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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Nicoleta SĂLCUDEANU

Revizuire și revizionism în literatura postcomunistă



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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Nicoleta SĂLCUDEANU
**REVIZUIRE ȘI REVIZIONISM ÎN LITERATURA
POSTCOMUNISTĂ**



REVIZUIRE ȘI REVIZIONISM ÎN LITERATURA POSTCOMUNISTĂ

Autor: **Nicoleta SĂLCUDEANU**
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Nicoleta SĂLCUDEANU

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Cuprins

REVIZUIRILE LITERARE POSTCOMUNISTE: MIȘCARE LITERARĂ, DEMERS ESTETIC, FENOMEN POLITIC?	7
EPURAȚIE ȘI RESTAURAȚIE. A CINCEA POSTERITATE A LUI EUGEN LOVINESCU	19
CLANDESTINIIL. RĂZBOIUL RECE CULTURAL	38
DISIDENȚA ÎN EST.....	65
DISIDENȚA ROMÂNEASCĂ.....	72
Episodul Dumitru Țepeneag	78
Episodul Virgil Tănase	101
Episodul Paul Goma	117
DECLANDESTINIZAREA	129
RĂZBOIUL RECE CIVIL	140
„DOSARIADA”. RĂZBOIUL RECE REÎNCĂLZIT	175
ETICĂ ȘI ECHITATE POSTCOMUNISTĂ	188
BIBLIOGRAFIE	199
ADDENDA	
ABSTRACT	208
CONTENTS.....	214

ADDENDA

Abstract

Revisals and revisionism in postcommunist literature

If exile literature, with the notable exception of Paul Goma, and of course of some other very few valuable writers, did not contribute to increased quality in Romanian literature, is indisputable that, by their authority and competence, the most authorized critical voices in exile belonged to Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca. One might even say that, through the microphone of Radio Free Europe, they represented the coagulation factor and direction of the entire Romanian literary criticism in communism. They were the correction in the mirror of critical action in the country but, even more, strengthen it from the outside, contributing directly to the scale of values which imposed itself and made itself accepted even by the communist regime. A thorough reconstitution of those days could reveal a true and continuous pilgrimage of writers and critics from the country, called by the two Parisian critics "clandestines" because they kept secret their visits in order to protect the writers and thinkers from the county. The "pilgrimage" became possible with the ideological "thaw" which began in the mid '60s, and so the Parisian nucleus became a veritable dispatch, a real military staff for the inside Romanian literary movement. The martial expression is not exaggerated considering the fact that both of them practiced a militant criticism, a "front" criticism, ideologically hatched in the colors of anticommunism. Through their authority and influence the two Parisian critics represent the turning point that will influence not only literary criticism during communism, but, decisively, the evolution of the cultural policies after the collapse of the regime, in December 1989.

It is almost inexplicable that huge capital of influence, knowing that writers in exile not separated from their mother tongue, and which does not forge a new literary career from the very ground, are lost in the condition of obscure exile, without any influence upon their native literature, as happened with most of them, exile literature meaning not more than a province of the national literature. They have assumed the condition, were resigned to it, as evidenced by their testimony, but suddenly become the protagonists of unexpected circumstances. These circumstances are best summarized by someone who closely knew them, and, for a period, shared their career, the critic and literary historian Mircea Iorgulescu, as well a producer of radio shows and, for a time, he was in the management of Radio Free Europe Romanian section. So authoritative source. The real career of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca begins with employment of Monica Lovinescu at Radio Free Europe and the moment when Virgil Ierunca becomes a permanent contributor, with sections devoted to Romanian literature – Mircea Iorgulescu says. Without the free gallery provided by this radio station they would not have been less obscure than other exiles.

In the subsection entitled “The Magic Microphone” of his book *Tangentiale*, we have a detailed description of the circumstances. The radio station, established by the United States to Munich, once the Cold War began, in the part of Germany occupied by the Western allies, exerts its influence through anticommunist propaganda directed against the countries beyond the Iron Curtain, the new communist countries. The share of various radio services – Mircea Iorgulescu says – “was and is determined by the geopolitical importance of the target countries, and not by their journalistic performance”. However, although of secondary importance in channel strategy, the Romanian department has enjoyed a privileged position and, somewhat atypical. It “had, from the second half of the ‘60s and until the fall of the regime in Bucharest, in December 1989, an extraordinary audience”, both in country, because “Radio Free Europe have always addressed solely those inside the country”, and in exile. Two are the most obvious explanations for this dramatic change (by then the audience and popularity of Radio Free Europe in Romanian had been rather modest). One consists in improvement of listening conditions by

reducing or even ceasing interference and by the appearance of the transistor radios, more efficient and easier to move. Another explanation is related to the bold change of programs, that is the work of a director who is providential: Noel Bernard. He, Noel Bernard, had the intuition of the extraordinary potential represented by Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca. Not only «in itself», but also by the simultaneous massive introduction of «culture» in programs” and, a very important thing, “It made the Romanian department, from this point of view, a genuine and long lasting exception, the only one in all Radio Free Europe what was up late, until the eve of departure from Munich, the largest and most significant cultural programs throughout the institution”. Left to wonder is if it was only the merit of Noel Bernard, as claimed Mircea Iorgulescu, or station policy was rather decisive, not foreign to the concept of Cultural Cold War, culture being considered one of the most powerful weapon in the media war against the governments of the communist bloc countries, as documenting the British researcher Frances Stonor Saunders, in o book published in 1999 and translated into several languages like Spanish, German or French. It is about a secret program of anti-Soviet and anticommunist propaganda, developed by the CIA, that culture was transformed into a weapon of war. Directly or indirectly, through foundations, congress, seminars, associations, great personalities, especially with leftist political orientation, to increase their credibility, received funds from CIA – from Raymond Aron to Athur Koestler, Hannah, Arendt, George Orwell, Igor Stravinski and many others. It is understood that American radio Free Europe, financed much of its activity by the CIA, could not be alien to the cultural cold war strategy .

But one thing is certain, is that, as results from the memoirs of Monica Lovinescu , Noel Bernard had a remarkable personality (“so rapid that there was no way to finish a phrase – he knew the answer before”) or, as states Mircea Iorgulescu, he was “a shrewd man, entering suddenly in action, knowing to persuade and mobilize, passionate, Noel Bernard was not a director, but The Director. In the spirit of essential truth, that beyond the prosaic data, he has created Radio Free Europe in Romanian, as entered and set in Romanian consciousness. He, and Monica Lovinescu, and Virgil Ierunca. It can not be known if then, in 1967, when Bernard proposed and

obtained the authorization from the administration to establish "Theses and Antitheses in Paris" and "Romanian Cultural News" presented by Monica Lovinescu, and, in 1975, "Talk story" and "The Chronic of the Pessimist", programs of Virgil Ierunca, will be there, even in draft stage, the image of transformations to come. Because since then the «heart» of the Romanian department of the radio station located at Munich moved, in fact, at Paris . They would not have happened without their outstanding dedication. As Mircea Iorgulescu reminds us, "the broadcasts made by them for a quarter of century were made in their house. And also states Mircea Iorgulescu: "Without anyone to minimize, because chance brought in the editorial and in programs other excellent radio journalists, (...), is beyond any doubt that, if the two of them haven't exist, Radio Free Europe, the Romanian department, would never have been what it was until May 1992". So the great intuition of Noel Bernard – will be only his intuition – that the great battle of the cold war was mainly the cultural one, with the revelation of the formidable journalist that was Monica Lovinescu (otherwise the project of the new cultural programs, supported by Bernard in front of the American management, was designed by herself), made Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca "the most formidable enemies of the regime in Bucharest". These were the circumstances that have favored the chance, for the two critics, to be involved from a distance, but deeply, into the literary and cultural life of Romania. In this context, the hypothesis of launching, by the Americans, of the cultural cold war, must not be neglected. As journalists at the French radio (RFI) they were not allowed to make policy. Instead at Radio Free Europe they have been given a free hand. All these and, in addition, suppression of jamming foreign stations in Romania, in the late '60s, taking into account the distinct case of RFE (in comparison with BBC, RFI or Deutsche Welle), where the anticommunist attack not only was not prohibited, but was the very reason d'être of the station, bear witness to the huge influence of the two.

Without understanding the huge influence they had upon Romanian culture in communism, we will never understand their enormous influence in the cultural and political life in postcommunism. The nowadays cultural and literary hierarchy is their work, it belongs to them. Also the cultural and ideological policies, now in progress, are the result of their efforts,

under the appearance of a new cultural cold war. If the revisionist process represents or not a pure literary movement and an approach of aesthetic origin is, of course, a superfluous question which obviously contains its answer. Nothing can be aesthetically reviewed by extraaesthetic means. Any review that does not occur as a required resetting mechanism, as a natural consequence of accumulation of modified aesthetic perceptions and sensibilities can not be called truly revisal. Of course, literature is far from being a product of greenhouse and is far from benefit by a spontaneous propulsive force. It goes without saying that it interacts, even indirectly, a lesser degree or higher, with ideologies. But which would be the golden proportion between the aesthetic product and ideology so that the alloy does not become toxic? Can we detect and determine by means of literary criticism overtaking ideological emission and concentration, aimed at altering and distort the value itself of the cultural object? From what threshold onwards ideological interferences can become harmful? There are as many legitimate questions, especially related to a still convalescent space and time of Romanian history, after a number of severe political and ideological injuries, and a succession of various dictatorships of the extreme right or left. Because culture and intellectuals were often trapped and used in various ideological scenarios.

In an article published in three sequences, in the „Observator cultural” review, *Iluziile revizionismului est-etic* (The Ilusions of the East-ethical Revisionism), version of a study published in the collective volume entitled *Literatura și politicul* (Literature and politics), the young literary critic Paul Cernat brings to discussions, perhaps for the first time in a balanced speech, free of any complexes, this obsesive problem of the Romanian contemporary literature. He identifies and names the „criticism of war”, the „militant criticism”, as being subordinated to certain principles which change „the the order of contextual priorities, respectively the deliberate overlap between the notion of «writer» and that of the «public intellectual» of civic-moral authority”. He also notes, without any parti-pris, that „Unfortunately or fortunately, experience proved that, with the same hand, there could be written denouncements (or propagandistic texts) and also books of great literary value, as «collaborationists» like Tudor Arghezi or Ioan Slavici remain, beyond anything, leading writers of Romanian literature. In addition, if during a military occupation and/or a

political one – easily classified as abnormal in relation to the norm of pluralist freedom – such attitudes are appropriate, even if not necessarily legitimate, the retrospective application of the criticism of war becomes, from a point onwards, counterproductive and inappropriate”. One can go still further with the question: if the retrospective application of the criticism of war appears as inappropriate, as Paul Cernat seems to believe, we can ask, for instance, how much fitness, legitimacy and efficiency enjoyed the „militant criticism” applied prospectively and simultaneously, even under the conditions of a military or a political occupation, has it really served and supported the axiological content of the literary work? Because, obviously, the militant excess, and also the politicization of the critical approach are cherished exactly by that kind of „criticism of war”.

It is well known that the confusion between the idea of „intellectual” and „the public intellectual” is not an invention of the former communist countries. It was proven the huge control exercised by an ideology or other upon arts, the control of propaganda upon artistic expression. Both the Soviets and Americans controlled the field of arts and thinking through K.G.B. or C.I.A. If in the case of the Soviet Union this kind of interference is automatically implied, it is quite a surprise to learn that the U.S.A. exercised such pressure upon democratic American and European culture during the Cold War. If we take the example of France, we see that a number of intellectuals, generically called „new philosophers” have arrogated to themselves the role of media opinion makers. Are notorious the cases of André Glucksmann or Bernard-Henry Lévy, as well as their political twists. But the process is global, and the model of the opinion making intellectual is already widespread. Be the mass media an insidious transporter of ideology in the name of culture? In this case, as only pure aesthetic is completely moral, pressing ethical and moral approach may lead to an adverse effect: destruction of morality in culture. The cultural object, as soon as it loses its aesthetic content saturation, becomes simply a vehicle for an ideology or another and its reason of being will be reduced to the idea of change and reproductibility and its action to be a simple provision of corporate services. Uniqueness becomes predictable. As critical action works with immeasurable things, with „gentle ideas”, while ethics and morale work with „hard things”, their fusion can generate a type of amphibious critics which may degenerate into pure propaganda.

Contents

POSTCOMMUNIST LITERARY REVISALS: LITERARY MOVEMENT, AESTHETIC APPROACH, POLITICAL PHENOMENON?	7
PURGE AND RESTORATION. THE FIFTH POSTERITY OF EUGEN LOVINESCU	19
THE ILLICITS. CULTURAL COLD WAR	38
DISSENT IN EAST	65
ROMANIAN DISSENT	72
Dumitru Țepeneag episode	78
Virgil Tănase episode	101
Paul Goma episode	117
OUT OF THE UNDERGROUND	129
THE CIVIL COLD WAR	140
FILES FIGHT. COLD WAR REHEATING	175
POST-COMMUNIST ETHICS AND EQUITY	188



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