

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication

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Section: Literature

ROMANIAN SOCIALIST REALISM IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Nicoleta Sălcudeanu

PhD, "Gh. Şincai" Institute of Research for the Humanities, Romanian Academy, Tîrgu Mureş

Abstract: Socialist realism or "jdanovism", as rightly defined by Sanda Cordoş, benefits itself of a certain kind of expressiveness and it can not be isolated from certain influences that fed it, nor of further influence. But, unlike the other European infiltration, it is a form of imposed cultural influence or, in the most optimistic case, "borrowed" through ideological channels. A somewhat forced synchronization. How fertile was it for the development of Romanian culture, we know: an aesthetic abortion, sterility of literary expressivity. On the other hand, an unfortunate consequence of this "synchrony" was the establishment of a relationship of brutal subordination of the writer towards the political power, he falling in a in cruel bondage to dogma.

Keywords: socialist realism, literature, ideology, culture, Europeanism

Romanian postwar literature seems to present itself as a rupture in the game of counterpoint rhythm between Europeanism and traditionalism, an omnipresent counterpoint in Romanian ideological cultural movement. First of all, we must say that there is no symmetry between progressivism and reactionarism in the Romanian culture. The "Junimea" model is perhaps the most illustrative: that of innovation inside tradition. But this is not the only one example. Never, except maybe its extreme stances (Avant-garde or "semanatorism"), the cultural paradigm did not appear in pure form. The phenomena can not be seen separately. There is a dynamic underground, a dialectic which ultimately produce a form of cultural syncretism.

Almost always traditionalism was depicted with innovative intentions, and innovation has always shown an element of traditionalist caution. Perpetual nesting between the fund and the form was the somatic brand of Romanian culture. We must not forget that a significant proportion of any cultural creation from any country is based on cultural loan. This is not a purely Romanian phenomenon. The cultures were always permeable with each other, They have not evolved in anaerobic conditions, they presented a fine network of capillaries through which influences and loans were breathing freely. Romanian literature could not be an exception.

Therefore, even communist parenthesis represented only one aspect of the same convoluted predispositions, more or less cautious, of cultural exchange, focusing on loan. Even the "obsessive decade", improperly called "proletcultism", rightly defined by Sanda Cordoş as "jdanovism" (term descending from the coordinates imposed in his speech by Zhdanov, at 17 August 1934, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers Union), represents the result of a tortuous

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cultural exchange. As, with extreme precision, she defines the idea of proletcultism in opposition to the "jdanovism", the young researcher notes that Proletcult is an episodic literary phenomenon in Soviet Russia, becoming, in time, a form of cultural dissent, disavowed even by ideologues: "... Lenin is not willing to credit any Proletcult, an extremely active cultural organization that explicitly aims to promote a revolutionary proletar culture through conferences, workshops and artistic centers. The ideological disagreements between Lenin and A. A. Bogdanov, the doctrinaire of Proletcult, dates back to 1909 when Lenin accuses Bogdanov that under the name of "proletarian culture" he promoted actually a reactionary conception".¹

If we trace the avantgarde roots of the socialist realist poetics, presenting points of irradiation in Switzerland, France or Italy, some discover a paradox: that even the "jdanovism" imposed by Moscow is not a spontaneous phenomenon and does not nearly represent an inaugural pattern or a cultural enclave. Paradoxically, Romanian "jdanovism" is rooted in the European avant-garde, and the fact is sumptuously and accurately demonstrated by the researcher Sanda Cordoş. But unlike other European infiltration, it is an imposed form of cultural influence or, in the most optimistic case, "borrowed" through ideological channels. A somewhat forced synchronization. How fertile it was for the evolution of Romanian culture, we know: an aesthetic eclipse, a depletion of expressivity in the literary field. On the other hand, an unfortunate consequence of this "synchrony" was the establishing of a brutal relationship of subordination between the writer and the political power, the first one waking up in a cruel bondage to dogma. Aesthetic taste and inner freedom are reabsorbed into the rigid structures of a simplistic and rudimentary poetics

There is also a surprising career - you might say - of the the expressiveness of cultural "jdanovism", and this happens at the level of reception, over time. Over the years, socialist-realist poetics has mutated significantly. Poems and prose of that time, read today, can have surprising effects on the receptor, and can be perceived in a cipher between involuntary humor and nostalgia. It is obvious that, as demonstrated by Eugen Negrici², there exists an involuntary expressiveness of ancient writings without calophile intentions. Thus socialist realist literature, fine arts or music are imbued with a whole rainbow of expressivity.

But in its groundwater, the phenomenon is infinitely more complicated. The idea of "crisis of culture" which, with wisdom, Sanda Cordoş defines, is actually a "western theme" which, at first sight, the "culture of Eastern Europe generally does not seem to be concerned about gaining ownership", but, the author mentions, "It must not lead us to believe that the East would have been, at the crossroads of centuries or decades to come, cheerful face of Europe nor that the major problems of Western culture were unknown in the East. On the contrary, both Russian culture and Romanian culture are deeply concerned by the Western cultural movement, whether they extract from here models to carry in their area or just parts (indubitable major ones) who are opposed, in a negative emulation, by the national spirit".

¹Sanda Cordoş, *Literatura între revoluție și reacțiune. Problema crizei în literatura română și rusă a secolului XX*, Ediția a II-a adăugită, Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, pp. 61-62.

²Eugen Negrici, *Expresivitatea involuntară*, Cartea Românească, 1977.

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It's about the dispute between substance and form, about the resistance of the fund to new contents even if, in the long run, these contents will be assimilated at last, even if distorted. "Dressed in radical forms or projecting peaceful cohabitation, of synthetic nature (between national specificities and universal creation), These debates are able to determine the age of cultures and, especially, national literatures in which the debates take place. Romanian literature and Russian literature are young literature that tries - entering into dialogue with modernity based on a long and consistent tradition of Western literature - to set up their own identity"³. Of course, Western influence has been taken over by young crops in an eclectic manner, but surely "techniques, themes, and motifs will transit smoothly towards the literatures of the East; But the matrix in which they are developing in the West and generating a sense of finitude and even the spectrum of exhaustion and sterility, remains foreign to the founders who have a world to build"⁴. A very important thing, emphasized by the young researcher, represents a contradiction: "These Western influences will precipitate more than once in cultural inferiority complexes that will turn against their own models"⁵. On this sophisticated track, even "jdanovism" is one such attempt to build a cultural identity - we know how damaging, but if we keep a certain distance, separate from any emotions the phenomenon can be looked in a more relaxed way. The trend is almost unanimous, however, and it is one of vehement, trenchant denials, that of outrage, of angry rejection of the phenomenon as a shameful disease. We forget that it can not be denied, no matter how indignant we are, and is part – we like or we don't like it – of our cultural history alike the grand history.

A somewhat similar attitude has Monica Enache, in a recent issue of „Observator Cultural”⁶. In a study devoted to socialist realism in fine arts, the author believes, axiomatically, that socialist realism "can not be considered a style or an artistic trend, since it can not be defined on a platform of plastic territory, a collection of philosophical ideas and a coagulated form in cooperation with them " But how could we define it otherwise, given the fact that it features a whole rainbow of expressiveness that defines it apart from other styles and trends? It is true that "the term will be permanently reinterpreted, increasingly more permissive at the aesthetic level, according to the political needs of the moment", it is true that the main component of it is pure propaganda. But we can ask is this the only form of expression which abuses of propaganda? It is a rhetorical question. The author acknowledges the aesthetic component, but she treats it from the perspective of another paradigm, the ideological one. Despite these reservations, it is a well-documented article that contextualizes the phenomenon in a professional way.

One thing is certain: the Romanian literature of the "obsessive decade", as this period is defined by the great novelist Marin Preda, it is also the result of a certain way of cultural precipitation, even if distorted, of some European cultural predispositions converted to the paradoxical situation of becoming the enemy of the genuine model.

³ Idem, p. 45.

⁴ Idem, p. 46.

⁵ Idem, p. 47.

⁶ Monica Enache, *Ce este realismul socialist?*, în *Observator Cultural*, nr. 805 / 13 ianuarie 2016.

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