

OUT OF THE UNDERGROUND. COLD WAR CULTURE

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Abstract

During the communist decades, Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca – notorious exiled intellectuals and editors at Radio Free Europe – were the most influential voices for the Romanian intellectuals. No wonder that their influence on Romanian cultural policy will be exercised even after the fall of communism. Of great importance and lasting consequences was the direct involvement of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca in the cultural policy, but also in Romanian policy itself. From the point of view of the Parisian group - the right-wing oriented intellectuals were regarded as legitimate only. From the very beginning, meeting the vote of the majority of intellectuals, the ideas of right-wing crushing won legitimacy, intolerance to multiple ideas will make that the voices of leftist intellectuals to be crushed also by their own shyness and also by their "communist complex" - any inclination towards the left being primitively regarded and assimilated by their opponents as communist totalitarianism. Such political intolerance to the otherness in our intellectual environment that persists to this days has resulted in a cleavage so categorically, that seems to be the most severe in our cultural history.

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Undoubtedly, during the communist decades, Virgil Ierunca with Monica Lovinescu, assuming the risk of error, struggling against oblivion, were – metonymically speaking – the memory, the voice and conscience of those whose tongues were bounded. No wonder that their influence on Romanian cultural policy will be exercised after the fall of communism and the cultural Cold War will continue in its post-communist stance. As shown in Monica Lovinescu's diary, the most volumes capture and document the post communist stage (to the previous one giving consideration only the first two volumes), diary rightly called by Mircea Iorgulescu "actually a book of a great and symbolic encounters between writers in the country and those in exile". The third volume of the diary is therefore "a capital book for understanding the early years after December 89, and, after all, for understanding the present time", it covers the period 1 January 1990-23 December 1993. The difference between the first two volumes and the latter is precisely highlighted by Mircea Iorgulescu. If the first two "have revealed the extraordinary amplitude and efficiency of the solidarity and complicity between intellectuals in exile and those in the country, a phenomenon that would seem singular, highlighting Romania among the other communist countries, the third volume could be defined in the terms of coming out of the underground, as Monica Lovinescu herself specifies. Those who until then avoided any public exposure together with the representatives of the militant exile, now make a big deal to be seen in the proximity of the power center of Exile. Even more, "These meetings acquires the appearance of a valued ritual for those who meet, become a sort of pilgrimage, they confirm and sometimes confers moral and intellectual qualities". "Post-December pilgrimage of Romanian intellectuals in Paris is equivalent, without exaggeration, to a legitimation, to an investiture in the exquisite and select club of Romanian culture." Whoever is not "anointed" in Paris does not exist. And this proves the immense moral capital and unrivaled authority of the two. "Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca are for the Romanian literates and publicists - says Mircea Iorgulescu not without a

touch of malice - that is, for Catholics, the Vatican on the map of Rome". The famous radio show of Monica Lovinescu "Theses and antitheses in Paris", by attending numerous guests of the country, it may well be called "Theses and antitheses in Bucharest". The famous radio broadcast of Virgil Ierunca, "Talking story", suffers the same metamorphosis, as well underlines Mircea Iorgulescu. Both of them are requiring distribution of interviews, articles, statements. "After decades of prohibition, this *engouement* is of course natural and it has, at least initially, the meaning, the character and appearance of repairs and especially recognition that finally became public." But if the underground cooperation and coordination of those from the exile with those of the country "worked together impeccably, the required secret of contacts being not altered by pettiness, selfishness, even infamy, but rather protected them", things appear quite different after the coming out of the underground. If the "notes from the years 1981-1988 contain the picture of a world of fraternity, harmony, decency and civility in relationships, all these will be shattered after 1990".

The image of the Romanian cultural life, as reflected in the diary, together with all its characters, reveals an extremely surprising and also unpleasant aspect: the fact that "people do not raise to the height of History, they pull down it into derisory, reducing it to platitudes, diverse plots, scripts etc. which unfortunately Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca will not be able to cope. In other words, "The crucial and grandiose fact – from a historical perspective – of the fall of communism in Romania is perceived not only in a deforming optical, but in a rather dwarfish one". Behind the "comet tail dust cloud that changed the world", when the old order blows, what one can see in the diary is not flattering to the cultural world. What can be seen is "an indescribable agitation. Freedom takes the form of endless rebellion ". "The cultural and literary world begins to quest functions, positions, titles, to change leadership, leadership is challenged, everyone is a candidate for appointment, directors, presidents, leaders, guides, tutors, prophets and prophecies are growing at a rate of mass. Searching for «good causes», fronts, barricades and positions generating material and symbolic profits. This new reality - "discord, running after honors and positions, mediocrity in full swing", notes Monica Lovinescu – imposes so aggressively that the old solidarity of intellectual and literary world appears as an illusion and is falling apart more and more every day." Freedom of movement intensifies this phenomenon. The show is more detestable as is reproduced through the lucid mirror of the spirit of Mircea Iorgulescu, who himself had the inspiration to cautiously refuse to take the leadership of the official newspaper at the Writers Union, "Romania literară". "There is - as he says as a good reader, but also as a direct witness - a process of homogenization between former exiles and those in the country, but the common denominator is indulging in triviality. In an almost symbolic way the office of Radio Free Europe in Paris closes to open offices in former communist capitals, including Bucharest. Bad words are worn here and there, and they are harsh words, alarms are given, definitive and radical labels are put, like "compromise", "traitor", "collaborationist". It's a time of bellboy, opportunists of all orientations, of inflamed suspicion. It's time for radicalism, fanaticism and Manichaeism in clinical forms (dividing the world into "good" and "bad" is in fact, according to the medical literature, a manifestation of schizophrenia). Nothing makes sense, but everything has underlying meaning. Chaos is ordered by the subtext, in any obvious reason is discovered a hidden guilt, something to be whispered in ones ear, to be given to the newspaper, top be loudly cried. This tendency towards exposure is copiously represented, it

do not spare anyone and anything. To unmask, to denounce, to reveal are the most profitable occupations, providing an instant notoriety and also a platform. Being inquisitor becomes a successful profession."¹ But what will change all the things will be the change of whose subject will be Monica Lovinescu herself. If she "was, until 1989, a coagulant personality for the cultural world, she will become, willy-nilly, since 1990, only a part of it. Because collapse inevitably lead to the creation of islands, groups, clusters, circles, and who tries to remain outside will be destroyed." The diary is witnessing one of the "most horrible injustices done in those years, it's what happens to Mihai Botez, a tragic victim of the collective hysteria" as it will go Mircea Iorgulescu a victim himself.

As *part*, at this time, of the cultural world and not as a "coagulator", the action of the "militant exile" was decisive in alliance with the country's leaders of cultural power games, being that time in opposition, but also with the emerging younger scholars and essayists, looking for a cultural status. Of great importance and lasting consequences was the direct involvement of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca in the editorial policy of a publishing house. It's about Humanitas publishing house, where they developed editorial strategies, proposing lists of books to be translated, whose authors have recommended and facilitated contacts with French intellectuals and journalists. It can be said that the right-wing orientation in post communist Romanian culture was created, reinvented by them, taking into account the Romanian specific, in the concert of Eastern communist countries, that of "resistance through culture". Because Romanian literature was not illustrated by cases (except Paul Goma) of major opposition against the regime. Furthermore, as shown in Monica Lovinescu's diary, a document of prime importance in reconstructing this period (and worth reading under a magnifying glass), the two cultural "dispatchers" have engaged civic cultural but also political power in order to eliminate the post-communist left, supported and advised, together with Mihnea Berindei, the candidates of opposition and participated enthusiastically in setting direction to the "22" magazine, organ of the GDS's (Group for Social Dialogue). There existed differences and disputes within these cultural and political forces of right-wing in post communist Romania, but in general, all the big names in culture, now in power, now institutionally strengthened, received baptism from Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca.

Immediately after the fall of communism, good faith was not enough into the boiling vortex of indistinct intentions, which more or less fair, which more or less justified in the struggle for moral precedence. Cultural world suddenly awakened from expectative, there appeared a lot of heroes and dissidents, more or less justified. It was natural that, in the eyes of the two major anti-communist militants, the most reliable intellectuals seemed to be those of their immediacy entourage, entourage already checked, those who, by opportunism or sincerely, shared their own ideas. Right-wing ideas - it must be said - because the two, although lived in a democracy with pluralist education, nevertheless showed a vehement intolerance of any shades of the left. Because of this, and due to insecurity, if not because the absence of political culture and skills in an intelligentsia formed the majority in a totalitarian society, it was created the false impression that one side of ideology, the right one, would be the only legitimate. It was only a single step from here to not accepting pluralism and political

¹ Mircea Iorgulescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-150.

diversity. A huge wave of intolerance opposed to the "good" ones the falsely counted communist intellectuals, those with leftist beliefs.

At the very beginning, after the euphoric rediscovery between the exile writers and those in the country (in early February 1990 a Romanian delegation of 89! People visiting Paris at the invitation of Laurent Fabius), after which Lovinescu will write the memorable phrase: "A total coming out from the underground, falling into each others arms", as early as the first days of the overthrow of the regime in Bucharest is installed in the cultural world a significant ebullition, unprecedented after the end of the Second World War. Even imperfect as it was, the cohesion of the "resistance through culture" crumbles and a Brownian motion will lead to extreme polarization. Because after more than forty years, a new rearrangement of power in the cultural world became possible. The struggle for power became triggered, cultural Cold War becomes slowly, slowly, a real cultural civil war. By far the most organized and coalesced core will consist of those from the "underground", formed by Radio Free Europe, established and built during the long years of dictatorship, around Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca spouses. Noting that, among them, those who refuse any political activism or are perceived as close to the loosely installed new power are rejected from the very start. Some of them, few, will be called deprecably "politically uninvolved" (Augustin Buzura, Eugen Simion, Valeriu Cristea, Marin Sorescu and others). There was also, established since communism, the group around the "Săptămâna" magazine, a group sharing paradoxical political ideas that meet extreme right elements with communist nostalgia (Eugen Barbu, Corneliu Vadim Tudor and so on). But most of the Romanian intelligentsia (despite the leftist political power that will continue for many years in power), as an anti-communist reflex, will be to the right, and this is also due to the huge moral influence of the Parisian group. Any attempt of introducing intellectual pluralism appears suspicious. Not much longer allowed political shades, especially the left. Preeminence in the struggle for cultural supremacy is won by an euphoric and intolerant right policy. One can easily see how the intellectuals close to the two critics of RFE seem to have a special logistics, they are the first to regroup, the ones which are appointed to the Ministry of Culture, giving interviews, traveling abroad, dealing with impudence the foreground scene. Moreover, as is noted in the confession literature of the two Parisian critics, some of them were already run, then a good portion of these "illegal" were supported, were awarded scholarships and stipends through various international organizations and through the intercession of Monica Lovinescu, already since the time of Ceausescu. If, in times of ideological obscurantism, these trips abroad, in the West, of the Romanian intellectuals were vital to their connection to culture beyond the Iron Curtain, of course, after its dissolution the guidance and support of the two Parisians remained crucial. Thus, as shown in Monica Lovinescu's diary, in a record dated January 19, 1990, so as not yet had settled well the new political forces, there was already getting ready for March of the same year, the Paris Book Fair ("Iboia Voreg – dealing, at the Ministry of Culture, with the Paris Book Fair, which will take place in March. I give her directions and phone numbers of Liiceanu and Hăulică at Nicodim"). Already for the beginning of February it was prepared a large reception to the Romanian intellectuals, hosted by the French Socialist politician, Laurent Fabius: "... Haulica arrived in Paris to prepare the reception offered by Fabius for early February. Pleșu and Dan Petrescu will come with ... 80 artists, critics, writers etc. He insists on us for coming Sunday, at UNESCO, where he will speak."

Since the first days after the political overthrow, adversative positioning is taking shape, although still confused and uncertain. A balanced and sensible proposal ("Dinescu claims - and Haulica supports it - that we should not do like "them". We should leave them the newspapers, now we have where to answer them, however the truth, value as well, will impose itself'.) Monica Lovinescu comments: "Nothing could be more false. If now the compromised are not forced to retreat (not to be judged, punished, imprisoned, only to retire or to "work down"), nor a sound basis will not guarantee a new mentality". This is already the signal of the will of assumption the power in culture after the principles of lustration. So far the picture in terms of hard militancy is at least confusing, with mixed characters: „The most virulent are the two former collaborators with the “Securitate”², Iulian Neacșu and Cezar Ivănescu who wanted to take ... the Writers Union. As Țoiu, he refused to resign (though he ended up being dismissed by others of the Council) and tried to defend DRP³. Who - he said - "defended the Union". “Contrapunct” – the newspaper of the “eighties”⁴ - cannot replace “Luceafărul” review, that will come forward with a peer and ethical direction already compromised. Along with Gabriela Adamesteanu, Fănuș Neagu and ... Ion Gheorghe ". In large part they are rumors having no coverage, but triggering revisionism by lustration and purges, it was clearly a battle for supremacy within the guild by putative distinctions between "good" and "bad", as makes Monica Lovinescu in her diary, though sufficiently inaccurate and sometimes unjust, but it will last for a long time. Revengeful spirit and haste overwhelm any balance of objectivity. In ethical and maximalist terms, nothing seems to change with the swiftness required: “I have the impression – or the confirmation – that we had illusions hoping in a moral renewal of the writers guild after the unexpected miracle in December. Hoping that they will be able to start on other bases. No. Writers will escape censorship, will travel. And that's about it. Conquering interior liability, assumption of collective responsibility - where dreams Paler - or real apprenticeship of freedom seem to remain of the dream or ... the Czechs.⁵ "Moral renewal of writers guild" will be much slower, more difficult, and having neither the expected results nor being as lasting as somebody expected.

At that time, however, confusion and lack of landmarks becomes ubiquitous, seizes everyone. The reality of the country, which writers friends depicted subjectively, was really muddy and unintelligible to the nucleus from Paris. How many rumors so many versions. Moreover, while the first perception will change noticeably. Octavian Paler will also correct his opinions later but, for now, however, "he describes to us the astonishing physiognomy of literary Bucharest. On most of those who have done nothing, envy and bitterness against dissidents is unlimited”. But what on that moment Paler or the author of the Diary do not notice is the astonishing inflation of dissents, while it is known that among them the most virulent were already living abroad, and those who remained in the country could be counted on the fingers of one hand. "What lurks under cover dictatorship! - Lovinescu exclaimed, visibly confused - Eugen Simion apparently attacked Paler in “Flacara”⁶: why Simon wants to guilty on Romanian writers who resisted aesthetic so fearful? Writers Conference, to be held

² The Romanian Secret Service.

³ Dumitru Radu Popescu.

⁴ A group of young writers.

⁵ Monica Lovinescu, *Jurnal. 1990-1993*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2003, pp. 32-33.

⁶ A cultural review during communism and after.

in the first half of April, will be an arena of resentment."⁷ On the other hand, "From Brussels: Eugen Simion: Insists for our collaboration on "Caiete critice"⁸ - (...). He wants E. Lovinescu⁹'s Diary for the publishing house that he has founded (in addition to critical books), and a dialogue with me about my father. We promise him. He is generally optimistic – «political struggle» - answers to all our objections, even if he doesn't defend the Front¹⁰. He wants to join with Buzura, Marin Sorescu and all kinds of professionals (lawyers, economists, who knows who), another kind of "Group for Social Dialogue". (The intellectuals of Păltiniș are visibly antipathetic to him.) He finds RFE too critical. Insists on coming. Let him organize an amphitheater full of students at the university, as he did for Dorin Tudoran and Tismaneanu. (...) He complains, of course, that, especially in the beginning, "dissents" - especially Dinescu and Blandiana - have mocked him."¹¹ Paler's inflamed perception will change over time, he will realize that he was not right on the dissidents ulcerated with envy on the fiery resisters, he realized that, in fact, false was the "vigorous" dissent, not at all foreign to some political upstartism. But the impression induced, with or without intention, by himself or by others, will strengthen the subconscious of the Parisians at such extent that they will empathize with some others becoming them unsympathetic according to the most twisted and distorted criteria, mostly based on rumor or even gossip. Geographical distance matured confusion. Of course, in general, approaches and separations were made by political criteria, but largely they reached irreconcilable positions being maintained strictly by the rumors and confusion interestingly maintained.

But the idea of moral lustration will follow Monica Lovinescu for a long time, although the signals she received from the writers guild were not the most encouraging. "Writers as a guild did not pointed or by calling to memory, not necessarily through a critical examination of conscience, leaving us, the group around the "22" magazine or "Contrapunct", this major task." For example, a great deception occasions he the General Assembly of Writers in April, the first after the fall of communism, where they rather talk about copyright and creative houses fate than to have a "collective conscience exam (exam that the other Eastern writers, as well subjects to the same pressure upon the word, they did) ... " Consistent with her maximalist principles, Lovinescu expected, if not purges, then an unwritten law of lustration: "Article 8 of the *Proclamation of Timișoara* would have found a counterpart at the General Meeting of Writers, a correspondent, for example, to establish a moral Court of Law without ambition to punish (the great purges can leave lasting scars) but they could have required that the stained of them to shut up, at least for a few years"¹². She also feels indignant about the attitude of "România literară" magazine that, "in the same number (19) with the article of Ana Blandiana, at the heading "Magic Eye", and in the absence of its director, Nicolae Manolescu, one can find, under the title "Abandoning literature?", a lesson of critical attitude, signed abnormally "Interim". Abnormal, because when you give lessons or you announce a state of emergency, you take their responsibility. So "Interim" do not complaints - which would be normal - that Romanian intellectuals - unlike others in the

⁷ Monica Lovinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁸ A wellknown literary review.

⁹ Monica Lovinescu's father, a famous literary critic between the two World Wars.

¹⁰ National Salvation Front, the first political force in Romania after the collapse of the communist regime.

¹¹ Monica Lovinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹² Monica Lovinescu, *Etica neuitării*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 303.

totalitarian East - were the least concerned with the restoration of civil society, but are indignant that some "literary" magazines abandon politics in favor of pure literature". E. Lovinescu's daughter is outraged, somehow against nature, that "Interim" takes "as an example and shield on E. Lovinescu, saying that "he is a literary critic. Nothing more, nor less", ignoring the fact that the interwar critic has proven that "he deals not only with books" but he "watches over the citadel not to be invaded by obscurantism"¹³. A harsh lesson given to Nicolae Manolescu, because it is about him, as evident from the conversation recorded in her diary by Monica Lovinescu. Rough and perhaps undeserved lesson, because in N. Manolescu's plea there was nothing outrageous, but even it was of a striking normality in the middle of the hysterical cultural climate of the time. However the critic from "Romania literară" chalks up his lesson and he not only will engage himself in politics, but later he will obviously politicize the magazine itself. On the other hand, Monica Lovinescu's exasperation is somehow justified as long as she can not outright oppose to the intelligentsia from other former communist countries than the gentle "resistance through culture" of Romanian intellectuals: "after when we are promised an "original" democracy", we must have also an "original" writers guild, one that is congratulating itself, in full freedom, about how they aesthetically survived, one which finds out that its unique task is to continue on this path, by forgetting the past?"¹⁴ And it must be said that writers in other communist countries, although they built a civil society, an alternative to dictatorship, had not sacrificed any of the aesthetic principle. However, watching a show set in Bucharest by Frédéric Mitterrand, "with the writers: Blandiana, Sorescu Dinescu Vulpescu (...), Buzura, Manolescu, Al. Calinescu (the only mention of Goma) and - for the French, Couriol", Monica Lovinescu notices justified maliciously that "From the whole television show all of them appear as great resistant through culture, free from any complex".¹⁵

As you can see - from the point of view of the Parisian group - the right-wing oriented intellectuals were regarded as legitimate only. A "politically uninvolved" as Eugen Simion, even if he had been a close friend of the couple, is seen with mistrust. Although the critic guessed right that there was needed an alternative to the Group for Social Dialogue simply for pluralist reasons (GSD considering itself the only legitimate mouthpiece of the intelligentsia). It will be seen however later that GDS, defining itself in terms of "elite" - concept belonging to the conservative right vocabulary - still operates and functions as an exclusive caste, and in the present moment, for example, operates strictly under the auspices of the popular conservative doctrine and as active supporter of president Traian Basescu. About the attribute "social" included in the logo, it appears rather as a populist ornament as a concept borrowed from the vocabulary of the Left, but skillfully used as long as the group does not even cover half of the ideological range that would be able to reclaim post-communist intellectuals. Among the mentors of GDS - naturally, taking into account the virulence of their political views - are Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca. The fact is that, from the very beginning, meeting the vote of the majority of intellectuals, the ideas of right-wing crushing won legitimacy, intolerance to multiple ideas will make that the voices of leftish intellectuals to be crushed also by their own shyness and also by their "communist complex" - any inclination

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 301-302.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 304.

¹⁵ Monica Lovinescu, *Jurnal. 1990-1993*, p. 73.

towards the left being primitively regarded and assimilated by their opponents as communist totalitarianism. Such political intolerance to the otherness in our intellectual environment that persists to this day has resulted in a cleavage so categorically, that seems to be the most severe in our cultural history.