cult: June 1940 - July 1941, August 1944 - July 1956*, comprises three sub-chapters, the first of which refers to the general and the specific characteristics of the communist Soviet occupation of Bessarabia. We note from the outset that the objective study of that period has become a priority theme of the new Bessarabian

historiography, of the history of culture and literature, a fact stimulated also by the gradual opening of the secret archives of the former Soviet empire and of some archives in Moldova. I kept insisting that the Soviet system architects have attempted in Bessarabia unique experiences towards the destruction of the identity of the Romanian population. All repressive actions undertaken: the extermination of intellectuals, especially writers and artists who have not complied with the so-called *socialist realism* method, the massive deportation of the population and bringing settlers from other parts of the empire, the quickly forced collectivization of farms – all had the absurd goal to create a new nation – the Moldovan Soviet nation. To this end, the idea of a so-called "Moldovan language" was imposed by repressive means and therefore Romanian language was strictly forbidden, together with Romanian history, culture and pre-modern and modern Romanian literature, and phobia towards Romanians was cultivated through draconian means of propaganda.

The second sub-chapter concerns the terrible year 1940 - 1941, the genocide unleashed by the Soviets in Bessarabia and the resilience of the youth and the intellectuals, the destinies of the writers from the generation I named '*the sacrificed generation*' in order to make the necessary delimitation from some of their colleagues in the interwar period who had willingly adhered to socialist realism and are included in '*the lost generation*'. Following investigations I have undergone in the archives, I bring new data on the fate of many Romanian writers from Bessarabia who have risen in the interwar period and who have not managed to escape on June 28, 1940: those that disappeared without a trace (Elena Dobroșinschi-Malai), those exterminated by Soviet security (Ion Sulacov), those exiled to Siberia from 1940 to 1941: Nicolae Costenco, Gheorghe Rusu, Mihai Curicheru, Emil Gane, Alexandru Terziman, Al.Cezar Stoica, of which only two survived and came back to Bessarabia after 15 years spent in the GULAG - poet and novelist Emil Gane and poet Nicolae Costenco.

Furthermore, we first bring unique texts of unpublished folklore of anti-communist resistance in Bessarabia, which refers to the terrible year 1940 - 1941 and to the first postwar decade.

The third section of Chapter II of this paper covers the period 1944 - 1956, the decade of aggressive intents to create a purely proletarian culture

that abnegates the past, a decade characterized by mass reprisals on the population of Bessarabia and the Romanian Writers of Bessarabia, by many measures of resistance of the over 250 groups of peasants and certain groups of intellectuals – a period that ended with the beginning of ‘defrosting’ in the period of Khrushchev.

It's a time when the tragedy of the writers and poets of Bessarabia continues. The scenario is repeated, exactly as it was in June 1940. In the very first days of the new occupation, writer Iulia Dicescu-Siminel, daughter of Paul Dicescu, vanishes without a trace. She was the author of the study *Moldovan songs in Bessarabia* (1933), prefaced by Nicolae Iorga, who remarked "*good start, thanks to a Romanian with a big heart*".

We also bring new information about the poets and writers, who, given the experience of 1940, escape over Prut, but soon, when the communist regime is brought on top of Soviet bayonets and installed by force in Romania, they are arrested, thrown in prison or turned over to the Soviets and deported to Siberia (Pan Halippa, Petru Stati, Boris Baidan, D. Iov, Sergiu Matei Nica, Al. Tambur, Andrei Ciurunga, Vasile Țepordei, Nicu Stegaru etc.). Only a few Romanian writers in Bessarabia were able to take the bitter path of exile (Eugeniu Coseriu, Sergiu Grosu, Alexandru Lungu etc.).

Chapter III of the paper refers to the poetry of resistance during de-Stalinization and the affirmation of the first generation of postwar literature. Based on new archival documents (the archive of former CC of the CPM, especially transcripts of discussions in the CC of the CPM, the Intelligence and Security archive), we present for the first time and in a broader manner, a phenomenon that marked not only the second half of the fifth decade of the last century, but all subsequent development of cultural and literary life of Bessarabia – the dramatic battle for the abolition of this Soviet proletarian cult and for the return to the classics of Romanian literature and to the aesthetic criteria - a battle which ran from 1956 to 1964. During that time, the new literary generation of the '60s takes shape.

The second sub-chapter is devoted to the poetic resistance of the '60s generation, a generation that largely restores the ties with the traditions of interwar Romanian literature, a generation struggling with both artistic,

literary and social inertia and with general amnesia. Cases of overt resistance appear (Vasilache Vasile, Ion Druță, Petru Carare, Grigore Vieru), as well as the first books and manuscripts that are banned or arrested by the communist censorship (*Arrows* by P.Cărare, *Ballads of the two sides of war* by Ion Vatamanu, *The Hora<sup>1</sup> of Light* by Gheorghe Cutasevici etc.). Escapist lyric becomes increasingly common, the coding, the parable, the allegory are all meant to camouflage gestures of defiance of the precepts of communist ideology (Gheorge Voda, Liviu Damian, Victor Teleucă, Mihail Ion Ciubotaru, Nicolae Esinencu, Pavel Botu etc.).

In the last chapter, the fourth, I have researched the Bessarabian poetry of resistance during 1970 - 1991 and poetry as a factor of national revival in Bessarabia (1985 - 1991). The first sub-chapter is devoted to the literary resistance of the generation of the '70s of the last century. The representative poets of this promotion – Nicolae Dabija, Leonida Lari, Marcela Benea, Leonard Tuchilatu, Vasile Romanciuc, Efim Tarlapan, Eugen Cioclea, Valeria Grosu - succeed in publishing their first volumes in the new collection - *Debut* - without it containing, at first, the usual poems on a 'forced' theme. In the poetry of these authors, all forms of poetic resistance are present, where poetic obedience to the regime is increasingly rare. For Nicolae Dabija, the appeal to the past is a way to relate to the present; the cultural and spiritual heritage inherited from ancestors are to Marcela Benea perennial values that underlie the poetic edifice; Vasile Romanciuc tries a re-reading of proverbs as a way to develop the hidden facets of the present; in the poetry of Leonida Lari metaphysics blends with the barely concealed protester spirit; Tarlapan Efim uses merciless sarcasm and irony to directly address the realities of the socialist province.

The second section of Chapter IV is devoted to the phenomenon of the poetry of resistance of the '80s. We note here that, paradoxically, in Bessarabia, the poetic generation of the '80s did not affirm itself with solidarity in the first part of the eighth decade - a period marked by the agony of the empire, by saturation with propaganda and ideological dogmas, but also by spectacular reversals of situations – some writers accepted compromises in order to be able to make their debut under

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional Romanian dance

communist censorship (N.Popa, E.Galaicu-Paun etc.); others, defying the conditions of the totalitarian regime, continued to write without hope of getting published (V.Matei, V.Ciornei, T.Chiriac, L.Bordeianu etc.), delaying their debut until the second half of the eighth decade or until the outbreak, in 1987 - 1988, of the democratic movement of national revival.

We note two distinct periods in the poetic resistance of this generation, the first - until May 1987, which marked the beginning of open confrontations with the communist authorities and triggered the democratic movement of national revival (which is the theme of this chapter), and the second - from 1987 to August 1991, the date of the collapse of the Soviet empire.

The last sub-chapter of the paper is devoted to poetry as a factor of national revival in Bessarabia between 1987 - 1991, to the role of poets and poetry in the democratic movement of national revival in the years 1987 - 1990, particularly to those involved fully in actions to abolish the communist dictatorship and detach the territory from the Soviet empire: Grigore Vieru, Nicolae Dabija, Ion Vatamanu, Leonida Lari, Ion Hadârcă, Vasile Romanciuc, Valeriu Matei and others.

Thus emerged this first comprehensive study devoted to the poetry of resistance during the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia – a complex phenomenon, encompassing hundreds of poetic voices, all different and distinct, hundreds of destinies of those called to give voice to the pain and aspirations of a nation and a culture challenged by fortune.

The guidelines of the phenomenon are well defined, while the opening and investigation of all the archives will complement this framework with more and more detail and will reveal original pages of poetic resistance. Literary history research should be complemented by a program for editing and reprinting the works of authors who have been subjected to retaliation, of the folklore of resistance, so that the literary landscape and especially the poetic one, gain wider and more accurate contours. In the case of Bessarabia, the research of the Romanian literature of the interwar period and the first postwar decade can not advance without a re-introduction into the literary circuit of the works of Dimitrie Iov, Petru Stati, Elena Dobroșinschi-Malai, Mihai Curicheru, Gheorge

A.Rusu, Cezar Al. Stoica, Boris Baidan, Alexandru Tambur, Al.Terziman, Ion Sulacov, Nicu Stegaru, Nicolae Turcanu and other authors evoked in this paper.

Through this study I have complemented and completed the general picture of the period of the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia – a theme which is now widely researched in historical science and culture and by art historians in the entire Romanian territory and abroad.

Certainly - having stemmed from the immense pain and compassion for the less fortunate destiny of a territory much challenged, from the love for fellow people who knew how to confront with dignity the terrible sufferings induced by the Soviets - the Romanian Bessarabian poetry of resistance against dictatorship, foreign occupation and totalitarianism, has both an undeniable literary and aesthetic value and the immense value of a moral and ethical example.

This study highlights the value of such moral resistance against totalitarian communist regimes, which is relevant to the European countries drawn from the former Soviet empire and the socialist camp, which then endured an excessively long transitional period, and a harrowing process of search for an identity or of creation of new identities. We hope this study contributes to the change in the perception of Romanian literature from this area, and to the inclusion of the works of some Romanian Bessarabian writers into the circuit of literary values at national Romanian and European level.



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Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române

CNCS PN - II - ACRED - ED - 2012 – 0374

Coperta colecției: *AULA MAGNA*

Machetare, tehnoredactare și prezentare grafică:

Luminița LOGIN, Nicolae LOGIN

Logistică editorială și diseminare:

Ovidiu SÎRBU, Radu AMAN

---

Traducerea sumarului și sintezei, corectură și bun de tipar  
asigurate de autor

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ISBN 978-973-167-162-8

Apărut trim. II 2013