

YOUTH ALIENATION BETWEEN FICTION AND UTOPIA IN THE COMMUNIST REGIME

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Abstract: In a totalitarian society "the social global engineering", as applied to a whole country, amplifies the split between the daily social reality and the image created by the political discourse of the representatives of power. The totalitarian system –no matter its political colour – substitutes the real with fiction which is built according to the best rules of the utopia.

The crisis of reality by the communist power is perpetuated by some formulae which bring into relief the total confusion between "what-it-is" and "what- they- say- it- is", thus a real "psychological war" occurred.

One of the sources of alienation in communist society is confusion –with tragic repercussions on human beings- between political fiction and socio-historic reality. In this context, the Romanian youth, as a group with a definite ideology (the communist one) has no specific identity. As long as the Power imposes a narrative identity to a certain collectivity (identity which will never characterize it), through ideology, one may speak of a drastic annihilation of youth's identity (and not only). In the totalitarian communist system it is the ideology that destroys reality so that it may replace it with an image emptied of any content.

The theme of the essay is discussed as part of the cultural discourse, in its close interrelation with the significant changes in the wider culture. It draws its substance from and points back to a variety of sources from such various domains as history, literature, philosophy and social sciences.

Keywords: youth, communism, totalitarian, alienation, duplicity

The totalitarian society programmatically annihilates critical consciousness and systematically cultivates the predisposition of a great number of people towards the acceptance of the ready-made ideas, thus deepening the crisis of reality characteristic to the communist world. The modernist antagonism between the individual and society turns into an ontological hiatus since the existence of them both takes place on different levels: on the one hand, there is the level of reality on which the individual struggles to survive, and on the other hand, the one of the utopia where the project of the „multilateral developed socialist society” is, which is nothing more than a form empty of any human content, the final aim being the creation of the ”new man”. By analyzing the common ideology of both Nazism and communism, Tzvetan Todorov¹ stated that „the totalitarian ideology sees individual human beings as simple instruments, as means of accomplishing a political project, even a cosmic one.”

A simple analysis of the official discourses (which contain innumerable “precious indications”, orders and suggestions meant for both party activists and writers) and newspaper articles that preach the undeniable superiority of the communist society, demonstrates that “life is somewhere else”, while political fiction is everywhere. In his message addressed to The National Conference of Writers in 1981, N. Ceausescu told the Romanian writers about what and how they should write, stressing the necessity of commitment and of correctly depicting the socialist (pseudo) reality.²

¹ See *Eseuri de hermeneutica*, trad. Vasile Tonoiu, Ed. Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1995, p.227

² See Tzvetan Todorov, *Confruntarea cu extrema. Victime si tortionari in secolul XX (1992)*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1996.

“We wish a literature totally committed to the fight of the people for a better life, for the making of socialism and communism, a revolutionary, militant literature, which should mirror people’s heroism and creative enthusiasm, and inspire popular masses in the historical work they accomplish on The Romanian Land, under the party leadership, and which should depict convincingly and excitingly today’s man physiognomy freed from exploitation, consciously building his own happy future. The cultivation of patriotism, of the hot love for the country and its people is one of the noblest duties of literature and art. The country with its glorious past, its socialist present, with its glorious future, as Eminescu wanted it to be, is and forever remains a generous theme of inspiration for the writers.”

It is obvious that this type of discourse, which acts upon the representations of the real, turns a literary genre –utopia – into a way of organizing the social and political life. Utopias reveal their pathological characteristics the very moment the Power tries to apply them to reality. What Ricoeur considered to be literary specific features of utopia, like the tendency to subdue reality to dream, the despise for the logic of action or the absence of any constraint of the real, become essential components of the political attitude, of a great aggressiveness, of the representatives of power, among whom there are a lot of men of letters. As an inevitable consequence of the intersection between ideology and utopia, the politization of the aesthetic and the aesthetization of the political constitute the distinctive mark of ideological aggressiveness of the totalitarian power.

The unique party manifests its totalitarian vocation and its will of power by organizing and planning the daily existence of the individuals. The obsession with the total control of the intimate life of each member of the society stands for the obvious mark of a political pathology that transforms people into easy to manipulate characters. As long as both “the creator and his narrator are one and the same person” – the Party, through all its authorised representatives,- “the new man” is a character himself. One might say that the novel characteristic established by E.M.Forster “If God could tell the story of the Universe, the Universe might become fiction”³ covers the real. Without taking into account individuality, the totalitarian system despises and hunts the intimacy of Homo Sapiens, whom it treats as if he were Homo Fictus, being preoccupied to find out by all means everything the latter does, thinks, everything he speaks and dreams about.

The broken relationship between the language of the political discourses and the world seems to be fundamental for the understanding of the tragic distortion of reality. Starting with Marx and Engels’ Manifesto and continuing with the official discourses of the Power, one may speak about a real *strategy of counterfeit* which has as its aim the creation of a pseudo reality. In this context, the *fragmented reality*, which is discussed about by Tzvetan Todorov in *Confrontation with the Extreme*, is the reflex of the separation operated by the communist regime between the public sphere and the private one. That is why all the individuals, no matter young or old, started to manifest duplicity in their attitude. Duplicity is also a sign of alienation as it leads to estrangement and to a certain schizophrenia. Tzvetan Todorov shows that “in a totalitarian regime social schizophrenia is a means of protection of those who still preserve a few moral principles; I am unworthy and obedient only in a certain fragment of my existence; while in the others, which I value most, I remain a respectable person.”⁴

Duplicity slowly contaminates all human activities, including religion, suspending the ethic and turning hypocrisy into a way of life. Duplicity and dissimulation are the basis for the communist education of the younger generation. The three main undeclared objectives of the educational system in Ceausescu’s epoch(which can be noticed in the manuals of the period) are considered today major *strategies of manipulation of human personality: disciplining* (aiming at

³ Quoted in William Totok in *Constrangerea memoriei. Insemnari, documente, amintiri*, Editura Polirom, Iasi, 2001, pp.104-105.

⁴ Quoted by Carmen Musat in *Strategiile subversiunii. Descriere si naratiune in proza postmoderna romaneasca*, Ed. Paralela 45, Pitesti, 2002, pp.46.

spreading a controlled fear and at developing certain reflexes of individual obedience); *standardization* (aiming at maintaining a censorial climate of ‘collective equity’) and *indoctrination* (hinting at the political-ideological formation of the future RCP members). “Together with the manuals and school popularization of the official thesis, the methodical contributions of the activists behind the teaching desk offer a precious inventory of the educational dogmas the state leadership was counting on in order to wash the brains of the primary class pupils, thus providing a docile and pliable basis of masses for their own good”.⁵ They considered that the mission of literature is to transmit patriotic messages and make aesthetic education to the younger generations.

In general the communist literature for children and youth is full of reliable pioneers or UTC members –poor patterns without life. Adolescents’ behaviour and language in these novels are perfectly subordinated to adults, being in total contrast with the young people from the Western world and the novels where they reject and sanction the universe of the grown-ups in the most nonconformist way possible.

Thus, according to a prose author for children, the well-known novel *Ciresarii* by Constantin Chirita, is the “saga” in five volumes of childhood and adolescence, a book undeniably remarkable”. “You just better said , are conquered by a young planet, a planet of our golden ages, unforgettable ages , which are our first years –of our dreams, hopes, enthusiasms and brave darings”. Creating a utopic world parallel with the real one, the writers for children “created a fairy tale universe meant to correct educational vices for which children’s families are often guilty by cultivating in them egocentrism, which does not build but destroys.”⁶

A model for the alienating morality of the humanist-socialist society is Mircea Sintimbreanu’s prose volume *Let’s Talk Forgetting about Marks – Sa stam de vorba fara catalog*. The book is a kind of a communist manual destined for educational classes. In spite of its friendly parenting characteristic, the book serves the doctrine, being subordinated to the initiation into the communist existence. Politically semiotized, the socialist society is characterized by a specific integrism. The young communists are part of a large machinery of a perfect coherence , in which everything is connected to everything, while the ‘responsible’ individual must be permanently aware that he is only a small wheel. “(...) the detachment may plant-and they must do it – in the heart of every pioneer the feeling of social responsibility, expressed in the conviction that everything he does either serves or does not serve the whole people. In this way, even when you are alone, you cannot feel on your own account, and this is a huge gain”. (“Our Colleagues”)⁷

The idea of personal family is turned into the idea of collective family, the child belonging to the huge family of his country: “We respect our parents both as older persons as men/persons of work, as citizens who belong not only to us , but to the whole society.” (“The Respect for Our Parents”)

It is not the parents who are the first educators of the child, but the people and the party, who also show parents what is good and help them follow the correct path.

There is another great family that corresponds to the great family of the country: the great family of pioneers.

“There is no pioneer without brothers and sisters. By tying the red tie around one’s neck, everybody gets hundreds of thousands of comrades, of brothers all of a sudden. Their successes make you happy, their failures make you unhappy, but you are proud you are part of such a family.”⁸

This indoctrination started from an early age leads to a high sense of estrangement, of alteration from the real self. Thus, Sintimbreanu’s book shows in its last section ‘the hidden face’

⁵ Op.cit., p.167.

⁶ Hristu Candroveanu, *Literatura romana pentru copii*, Ed. Albatros, Bucuresti, p. 131.

⁷ Ibidem, p.88

⁸ Mircea Santimbreanu, *Sa stam de vorba fara catalog*, Ed. Politica, Bucuresti, Redactia literara pentru tineret, 1981.

of 'the world of capital', beyond the glittering temptation of prosperity, opulence and consumerism which are a threat for the minds of young people of the Socialist Romania. The children without childhood, dehumanized victims of money and of the exploitation of minors' labour force living in a South American poor country are opposed to the little heroes of 'patriotic' work at home.

"Our children handle tools, plant trees, harvest orchards...And still, children's hands are not made for any kind of burden. Thus, for example, I'll never forget the children from the big South-American city, lying in wait near the canal of an old slaughter-house, surrounded by dogs, for the moment when the entrails of the sacrificed cows are thrown. ("Children's Arms")

Communist propaganda uses, subliminally, fractions of truth manipulated in a diversionist way. The author breaks the illusions of those who would like to emigrate by exposing the 'cheating facade' of the rotten capitalism symbolized by the sombre future of the expatriated children.

Unlike the type of literature which was especially created for children and youth, finding a convenient niche in an evasive attitude, the so-called 'serious' literature contained too little information about Romanian youth culture.

According to the educational norms characteristic to the socialist humanism, the texts for youth and children belonging to the universal literature are masterfully manipulated to indoctrinate the little ones. The communist manipulation is very mean just like the wolf in *The Red Riding Hood* who dresses up as a granny to be able to devour the little innocent ones. This is the case of a part of the collection *Biblioteca scolarului* where, selections ideologically oriented, along with the representative titles of Romanian and universal literature, are published. For example, in *Cuore* by Edmondo de Amicis, or *The Miserables* by V. Hugo, the editor's attention was focalised on the sufferings, misery and exploitation of 'the children without childhood' from the capitalist society. In the same manner, *Un om necajit* (A Miserable Man) by M. Sadoveanu is meant to illustrate (in accordance with the school manuals and methodological guides) the exploitation of poor peasants' children in the old regime. The fears coming from the 'bad dreams' of the past or of the capitalist imperialism are exorcised through the "wakening" in the beautiful dream of the socialist country. It is not the critique of the failure of capitalism that are a problem in this literature, but their manipulation for the creation of a unique, repressive and utopic thinking. Through this seductive literature, the process of 'implementation' of the mythology of national communism into the innocent minds take place. By following the principle 'you don't know – we teach you, you are not able- we help you, you do not want, - we oblige you', the Ceausist humanism had understood that the American 'imperialism' had to be counteracted by using their own weapons.

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